

Survival of the Skilful:

**An Ethnographic Study of Two Groups of Young People
in Residential Care**

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Abstract

Survival of the Skilful: An Ethnographic Study of Two Groups of Young People in Residential Care .

This thesis is a study of the experiences of young people living together in groups. It uses two children's homes in the north east of Scotland as its research sites. The ways in which data were collected were devised in consultation with the young people involved and required the researcher to 'live-in' the units for a year long period.

This thesis concentrates on the ways in which the young people structured their resident groups and gained status and position within them. It argues that fixed roles or positions were not in play; rather there was constant change and fluidity. Young people, it is argued, gained position through a complex set of negotiations which required them to consider their skills and abilities as well as the social context in which they were operating. This inter-relationship supports some of the ideas put forward by Pierre Bourdieu and the conceptual analysis developed during the course of this thesis draws upon his work.

The thesis as a whole contributes to the debates both within the study and practice of residential child care and broader sociological debates around children and young people. It illustrates the wide range of skills and knowledge used by the young people thus challenging bully/victim stereotypes and beliefs about the solely 'negative' influence of peers. Furthermore this thesis demonstrates the ways in which young people use their social agency to negotiate around 'adult' influences and controls.

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They are playing a game. They are playing a game at not
playing a game. If I show them I see they are, I
shall break the rules and they will punish me.
I must play the game, of not seeing I see the game.

(R.D. Laing 1970)

Introduction

Why Study the Resident Group?

This thesis is concerned with exploring the experiences of young people living together in two residential children's homes. The aim is to reveal, using ethnographic techniques, the ways in which resident groups are organised and the strategies employed by the young people to gain position amongst their fellow residents. In order to achieve its aim this work engages not only with academic writing on residential provision for young people but also the wider sociological study of childhood and youth. In exploring the strategies used it draws on analytical thinking influenced by the work of Pierre Bourdieu. Crucially this thesis is not concerned with the practices of the staff groups in the units studied rather it places the views and experiences of the young people, as a distinct group, at its centre. Thus it is a piece of ethnographic work but not a full ethnography of the two children's homes. It has developed via a process of analysis which is both centred in the data and which brings conceptual thinking to meet the data.

Social and political understandings of residential care for children and young people have tended to perceive those who require such a service as, if not 'troubled', then certainly 'troublesome'. The notion that there are young people who cannot be contained within a familial living situation has

generated public and political concern (Davis 1981, Berridge and Brodie 1998). Consequently legislation and social policy over the last half of the 20th Century has seen a growing demand for children and young people to be ‘accommodated’ within a family home; if not their own then in that of a substitute family (Fisher et al. 1986:76). One outcome of such a policy has been an overwhelming view of residential care as a ‘last resort’ option for child care professionals (Berridge and Brodie 1998, Cogdell 1989). Certainly those children who are admitted to residential care will, in the majority of cases, have experienced other forms of ‘alternative’ care, predominately ‘failed’ foster placements (Kendrick 1995:72). Those using the service are seen to have ‘extensively damaged personalities, fed by destructive and damaged experiences and negative perceptions of self and others’ (Davison 1995:12).

There is, however, something of a paradox. Despite recognition of the complex needs of the young people who require residential care, the ‘last resort’ perspective has had an impact not only on the morale of residential staff but also the qualifications and standing experienced by residential staff as compared to their fieldwork colleagues. The view that the carers of children, whether in a family home or an institution, require predominately ‘parenting’ or ‘domestic’ skills (Ainsworth and Fulcher 1981) has resulted in a largely unqualified workforce who, in the main, have poor levels of pay and working conditions (Skinner 1992). It may be argued that the numerous exposures of dangerous abusive practices over the last three decades have created not only a demoralisation of staff and young people within residential care but have exacerbated the anxiety and mistrust felt by the wider population in relation to this type of service (see for example Levy and Kahan 1991). The result has been further marginalisation and disadvantage experienced by these young people.

Academic study of residential provision for children and young people has done little to contradict public perception. In the main, such study has taken a broadly evaluative perspective and has been dominated by social work research (see for example Aiers and Kettle 1998, Triscliotis et al. 1995)). As a result more is known about the place of residential care within the wider child care system and the characteristics and backgrounds of those that live and work within it than the experiences of young people themselves. This body of work has influence on the way in which residential care is managed by child care professionals, principally in relation to the notion of 'drift' within the child care system and the need to keep track of the 'careers' of those young people who require the service (Millham et al. 1986). Historically such work has had strong links to policy and service development.

Residential care for children and young people has generally been neglected as a site of *sociological* research. Children's homes in particular have been absent from sociological studies of institutions or of children and young people. As a research site however children's homes offer the opportunity to explore children's experience of institutional as opposed to familial care as well as the opportunity to get closer to the 'everyday' ways in which children and young people operate amongst their peers. The 'public' nature of residential care allows, rightly or wrongly, for greater access to the 'private' world of 'bringing up' children and to peer group relations.

Childhood as a period in the life course is perceived as one of 'happiness' and 'innocence' (Prout and James 1990). It has become synonymous with a lack of responsibility; a time of freedom from adult concerns and restrictions. Indeed it has been argued that children are almost 'obliged to be happy' (Ennew 1986:18). Children and young people who require intervention from social services

may therefore be seen to deviate from this 'norm'. Little research has been concerned with public perceptions of children in public care. However from media coverage of incidents involving children and social work there appears to be juxtaposing images of dirty, poverty stricken 'victims' and ruthless, demonic 'monsters' (Jay and Doganis 1987, Thompson 1998). Those who require residential care are most likely to be over the age of 12 at the point of admission and a significant proportion will, through their risk taking behaviour, have been deemed to be 'beyond parental control' (Kendrick 1995:38). The image of them as 'troublesome' rather than 'troubled' may be exacerbated by current public anxieties about young people in a more general sense.

In the main, research on children and young people concentrates on those who continue to live within the parental home (James et al. 1998). Little is known about the everyday lives of young people living in substitute care. As a result the sociology of childhood and youth, although developing a growing awareness of the diversity of childhoods, continues to focus primarily on children from 'mainstream' social backgrounds. The study of 'minority' groups, those who have a somewhat different experience of home and of growing up, is therefore worthwhile. Through such work, knowledge of this particular group of young people is developed and further light is shed on children and young people more generally.

The impact of both the lack of sociological research and the domination of evaluative social work research in this area has been the marginalisation of the experiences of children and young people in the existing body of work. Indeed the voice of young people has been somewhat muted. Few studies have been conducted with young people as the sole providers of data (see discussion of Polsky 1962 in Chapter Five). More commonplace is a section on the views of residents (see for

example Berridge and Brodie 1998). Whilst there is a need to create a holistic picture of residential life, the voices of young people have tended to be lost amongst the policy and practice implications that so often motivate such work. Little is known about the organisation and management of and by the resident group within children's homes and the purposes that it may serve for the young people. There is a tacit understanding that the group is a negative force and is something to fear (White 1996). Such a belief system appears to have little empirical foundation yet has a powerful impact on the view of residential provision for children and young people. It is this element of residential life that this thesis seeks to address.

Broad Objectives

This study was motivated by a general interest in the ways in which children and young people negotiate and achieve influence and power amongst their peers. Discussion of the interactions of children, in relation to establishing status or roles within their peer groups, tend to concentrate on negative practices, primarily viewed under the umbrella term of "bullying". Although there is an ever growing body of knowledge surrounding young people's use of bullying behaviours (see Boulton and Underwood 1992, Olweus 1994, Bowers et al. 1992) far less is known about the place of such behaviour the wider repertoire of young people's practices, or indeed if such a repertoire exists. Studies of bullying have approached the subject from an individualistic view of behaviour and have identified traits within personalities, which mark children out as 'bullies' or 'victims' (Tattum 1993). One repercussion of such an approach has been the labelling of children in these dichotomous terms. I was particularly interested in exploring the range of methods used by young people who had been viewed as 'damaged' or 'problematic' and who it was therefore assumed

would be most prone to using 'bullying' behaviours (Rigby 1996) and perhaps be most likely to be bullied.

A further impetus was an interest and a professional background in residential child care. From this I had considered that the 'resident group' had a great impact on the experience of young people being 'looked after' yet was uncertain what this might mean or indeed how it was manifested. Throughout my practice career the group has been portrayed as something the staff ought to be wary of. The potential of the young people to 'overthrow' staff control was an ever present anxiety. Despite this fear the group in its entirety was rarely considered, the focus instead was on individual development and intervention.

The study involved two local authority children's homes in the north east of Scotland. I was 'resident' at one unit, Strathmore, for an intense period of 6 months with regular monthly visits taking place over the following six months. During this time I lived as one of the young people, spending the majority of my time in their company. By doing so I was able to study the ways in which young people ordered their groups and achieved status amongst their peers. The second unit, Brunswick, was used in the later stage of fieldwork. My time at Brunswick followed a similar pattern to that at Strathmore. By the time of my 'admission' to Brunswick however, I had begun to formulate ideas about the group processes and explored the similarities and differences between the behaviours of the two resident groups.

Both units provided placements for young people aged between 12 and 18 who required to be 'accommodated' under the Children (Scotland) Act (1995). Strathmore had places for 8 young

people on both a short and long term basis. Brunswick had been identified by the local authority as a long stay unit and could accommodate 5 young people. Data was collected by semi-structured interviews in the first instance followed by extensive participant observation. Data was recorded in field notes and by tape recorder.

This thesis has the broad aim of exploring the experience of residential care from the young person's perspective. Central to this was a focus on the 'group' experience. It does not therefore set out to examine staff practices or wider organisational influences; rather the research questions focus on what was it like for young people to live with other young people and how they constructed this group. It is increasingly 'fashionable' to promote the individuality of care within institutions however it may be argued that such a perspective disregards the group experience and the impact that this may have on the child or young person's time in residential care (Hudson 1996:2).

This study sets out to explore the resident group - its structure, organisation and influence. Its focus is the group experience of group care. In other words the ways in which young people organise and maintain their resident group. Furthermore this study seeks to provide an insight into the structure of the resident group and the purposes it serves for individual young people. As the study progressed it became clear that such aims could be explored through analysing the methods used by young people to gain credibility and status and the skills and competencies required for such an undertaking. By discussing the range of skills used this thesis presents a broad picture of group experience.

Structure Of The Thesis

The structure of this thesis aims to provide the reader with a coherent 'story' of the research. It initially contextualises the experiences of the young people involved in the research by presenting a discussion of the literature surrounding residential child care and the study of childhood and youth more generally. Chapter One presents the literature with regard to residential child care; its history, development and characteristics. Here I demonstrate the way in which the origins of residential provision have influenced present day thinking. I show too that young people have rarely been considered in what has been predominately 'welfarist' research. Chapter Two then examines, in more general terms, the sociology of childhood and youth and the insight such knowledge gives in relation to young people in residential care. I illustrate the ways in which the notion of 'normal' childhood has been constructed and the growing evidence that children are active social agents, negotiating with and around such constructs. I go on to discuss the impact of youth studies, with its predominately transitional and subcultural focus, on 'everyday' assumptions about young people and peer relations.

Chapters Three and Four are concerned with the research process. First, Chapter Three presents the 'mechanics' of data collection both in terms of the development of the research process and in relation to the methods used. Second, this chapter introduces the young people and staff who lived and worked in the units studied. Chapter Four explores in more depth my experience of conducting an ethnographic piece of research and the impact this had on the young people, the data and myself. This reflexive account maps my progress of admission, acceptance and exit and relates my experiences to the progression of the young people through the residential 'system'. The conceptual ideas that were used for the analysis are presented in Chapter Five. In it, the influence of the work

of Bourdieu is discussed in relation to the creation and application of these ideas. I argue that existing models of analysis pertaining to young people's groups have in some ways been restrictive and have failed to recognise the fluidity of relationships.

The next four chapters present the data and are initially in the form of an insight into the routines and habitual behaviours that made up daily life in both units. The subsequent chapters then focus more specifically on the skills and competences used by the young people to gain position and influence. These chapters are shaped by the dominant themes identified during the course of my field work and bring the competences or, as I named them, the 'social currencies' together into general themes; currencies of knowledge, currencies of environment and currencies of communication. Finally the concluding chapter highlights the relevance of this work for policy and practice as well as its contribution to sociological thinking on childhood and youth.

Throughout this thesis the comments and observations of the young people are proffered. These quotations have been kept in their original dialect and use of language. The decision to produce the material this way was made in consultation with the young people.

Chapter One

Children's Homes: The Research Reviewed

Residential provision has been a long-standing topic of academic and social debate (Abrams 1998).

The moral discomfort resulting from the placing of children in institutions has, throughout this century, been tempered by the belief that there are some children who are 'better off' living away from the family home. Central to academic interest in this area has been the structure and organisation of residential living as well as the 'success' or 'failure' of such provision in altering behaviour or life chances.

This chapter has two broad objectives. Firstly by providing the reader with a brief history of the development of residential provision within Scotland¹ and illustrating the significant models used, it contextualises current children's homes. The second part of the chapter explores the literature surrounding children's homes as a means of caring for children. In so doing it draws together the

¹ I have chosen to concentrate on the historical development of residential provision in Scotland as this research has been conducted in two Scottish research sites.

research conducted in this area, identifying the modern day uses of such provision and the young people and staff who live and work within it. Finally it identifies the experiences of those who live or have lived in children's homes and the place of such accounts in the current body of research.

The Evolution of Children's Homes

Boarding Out

Substitute care for children and young people in Scotland during the 19th and the majority of the 20th Century was founded on the dividing principle of the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor (Abrams 1998:83). The long-standing practice of 'boarding out' was regarded as the most appropriate solution for the majority of 'needy' children. Such practice was dominant in the period between 1845 and 1950. Often these children were sent away from the industrial cities of Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee and Aberdeen to rural areas of Scotland to be placed indefinitely with families willing to house or requiring a child. In many cases these host families regarded them as an added pair of hands either within the household or on the land. The practice of 'boarding out' was underpinned by the belief that the spiral of poverty could be broken only if children and young people were taken away from industrial cities and their 'failed' poverty stricken parents (Abrams 1998:45). This notion of breaking a cycle of poverty resulted in many hundreds of children and young people being relocated to the farmlands of the North of Scotland and the Border regions. There was a sense of permanency to these arrangements; indeed many parents were not informed of where their child had been placed.

This lack of parental involvement extended to those children who were transported to Canada and Australia to be boarded out².

'Boarding out' was used for hundreds of children who as a result of family breakdown, abandonment, death of a parent or alcohol abuse were regarded as in need of substitute care³. In general they were seen to be the product of the 'undeserving poor' who, if Scotland had not rejected the poorhouse as a place for children, would have been placed there (Checkland 1982). The practice of 'boarding out' was widespread and was encouraged as recently as the Clyde Committee in 1946. This influential body, set up to examine child welfare practices, argued that boarding out gave 'slum' children the opportunity to live in a 'rural idyll' where the illness and deprivation faced by them in the cities was removed. For many children however such an idyll involved hard work and often exploitation if not physical abuse (Jamieson and Toynbee 1992).

Within the North East of Scotland during the 19th Century there had been an almost unique type of provision referred to as 'feeder schools'. Such schools provided daily care for 'vulnerable' children, the majority of whom were affected by poverty. The philosophy of these schools was to 'feed' the children physically, spiritually and educationally in the belief that they would return to their families as an example of an 'alternative' existence. This was a truly community based resource which prevented the physical removal or displacement of children, rather it maintained

² Throughout the late 19th Century children were shipped to the 'new lands' of Canada and Australia. The arrangements for passage were made by the Parish or the Orphanages themselves. It was rare for these children to be orphans, more often they were children from impoverished families. It has been estimated that between 80,000 and 100,000 British children were sent to Canada between 1870 and 1930 (Abrams 1998).

³ There are no reliable statistics to indicate the total number of children who were boarded out. However in 1881, for example, about 1,500 children from the county of Lanark were boarded out (Abrams 1998).

them within their family homes. It was hoped that these ambassadors would, by example, encourage parents and siblings along a spiritual path stressing the value of good physical care as well as educational attainment (Seed 1973). However by the early 20th Century boarding out and the use of institutional care overtook this practice. It has been argued that the 'colonisation' of Scottish child care, such as feeder schools, by English welfare models forced a removal of the child from the family rather than working alongside the family to achieve change (Fulcher 1998).

The Orphanages

Orphanages created and managed by mainly religious or philanthropic organisations dominated residential or institutional care for children in Scotland at the turn of the century. Surprisingly many of these were relatively small in size, containing 30 to 40 children. There were however notable exceptions, primarily the Aberlour Orphanage in Speyside and Quarriers Village in Bridge of Weir. These two institutions were both built in the country and contained provision for an average of 600 children. They were, as Quarriers promoted, children's cities, with schools, churches, accommodation and recreational facilities on site (Magnusson 1984)⁴.

Many families regarded these children's homes as a necessary evil that provided a temporary care facility at times of family crisis. As such they were chosen as an option by the 'respectable poor' to accommodate their children whilst they were finding employment or re-establishing themselves after the death of a partner. Indeed at this time it was difficult, if not impossible, for the working classes to continue to care for their children if they were widowed or unemployed. Women had no source of income and limited access to employment whilst working class men were financially unable to

⁴ William Quarrier was heavily influenced by the work of Dr. Barnardo in England (Magnusson 1984)

pay for a housekeeper or nanny to care for their children. The orphanages therefore provided care for their children whilst alternative arrangements were sought. For these parents residential care was a positive, if a difficult, choice. They did not want to rely on poor relief or face the stigma of pauperism. As Abrams describes:

The majority of children were the so-called 'deserving' children; children of widows and widowers, children of the respectable poor and physically and mentally sound children who were victims of family circumstances.

(Abrams 1998:83)

Despite the voluntary nature of care, these institutions regarded their role as, at least in part, to 'cure' these children of poverty and to convert them to the ways of the middle classes. In both the large institutions mentioned above, care of the children had to be signed over by parents and, as a result, decisions made regarding them became the right of the institution. For many children this meant that they would be sent to Canada or Australia in relocation programmes despite the desire of their parents to return to the orphanage to reclaim them. It meant also that children seen to be 'abnormal' or 'mentally deficient' could be sent to hospitals or institutions created for the mentally subnormal without any parental consent.

Historically therefore residential care for children in Scotland became associated with the working class. Circumstances had left the parents of these children not only working class but also poor. The orphanages provided a last resort option to protect and care for these vulnerable children and at the same time allowed an opportunity for the 'morality' of the working class to be replaced by those of the Christian or philanthropic organisations who provided respite. The dual role of residential

provision for children (that of 'rescuing' and 're-educating') was firmly established during this period.

The Fall of the Institutions

The institutions created to care for and protect children were initially applauded for their philanthropic and Christian values. However, after the Second World War increasing concern was voiced as to the levels of care provided. The concern for 'good' care of these vulnerable children gained rapid pace after the introduction of compulsory government inspections in the 1930s. It was argued that institutions provided no family life, indeed at Aberlour there was one 'mother' in charge of 60 children (Abrams 1998). Children were strictly controlled with silence, and cleanliness was given greatest importance.

The impact of Bowlby's (1953) writings on the importance of maternal love and care and its dependence on one primary care giver in producing competent adults left many pushing for an end to institutional care for children. From the 1950s there was concern not only in relation to the day to day treatment of children but also the philanthropic and religious values that underpinned the institutions themselves. The idea that residents were encouraged, indeed required, to be grateful for the charity that they received appalled many onlookers. Children requiring to be taken out of family care were increasingly regarded as victims rather than as delinquents or in need of cure. With growing numbers of allegations of abuse and abusive regimes coming not only from ex-residents but also from government inspectors, coupled with the impact of theories of child development, these large units were forced to close down or scale down their operations (Abrams 1998).

Concern surrounding institutional care was not solely restricted to child care. The Victorian era was characterised by a general confidence in institutions as a response to deprivation, delinquency and ill health. The combination of scandals and published research (see Goffman 1968) changing views on the origins of social problems and new understandings of the emotional needs of children and adults resulted in the only large-scale institutions built post war being prisons (Jones and Fowles 1984). All of these motivations were spurred on by the escalating economic cost of providing institutional care.

Alongside this general loss of confidence in institutional provision the interventions of the state in the care and protection of vulnerable children became increasingly formal. In many cases it became the decision of the state as to whether a child or young person required residential care. Post war the state took a more active part in the care of children, through education, health care and social services and consequently was seen to share responsibility for their development. Significantly from the 1960s onwards the proportion of children and young people in the general population also began to fall and therefore the 'market' for child care provision was reduced (Barker and Drake 1982).

The 1970s saw the rise of the permanency movement in the USA and Great Britain (Maluccio et al. 1986). This movement argued the need for children and young people to have a secure and permanent placement. Failure to provide this, it was argued, would harm the children not only in the short term but also in relation to their adult competence and ability. In the USA, permanency related not only to placement away from home but included permanent placement with the child's own family. Therefore an added emphasis on the work done with and resources available to families in need of care and support was stressed. In the UK key research studies such as Rowe and

Lambert (1973) and Millham et al. (1986) had highlighted the drift that was occurring in relation to children in foster and particularly residential care. It was found that children, once placed, were left indefinitely until a point of crisis required the social worker to find alternative accommodation (Dinnage and Kelmer Pringle 1967). Increasingly it was felt that residential care with its history of lack of real affection, regimes and batch handling could not be regarded as a permanent option for the care of children. Children, it was argued, should be cared for within families not within institutions (Cliffe with Berridge 1991).

Kilbrandon and the Notion of Welfare

Within Scotland the belief that children were products of their circumstances and should therefore be regarded as such continued to gain momentum. Indeed the early child care workers in institutions as well as the 'cruelty man' from the SNSPCC had also argued this point⁵. From the 1950s change came not in regard to this philosophy but in the most appropriate methods of dealing with these vulnerable children. Quarriers, Aberlour and other child care organisations had believed in the value of separating the child from poverty or family crisis. Once this had been achieved the child had then to be cured of his/her social inheritance through the regimentation of care as well as physical and emotional punishment.

From the 1960s however the belief in the punishment of children was challenged socially, academically and politically. This principle of cure rather than punishment underpinned the Kilbrandon Report and the subsequent creation of the children's hearing system in Scotland (Murray

⁵ The 'cruelty man' was the slang term for the local Scottish National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. Such inspectors were both feared and admired, they were responsible for the 'removal' of vulnerable children to orphanages or boarding out (Abrams 1998).

and Hill 1991). Unlike our English neighbours, children were not to be put through a court system (unless their behaviour was of a seriously criminal nature). Rather *all* children who were deemed to be in need, whether they had been identified as neglected, abused or 'delinquent', were to be treated with the utmost regard to their welfare. Indeed the central argument was that all these categories of children required care because, for whatever reason, their parents had failed or had been unable to provide a normal upbringing. It was the lack of appropriate parenting that was the cause of or at least a contributory factor to criminal activity or 'delinquency'. The (at times unspoken) argument therefore was that if given appropriate parenting and positive family experiences these children would be 'cured' of their delinquency (Murray 1989). For those whose parents could not provide this, despite social work intervention, it was felt foster parents rather than institutions were the better option.

As a result of the move toward a welfare-orientated system coupled with the concerns raised about institutional care, foster care became the positive choice of child welfare workers. The belief in the good of the family and its place in the discourse of permanency became set. Institutional care was generally rejected and given its place as the last resort, a position it maintains today (Kahan 1993). Interestingly it was not the type of institutional care that was rejected, rather the general notion of children being cared for in such a formal setting. Little evidence was sought regarding how residential care could be improved or examples provided of where it may have been working successfully. Rather residential care became synonymous with batch handling, isolation, lack of privacy, lack of individuality and lack of real affection (Abrams 1998:112). Although there were and continue to be moves to explore residential care as a positive option, the dominant perception remains that it is second rate to care in a family setting.

Recently researchers and policy makers have been concerned with ways in which to make residential care better rather than to dismiss it wholly out of hand (Berridge and Brodie 1998, Brown et al. 1998). The recognition that some young people require, indeed prefer, to be looked after in an institutional rather than in a familial setting has come predominantly from the young people themselves. The following sections of this chapter will explore the current trends in residential care for children and young people and the legacy that has continued from the days of the orphanages.

Current Children's Homes

Types of Children's Homes

Residential care in particular has been depreciated in two ways: it has been considered the poorer alternative to foster care (partly as a result of research on old fashioned orphanages and on very young children in nurseries) and it has consequently become the accepted placement for difficult children who can not be fostered - a kind of double substitute care, neither home nor foster home

(Dinnage and Kellmer Pringle 1967: 103)

Children's homes as they exist today developed out of the orphanages and institutions of the late 19th and early 20th Century. Despite the lingering connotations of large soulless orphanages, modern children's homes are quite different from those involved in the early influential research studies. Berridge (1985) in his overview of residential care in England identified three main types of children's homes in use at the beginning of the 1980s. These he describes as the family group style home, medium style adolescent hostels and the larger multi - purpose style homes. Interestingly, on returning to his original research sites in the late 1990s, Berridge discovered that even in the last decade the style and organisation of residential child care had changed (Berridge and Brodie 1998:28). In the course of this more recent study they instead identified four main types of residential provision. These included local authority homes for adolescents (4 - 7 residents), local

authority homes for younger children (6 - 8 residents), local authority homes for young people with severe learning disabilities (9 - 13 residents) and finally private children's homes (4-8 residents).

These resources offered a range of provisions and had quite diverse aims and objectives. The majority of adolescent units regarded their main function as preparation for alternative placements either to foster care, return home or independent living. Two of the adolescent units were less clear in their purpose and appeared to be trying to reach a number of objectives with a variety of young people. One of the adolescent units had identified its role as an alternative to secure accommodation⁶, regarding itself as a therapeutic resource. Although these units offered placements to young people over the age of 12, the majority of residents were aged 14 and above.

In 1996 there were 169 residential children's homes in Scotland containing a maximum of 2,176 children and young people (SWSI 1999). The majority of these (65%) contained 10 places or less. Very little is known outside of these units as to what their function is and how well staff practices are meeting those functions. There appears to be a general assumption by the academic community as well as by the wider social work profession that we know what residential care for children is and that overall it is not doing well (see for example Waterhouse, 2000, Kent 1997, Utting 1991, Berridge and Brodie 1998, Colton 1992).

Children's homes have over the last decade decreased in size and have increasingly been relocated out of rural, isolated settings and into communities (Murray and Hill 1991:274). Throughout

⁶ Secure accommodation is a heavily controlled residential resource where the most vulnerable or 'damaged' young people are placed. Secure units require that young people have no or restricted access to the community and in some cases to each other. Doors to the unit and to parts of the building are kept locked at all times.

Europe there has been a decline in the general numbers of children and young people and provision of residential care. There has however been an increase in the number of children and young people placed in foster care (Colton and Hellinckx 1994:561). The trend for those residential units that have survived is toward the use of small-scale provision. There appears to have been a move toward creating the nearest possible alternative to family life in the shape of small, two or three bedded units. Indeed Warwickshire council made the unique decision to close down its residential provision ⁷(Cliffe with Berridge 1991).

Research from the Netherlands suggests that small-scale resources can however carry their own problems. Van der Ploeg (1993) found that workers in small units were more likely to display symptoms of stress and receive less managerial support. The children and young people resident in these small units may also feel isolated and unsupported. Within Scotland, Perth and Kinross Council have recently closed down their large 12 bedded unit and instead have opened four small units, the largest of which has two children. Although this has allowed for greater visible integration into the community (i.e. small, unidentified housing) young people and staff continue to report feeling stigmatised and treated with suspicion. The young people and staff are, in the case of the one to one units, placed at what might be seen as potential risk and are socially isolated from the support of their peers (Lafferty 1999, Personal Communication). However it remains the case that smaller (rather than small) units do provide more child orientated practice and workers are more able to have a thorough knowledge of the young people in their care (Zandberg 1988 cited in Colton and Hellinckx 1994). With the decrease in numbers, staff are also less restricted by the bureaucracy

⁷ Despite closing their own residential resources Warwickshire continued to use out of region residential provision (Cliffe with Berridge 1991).

evident in larger units and therefore free to spend greater amounts of time with the young people (Colton and Hellinckx:564).

The range of work undertaken by children's homes appears to vary from authority to authority as well as from unit to unit. Within Scotland there has been a recommendation that all children's homes have a statement of aims and objectives and an outline of how these will be met (Skinner 1992)⁸. There appears to be no study available that has looked systematically at these documents in order to demonstrate the common resources which children's homes offer. At their most basic, children's homes provide food, warmth and shelter to children and young people who cannot, for a variety of reasons, continue to live at home. Beyond this basic requirement the functions that children's homes serve may vary dramatically.

The range of work may also extend to the provision of an advocacy function, liaising with outside agencies and families (Bilson and Baker 1995). Children and young people may be encouraged and helped to attend school (Cheung and Heath 1994). Work may be undertaken to resolve family breakdown, experiences of sexual, physical or emotional abuse or to help young people develop a sense of who they are (Bullock 1992). Units may regard their aim as returning children to their families, preparing them for fostering or for independent living (Berridge and Brodie 1998). Residential care is also expected to provide a controlling, safe environment for young people who are outwith parental control or who have a history of abusive behaviour (Brown et al. 1998). This extensive list may not appear in every children's unit. Indeed in some, little will be accomplished beyond the provision of food and shelter and yet in others there is evidence of an increased

⁸ This is required by statute; The Social Work (Residential Establishments - Child Care) (Scotland) Regulations 1987.

specialism of care (Murray and Hill 1991). The ambiguity surrounding the role and purpose of residential care for children has however had a major impact on how its 'success' has been viewed. How can there be a sense of children's homes achieving what they should if there is no clear outline of what this is perceived to be?

The People on the Inside

Young People in Children's homes

Over the last decade there has been increasing recognition that the population within children's homes is changing (Berridge and Brodie 1998). This is not simply a British phenomenon but has occurred throughout the European Community (Colton and Hellinckx 1994). It appears that in general young people placed in children's homes are significantly older than those placed in the 1970s and early 1980s (Kendrick 1995:71). Various reasons may account for this demographic shift in population, the majority of which are related to the rising belief in the benefits of the family. As has been mentioned there has been since the 1950s a growing attack on the appropriateness of residential care for the majority of children. This attack led directly to the restriction of young children placed in this form of care. It was regarded as essential that young children (under the age of twelve) be given the opportunity to grow up in a family setting (Murray and Hill 1991). The value of the family was granted further sway in the aftermath of the 'permanency movement'. Social policy placed increasing pressure on social workers to keep families together.

The result of this political and social change, coupled with the falling birth rate, has been that the population of children's homes has become predominantly young people aged 11⁹ and above and that length of placement in children's homes has been greatly reduced (Bullock 1992). Younger children are now highly unlikely to be placed in residential care. The desire for family placement however has resulted in this older population generally having to experience foster care prior to placement in residential care. Currently young people in residential care in Scotland are, on average, aged between 12 and 17 and have experienced more than one foster placement and often a 'failed' attempt at rejoining their family of origin (Bilson and Barker 1995).

The reasons for young people requiring residential care have also become more complex (Bebbington and Miles 1989). Young people experiencing difficulties are encouraged and supported to remain within the family home and therefore those who do require residential care are often those with the most complex care needs and social histories (Brown et al. 1998). It has been argued that over the last 20 years the ability to remove children from the family home has become increasingly problematic. Although many of these children are placed on supervision orders it is not until they reach their teenage years that they themselves become 'out of control', predominantly as a result of their family experiences (Kendrick 1995). This may account for the bulk of admissions into local authority residential care occurring in relation to children aged 14 to 15. Indeed the lowest rate of entry to any form of 'looked after' care occurs between ages 5 and 12 (Bebbington and Miles 1989:353). Being deemed 'outwith parental control' either in a foster home or in the familial home is often the prerequisite for placement in a children's home (Bilson and Barker 1995).

⁹ In Scotland only 8% of the residential population was under the age of 11 (The Scottish Office 1999).

Although the personal biographies of children and young people who require local authority care are varied, there appear to be common factors. This group of children is more likely to have been living in one parent families in rented property, most frequently in 'run down' neighbourhoods. Their parents are likely to be unemployed and in receipt of state benefit (Bebbington and Miles 1989). The children themselves are, as has been mentioned above, likely to be aged 14 and over and in terms of residential care are more likely to be male (Borland et al. 1998). In relation to ethnicity it would appear that children of mixed race are two and a half times more likely to enter care than a white child (all other factors being equal). Such a ratio does not appear to exist in terms of other racial groups, although black children are slightly more highly represented (Bebbington and Miles 1989).

Children and young people requiring local authority care in Scotland may be defined as belonging to three main categories. Firstly there are those children who are deemed to be 'at risk' of continued or potential physical, sexual or emotional abuse. There is a further group who is deemed to be 'at risk' of neglect. It is likely that these categories are most frequently applied to young children, significantly those under five (Kendrick 1995). Children may also require local authority care if they are deemed to be beyond 'parental' control and are therefore a risk to themselves or those around them (Borland et al. 1998). Children may be placed 'voluntarily' by parents or at their own request at times of family vulnerability or crisis. (Kendrick 1995). These very general categories however conceal what is often a complex range of needs and causations that lead to a child's placement in residential care.

The range of needs and factors leading to a young person's admission to a children's home may result in a number of quite different young people living together. Although it has been argued that there is little difference in the background and social history of young people who offend as opposed to young people who are deemed to be at 'risk', this mixing of young people has been a cause for concern (Berridge 1985). Indeed this appears to be one of the central arguments against the use of residential care for children and young people. It remains the case that young people who enter residential care are most likely to be older adolescents who have experienced not only disruption and separation from their own families but who also have experienced other forms of local authority provision.

Staff Members

Prior to the 1970s residential care workers were generally seen to provide a 'parenting' role. Indeed the Curtis Committee identified the need for 'motherly women' to be employed to provide care. This was often in the guise of strict regimes and religious and educational input. The training required for such a position therefore was regarded as the demonstration of good Christian values as well as ability to control and order children and young people's behaviour. 'House parents' were employed in an attempt to create institutions that modelled 'normal' family structures. Since the 1970s however attempts have been made to professionalise residential childcare and to meet children's needs on a more individualised basis. The reasons behind such a move have centred primarily on the recognition of the complex needs of young people requiring this type of resource as well as the criticisms levelled at the practice demonstrated by these workers (Colton and Hellinckx 1994).

Residential work involves a variety of tasks which have been identified as supervision of young people, encouraging recreation, offering physical and emotional care, showing concern, social training and acting as 'keyworker' (Sinclair and Gibbs 1996). In order to undertake these tasks residential workers are also required to demonstrate an ability to liaise with a range of external figures including parents, educationalists, health care professionals and social workers (Whitaker 1996). Increasingly residential workers are taking on what was historically regarded as the fieldwork task. Fieldworkers, faced with increasing caseloads and bureaucracy, have restricted time available to spend with young people and their families who are instead reliant on the residential staff to meet their needs. It has often been the residential workers who have the greatest access to and strongest relationships with both the young person and his/her families.

Despite the acknowledgement of the change in needs of the young people as well as the level of support and intervention being undertaken by residential staff, such staff remain a largely unqualified and unskilled workforce. The legacy of the 'good enough parent' has resulted in the bulk of residential staff being female and untrained (Berridge and Brodie 1998). Although there has been a marked increase in the numbers of staff employed and a higher ratio of staff to young people, the quality of practice has consistently raised concern from academics and politicians alike (Skinner 1992, Levy and Kahan 1991, Kent 1997, Waterhouse 2000).

Within Scotland the Skinner Report (1992) highlighted the lack of trained workers in this field. In it, Skinner comments on the unsatisfactory levels of trained professionals in this valuable provision:

Staff are the key resource, but currently are trained too seldom and too little, insufficiently supported and sometimes appointed too casually.

(Skinner 1992:68)

Within the report he stated that in 1991, 83% of care staff had no relevant qualification and only 14% had a social work qualification. Little has changed since the writing of this report. Recent figures suggest that only 34 of 889 'houseparents' employed in residential childcare in Scotland have a Diploma in Social work or an equivalent (SWSI 1999)¹⁰

Residential childcare workers have a long-standing tradition of being the poor relations of fieldwork staff (Ward 1997:vi). The origin of the good parent has meant that residential staff are seen as requiring sensitivity, control and compassion rather than any direct professional qualification. However training for this sector has not achieved its intended benefits. Secondment to social work training courses has resulted in many staff leaving to take up fieldwork positions and therefore has been regarded as an expensive option that has had little direct impact on the quality of care given to young people (Skinner 1992). The identification of a need for a separate training course has been made by a number of reports including the Warner Report (1992). It has, however, yet to reach fruition. The UK has not had, like other European countries, a tradition of social pedagogy. This profession centres on the notion of teaching by example. The lack of a tradition within residential childcare, of either social work or pedagogy, has resulted in 'the learning, scholarship and vocabulary associated with a distinctive residential childcare profession is [being] largely missing' (Colton and Hellinckx 1994:571).

¹⁰ The Scottish Executive awarded funding to the University of Strathclyde and Robert Gordon University to undertake a training needs review of residential child care workers in Scotland. It is expected that specific training for residential staff will commence in September 2000.

The pattern of qualification does however vary according to region. The study conducted by Berridge and Brodie (1998) demonstrated this diversity. In it they state that in one area a third of staff were qualified whilst in another, qualifications were held by less than one in ten. Scotland also appears to have wide variation in the expectations of staff with Aberdeenshire having 75% of their residential child care staff qualified to DipSW level (Bradly Personal Communication 1999) whilst other regions have a much smaller percentage of qualified staff.¹¹ This regional variation may reflect the different attitude toward the value of residential care and its importance in the wider child care system (Berridge and Brodie 1998:124).

It has been commented that the turnover of residential staff is high, often leaving the newest, least qualified to undertake work with this group of the most demanding clients (Bullock et al. 1993). Indeed some commentators have argued that this rapid turnover of staff reflects the problematic nature of many of the young people placed in this type of resource (Colton and Hellinckx 1994, Ward 1980, Baldwin 1990). Berridge and Brodie (1998) however found that within their sample there was a high level of previous experience and length of service. 29% of child care staff had worked with young people for more than five years, with a further 31% having worked with young people for over ten years. Despite this they found that there was a high level of movement within the service with over a third of the staff having worked in their current establishment for less than 3 years.

¹¹ Statistics illustrating the percentages of residential child care staff who are social work qualified, region by region, are not available. The Scottish Office does however provide statistics relating to all forms of residential senior practitioners. In Aberdeenshire for example of 75 staff 37 are social work qualified whilst in Dumfries and Galloway of 64 workers only 9 hold a DipSW or equivalent.

Such factors appear to have played a part in the controversy surrounding bad or indeed abusive practice in children's homes. Levy and Kahan (1991) in their report into the 'Pindown Affair' in North Staffordshire, commented on the lack of appropriate staff knowledge with regard to the young people in their care. That the practice of 'pindown' was overt, highlighted a more widespread lack of understanding as to the purpose and function of residential provision, from senior managers down. Both Kent (1997) and Skinner (1992) stress the importance of thorough selection procedures and recommend a probationary period in which practice with young people can be fully assessed. Both these measures, whilst essential, must be considered in tandem with the need to make specific the role of residential childcare and the expectations of its staff.

The experience of working within residential care is far from homogeneous. The salaries paid to residential workers are generally less than to fieldworkers although this has been a reflection of levels of qualification held by these staff. In the mid 1990s Tayside Regional Council, in an attempt to recruit more social work qualified staff, increased basic grade salaries for qualified residential staff to a level higher than that of fieldworkers (Walker 1998 Personal Communication). Despite this radical move few qualified workers were attracted to residential posts. This may suggest that it is not merely salaries that affect recruitment to children's homes. The conditions of residential staff are a further disincentive for qualified workers. Due to its residential 24 hour care remit, residential workers generally work on a shift pattern which involves overnight or sleep in requirements as well as long hours and a stressful working environment. These conditions are made worse by the lack of adequate support and supervision in most children's homes (Kent 1997). It may also be argued that the view of residential work as inferior to fieldwork is a significant

disincentive. The belief that residential work is not 'proper' social work has resulted in many qualified practitioners leaving to take up fieldwork posts (Skinner 1992:71).

The People on the Outside

Despite the historically 'closed' nature of institutions caring for children and young people, modern day children's homes have contact with and rely on a number of outside organisations and individuals. Such outside influences range from the parents and families of the young people being 'looked after' to members of the children's hearing system.

The Children (Scotland) Act 1995

The introduction of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 has been one of the most significant pieces of legislation affecting children and young people this century (Borland et al. 1998). In many ways it has updated and replaced the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 with respect to children. In contrast to the Social Work (Scotland) Act, the 1995 Act does not place the sole responsibility for the welfare of children in 'need' on social work services. It is the local authority as a corporate body that is required to take on this role. This new emphasis on whole authority responsibility makes clear the requirement for education and housing to work alongside social work in assessing and providing appropriate services for children and young people.

The 1995 Act recognises the diversity of children and of childhoods. It is predominately written from an individualistic perspective, in that rights and duties are generally expressed in terms of individual children. One of the key underlying principles of the Act has been the responsibility of those involved in the care and planning for children to listen to the child's views and expressed

wishes. The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 attempted to tackle some of the stigma attached to social work intervention in family life. Indeed the move away from the use of the term 'in care' to that of 'looked after' was designed to encourage a more positive view of statutory intervention and to promote the view that in the majority of cases intervention is required to help and assist parents rather than to prevent their involvement with their child's care.

The 1995 Act continues the philosophy that children are best cared for in and by their families. In keeping with this, section 22 states that each local authority must provide a range and level of services not only to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in its area who are 'in need' but also to promote the upbringing of these children by their families.

The decision to place a child in a residential unit continues to be made by the children's hearing panel¹². This system, set up after the Kilbrandon Report (1964), aims to encourage the active participation by parents and carers of children and young people (as well as young people themselves) in decisions concerning their care. Underlying the children's hearing system is the notion that young people should be protected and that their welfare should be regarded as paramount. Regardless of the grounds for the hearing, the social background and familial experience of each young person must be taken into account. Therefore the system is based not on a principle of punishment but on one of understanding and encouraging change. The level of success or indeed consistent practice in this approach has been questioned (Hallett and Murray 1998). For example residential care has regularly been used by children's hearings as a threat or punishment in

¹² The children's hearing panel is made up of three lay members, with one of the members acting as chair. Although given training the panel members have a range of backgrounds and should be drawn from a full range of ethnic and class groups.

an attempt to improve the behaviour or attitude of parents and their children (Hallett and Murray 1998).

Continuing Relationships With Parents

One of the major criticisms directed at residential care for children has been the lack of encouragement or opportunities provided to parents to maintain an active role, or even a level of contact with their child (Bullock et. al. 1993, Farmer and Parker 1991). There have been a number of studies that have highlighted the positive link between parental contact and early return to the family home (for example Millham et al. 1986, Bilson and Barker 1995). This variable does not in isolation lead to an early return but coupled with a 'positive' admission and good care planning it is a powerful indicator of 'successful' reintegration to the family (Tam and Ho 1996).

Young people entering residential care frequently have strained or problematic relationships with parents. Of those whose admission was 'voluntary', figures produced by the Scottish Office indicate that in 1993, 55% were admitted because their parents were 'unable to cope'. Of those admitted on compulsory supervision orders the main grounds included 38% beyond parental control, 28% truancy and 17% subject to a lack of parental care (SWSI 1996). Such figures although providing a simplified picture of reasons for admission (Kendrick 1995:37) do illustrate the difficulties and tensions that exist between children and their parents prior to admission to residential care.

The role of parents in the lives of their children once they are placed away from home is one that the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 has sought to address. The Act makes clear that not only do

parents have rights under law they also have responsibilities. In relation to rights, parents, like children, have a right to have their views considered and heard. Indeed one of the key underlying philosophies of the 1995 Act is the notion of joint parenting. The expectation is that parents will be involved in day to day planning and decision making with respect to their child and will be involved in work undertaken with them and the family in general.

A number of studies have also highlighted the importance of parental contact in maintaining relationships with extended families and communities of origin (for example Bilson and Barker 1995). Those children and young people for whom contact with parents is not sustained find it more problematic to maintain relationships with siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. In addition the loss of opportunity to return to the family home for visits may result in these young people also having to contend with a loss of friendship groups and hobby groups (Fisher et. al. 1986, Baldwin 1990, Stein and Carey 1986).

Residential care is not alone in its apparent inability to maintain and develop contact with parents. Foster care has also come under attack for not encouraging contact and in some instances actively preventing it. Bilson and Barker (1995) found that 2 out of every 5 looked after children in their study had no face to face contact with their parents and that less than half saw their parents as often as once a month. This study highlighted that young people placed in residential care were more likely to have contact with parents than those in foster care. Although they acknowledged the significance of age and reason for admission in this finding, Bilson and Barker argued that residential care is more active in its practice of maintaining links. This finding demonstrates the

part residential staff play in the 'fieldwork' task of working with families to enable relationships to develop.

Education and Young People in Children's Homes

Children's homes do not as a rule provide education on site and are therefore dependent on young people attending mainstream school or specialist provision. Many of the young people resident in children's homes have experienced difficulties at school prior to their admission (SWSI 1996). These difficulties may range from a failure to attend to behavioural problems in the classroom setting to learning difficulties. As previously mentioned 28% of young people are deemed to require a service on the grounds of their repeated truancy (SWSI 1996).

For some young people however school can provide an important source of support. It has been reported that, for some children, focusing on school is one way of coping with difficult home situations (Laybourn et al. 1996). For many however, problems in attendance at school and their behaviour within it precipitates their admission to residential care. Triseliotis et al. (1995) found that difficulties at school increased pressure at home and in the community, which led directly to admission to residential care. The move to keep children within their family home and out of 'looked after' provision has left many residential workers and panel members concerned that school problems are often firmly established by the point of admission (Kendrick 1995). Such a finding is reflected in the higher age range of young people being admitted to residential care. Young people aged 14 and 15 argue that there is little point in tackling the problems of education and demonstrate little motivation to undertake this work.

The reality is that many young people living in children's homes will not be educated at their local mainstream school. Kendrick (1995) reported a range of alternative provision in place for this group of young people that included day attendance at residential school, intermediate treatment, home tutors, special day units and college packages. Triselios et al. (1995) found that 11% of the young people in his study were receiving no formal education at all. It must be noted however that both these studies found a significant number of young people being 'looked after' who were attending school regularly and who could not be educationally distinguished from their peers.

Despite the provision of alternatives to mainstream education the levels of qualifications demonstrated by young people leaving residential care to live independently make depressing reading. Leaving care studies have shown that the majority of young people leaving residential care have no formal qualifications. Stein and Carey (1986) report that in their study this related to 90% of the young people involved. The direct result of this poor level of attainment is the limited access to employment and training. Biehal et al. (1992) found that after three months of living 'independently', only 13% of the group studied were in full time employment.

Despite acknowledging the existence of educational difficulties experienced by children and young people prior to their admission to residential care it is apparent that whilst being looked after these deficits are far from compensated. One of the fundamental issues raised by research into 'looked after' children is the number of placements that they experience in their 'care careers'. A direct implication of these constant moves from placement to placement is the change of school that has to be endured. In a study conducted in the North East of Scotland men and women who had left residential care reported having experienced an average of 3 different primary schools and 4

different secondary schools (Emond 1995). This level of disruption goes some way to explaining the continuation of school problems after admission.

The responses by the education department and schools to the problems facing young people who require residential provision have been varied. Within the general school population there has been an increase in the levels of school suspensions and exclusions and a growing concern about the 'attractiveness' of and competitiveness between schools (Borland et al. 1998:52). For those living in children's homes, their status can lead to assumptions being made by teaching staff about their ability and behaviour. Young people report a lack of support and understanding from teachers and school staff in relation to their 'looked after' status (Fletcher 1993). There appears to be a belief within the teaching community that young people in residential care are 'trouble makers' (Heath et al. 1994). The result is that not only are young people stereotyped but that previously high achieving young people are placed in lower grade classes. Biehal et al. (1995) however report that teachers who demonstrate too much overt sympathy or concern can also add to young people feeling 'different' and therefore labelled.

The expectation that children and young people in residential care will not do well academically appears to be shared by social workers and residential workers. Education has, since the closing of the large institutions and the preparation of young people for a trade or domestic service, been subordinate to the promotion of emotional well being and development of attachments (Borland et al. 1998:71). Whilst this is perhaps rightly the case there has been a growing awareness that addressing education and health needs can only add to a child's level of well being (Ward 1995). Aldgate (1990) argues that the lack of importance placed on educational attainment has its roots in

the Poor Law and the notion of 'less eligibility'. Central to this argument is that children in public care should not receive attractive or expensive support or goods as this will disadvantage children who remain in the family home and will in turn lead to such provision being seen as a reward for 'bad' behaviour or as an incentive to others to be placed away from home.

Children's homes themselves may also add to the low levels of academic attainment. A number of writers have noted that residential staff tend to spend less time than foster carers in direct contact with young people, focusing more on domestic or bureaucratic tasks (Colton 1988, Berridge and Brodie 1998). Berridge et al. (1996) report that in the units studied there was a lack of stimulation, scarcity of books, newspapers and reference texts required for young people to undertake homework. Children's homes are often noisy places with a number of people, music, television, visitors and telephones. This environment increases the level of difficulty experienced by young people in doing their homework. This is compounded when the culture of the unit is one where young people are not encouraged to undertake school work. In such units young people have reported feeling bullied and intimidated when doing school work (Fletcher 1993).

The qualifications of residential staff have been found to have a bearing on their practice in relation to young people and education. Staff have reported feeling a lack of confidence in approaching or liaising with schools (Berridge et al. 1996). This feeling was not shared by those staff who were social work qualified. Teachers who regarded the unit managers as their equals rather than the unit staff confirmed such a view. Unqualified staff have also been found to have had a low level of educational attainment, and a number have reported disliking their school years. These factors

contribute to a sense of resignation and lack of motivation to encourage young people in their education (Millham et al. 1980).

Fieldworkers

Fieldworkers hold the responsibility for the management of the young people and their families who require residential care. These workers are normally based in the community social work office and are employed to work in office hours. In the first instance fieldworkers are involved in assessing young people and their families and preparing a report for the children's hearing if one has been requested. The decision to place a child in residential care is officially made not by the fieldworker but by the children's hearing. There is however a high level of agreement between children's hearing decisions and social work recommendations (Hallett and Murray 1998).

After a child is placed in a children's home the fieldworker is expected to work closely with both the family and the unit in establishing the long term needs of the young person and the most appropriate ways to meet those needs. Fieldwork has however been heavily criticised in its use of residential provision and its attitude toward it (Fisher et al. 1986, Baldwin 1990, Potter 1986).

Many fieldworkers regard residential care as a last resort with primary consideration being given to maintaining the child in the family home (Rowe et al. 1989). If this is regarded as not feasible then it is likely that the child will be placed in foster care. It is normally only once this has been tried (often on a number of occasions) that residential care is used (Abrams 1998). Residential care has also historically provided for those young people who are difficult to place. Such children may include those who require specialist therapeutic placement, residential school, drug rehabilitation

projects or, more controversially, those young people who are nearing 16 but who have criminal charges pending.

The result is a view of residential care as a 'dumping ground' for those who have failed or have been failed by the social work system and wider society. Indeed Fisher et al. (1986:76) found that the majority of fieldworkers included in their sample viewed a child's admission to residential care as a failure. One of the repercussions of this mind set is that those working in residential care believe that they are working in a resource that caters for those who do not 'fit' anywhere else and that they have a lack of control over the remit of their workplace (Ward 1980). A further implication is that this 'last resort' mentality creates few planned admissions to residential care. Instead admission is done on an unplanned, emergency basis. Indeed Rowe et al. (1989) found that three quarters of admissions studied were on an emergency basis.

Residential staff and young people living in children's homes report that once admission takes place they have little contact with the fieldworker involved (Bilson and Barker 1995, Emond 1995). Contact takes place at times of crisis or prior to children's hearings as a means of writing a suitable report. It appears that, once a child has been placed, fieldworkers withdraw and the planned work with families and young people is often left to residential staff. The lack of relationship that exists between fieldwork staff and young people is reflected in research conducted in leaving care. Morgan-Klein (1985) for example found that contact with field workers varied enormously. The majority of young people had no experience of contacting fieldworkers on their own initiative and believed that this should only be done if they were in trouble. A number of the respondents stated

that they felt that their social worker had ignored their views and feelings and had written reports about them without proper consultation.

The Experience of Living in a Children's Home

The day to day experience of living in a children's home is the least researched aspect of residential care for children. This lack of literature has much to do with the place of children and young people's views in research in general (James et al. 1998) and the importance given to policy orientated findings. Government investigations and reviews have more systematically gathered the views of young people (see for example Kent 1997). Although useful, such investigations have a specific remit or focus and as such present information on certain aspects of residential living.

Bullying and Abuse

A number of government reports have set out to monitor and investigate the degree and type of abuse that is taking place involving children and young people in residential care. The most recent of these to take place in Scotland, the Kent Report (1997), highlighted the abuse occurring both at the hands of residential staff and by young people themselves. Although there remains no central mechanism in the UK for recording investigations or reports of abuse, the public investigations that have taken place over the last two decades would suggest that physical, sexual and emotional abuse within institutions is more widespread than was previously recognised (Doran and Brannan 1996). The concerns relating to the protection offered to young people in residential care motivated the National Commission of Inquiry into the Prevention of Child Abuse to write:

The catalogue of abuse in residential institutions is appalling. It includes physical assault and sexual abuse; emotional abuse: unacceptable deprivation of rights and privileges; inhumane treatment; poor health care and education. This is especially

disturbing because many of the children in residential institutions have already been deeply harmed ...

(Williams of Mostyn 1996:19)

Abuse by staff is not however restricted to children's homes or what might be classed as other provision for 'vulnerable' children. Boarding schools also have a long history of abusive regimes and individual assault. Indeed Lambert and Millham (1968) found that sexual abuse of children by staff had occurred in 4 of the 66 schools studied. Within these identified schools a significant number of pupils talked about the existence of abuse. That such abuse is so endemic and almost an 'acceptable' part of boarding school life is evidenced by the authors' choice of referring to the sexual abuse of boys by staff members as 'sexual deviation'. More recent studies have highlighted that sexual abuse in boarding schools is still occurring (La Fontaine and Morris 1991).

Both residential units for children and boarding schools have a sense of isolation and a relatively closed environment. Wardhaugh and Wilding (1995) argue that this sense of social isolation extends to the wider social work system and as a result such provision allows abusive practice to take place. Those units or schools that are physically isolated have limited contact with outside professionals or families and are therefore not open to outside scrutiny. It may also be argued that foster carers and those living in foster families experience isolation. For this group, the sense of isolation may be even greater. Indeed Pringle (1993) argues that, despite the high profile given to abuse within residential units, foster homes are just as unsafe.

One element of abuse that is frequently directed at children's homes is that of peer abuse. Like boarding schools, there is an assumption that children living together will treat each other cruelly. Lambert and Millham (1968) present material from young people in boarding schools that suggest

that not only was peer abuse or bullying rampant, the expectation that such treatment of fellow pupils would take place was widespread. The hierarchical system of pupil power (School Captain, head of house, prefects etc.) encouraged the 'right' to abuse younger children as a means of disciplining and instilling order, and the status granted to those in such positions encouraged other young people to strive for such appointments.

Bullying or peer abuse has over the last two decades become an increasingly recognised aspect of institutional living:

There is a growing awareness that bullying does not just affect the lives of children in schools but extends to many other organisations in which numbers of people have to live and work in close proximity. There is an increased concern about bullying in the work place, armed forces, hospitals, residential institutions such as children's homes, and homes for the aged and, most certainly, in prisons

(Tattum 1995:18)

The extent of bullying within children's homes has attracted less attention than abuse by staff.

There does however appear to be a widespread assumption that bullying is a significant aspect of residential life. The majority of studies, which have examined bullying amongst young people in institutions, have concerned themselves with units for young offender's or large residential schools (Little 1990, Browne and Falshaw 1996) rather than children's homes. Despite this, the findings appear to have been translated to what are significantly different institutions (Kendrick 1997207).

Bullying has been described by a number of young people involved in studies concerning children's homes. One in six of the young people interviewed as part of the Triseliotis et al. (1995) study who were living in residential care described that they had been bullied or had witnessed bullying toward fellow residents. The extent of the problem is however far from clear. More appears to be known

about the levels of sexual abuse by young people from fellow residents (see for example Farmer and Pollock 1999). Such a finding resulted in the government issuing guidelines which state that it is inappropriate to place young people who have been victims of sexual abuse alongside those who have been identified as perpetrators of abuse. The reality however is that often history of abuse or abusive behaviour is not always known at the point of admission. In cases where it is known the lack of appropriate facilities to cater for perpetrators of abuse often means that they are placed together in the 'dumping ground' of the children's home. Perhaps more significantly children who sexually abuse have often been victims of sexual abuse. The dividing line between the 'abuser' and the 'abused' is therefore rarely clear.

The 'Voice' of Young People in Residential Care

It is of note that much of the writing on children's homes has concentrated on structural issues or the negative practices that take place. Although without question such issues are an essential part of developing our understanding of residential life they provide a restricted perspective on the experience of being 'looked after'. Berridge and Brodie (1998), for example, provide limited insight into the day to day practice of residential work. They highlight the extent to which staff are involved in domestic or bureaucratic chores and the struggle to afford time to the young people in their care at important points in the day. However they also describe the atmosphere in the units studied as friendly and welcoming and highlight the apparent good relationships between the residential staff and the young people. In terms of the resident group they found little evidence of a strong resident subculture arguing that this may have been the result of short term placements. Most apparent however is their perception of the young people living in the units and the way in which this affects the structure of the residential culture:

....that self-centredness among emotionally deprived or disruptive children hinders strong, enduring peer relationships

(Berridge and Brodie 1998:91)

The aforementioned quote highlights the tone of this book and its emphasis on the 'voice' of the young people. Despite stating in their research methods that the views and opinions of the young people were paramount to the research their voice is muted and overshadowed by the presentation of staff and managerial reports. This reliance on managers and staff to describe daily life has resulted in a number of studies failing to gain any real insight into what residential life is like for young people (see for example Millham et al. 1986, Brown et al. 1998). It may be argued that this type of 'consumer' research is a relatively recent phenomenon, especially with regard to 'hard to reach' respondents. Indeed it is only recently that wider academic research has begun to take account of the views and experiences of children and young people.

Fletcher (1993) provides one of the few studies which focuses predominantly on the opinions and experiences of young people being 'looked after' in both foster and residential care. She stresses the significance of the losses that these young people have incurred in entering the care system in terms of parents, home and frequently school, neighbourhood and friends. Young people in this study spoke of their sense of powerlessness concerning both their everyday living choices as well as those decisions concerning their futures. They mentioned the problems in maintaining privacy and sustaining educational attainment as well as difficulties encountered in maintaining contact with family and friends.

The positive elements of being 'looked after' were identified by this group of young people and included the relationships that they had with their carers and the material benefits that the system

provided. Mention was also made of the sense of safety and security felt by many. There are however issues with this study. The questionnaire that was used was circulated through a magazine for young people being 'looked after' and included a question on the satisfaction with the magazine itself. It may be argued that the questions focused on 'adult' areas of interest including opinions on social workers, complaints procedures and family contact. There was no provision made for the young people to write about other areas of their lives which they may have wished to discuss and indeed the requirement to write responses may have excluded a number of young people from the study. It may also be an assumption that young people were afforded privacy to undertake the questionnaire.

The experience of living alongside other young people is one that has been discussed largely in terms of abuse or harm. An example of this is Kahan's (1994) response to findings by Morgan (1993) in his study of life in boarding schools. He claims that young people identified their relationship with fellow pupils as the most significant relationship at school. Kahan however states that

This is unlikely to be the case in children's homes...peer group relationships between children in children's homes are often tentative, conditional and transitory
(Kahan 1994: 138)

There appears to be no empirical basis for this claim, nor is there any attempt by Kahan¹³ to support this statement. Indeed in this work Kahan discusses the peer group under the section entitled 'The Contemporary Hazards of Growing Up'. Young people are discussed in terms of peer pressure, bullying and intimidation. Other writers have made similar unsupported claims. Davison (1995),

¹³ It should be noted that Barbara Kahan played a significant role in raising the profile of residential child care and has been committed to research and practice developments in this area throughout her career.

for example, argues that a young person's experience of residential care and the benefits that such care may offer will be influenced by 'the way in which the members of the group regard each other and value themselves' (Davison 1995: 195). This appears to be a significant point yet there appears to be no evidence to support this view.

Hudson (1996) has been one of the few writers who has attempted to explore the importance of the peer group to young people in residential care. He argues that the bulk of literature surrounding residential provision has concerned itself with what he refers to as the 'vertical relationship' within the setting. By this he means for example the relationship between the staff and the young people, the manager and the wider child care service etc. Hudson has made some attempt to problematise this tradition by historically examining the importance of the peer group in institutional care. He claims that the majority of 19th Century provisions were founded on the premise that young people would care for each other, there was simply not the staff provision to do otherwise. It was with the rise in psychotherapeutic thinking and the way that this impacted on social work practice that notions of group care ('self help') were replaced by individualised treatment approaches. Hudson makes the point that, in more recent times, other fields of practice and research have begun to acknowledge the part that peers can play in 'treatment' and support. He claims an example of this is the use of young people in the management of bullying in schools. However within children's homes:

The continuing concentration on 'individual' approaches to child care in the UK ignores the importance of peer interactions in an individual's development of their gender and ethnic identity.

(Hudson 1996:3)

Outwith writing on residential care other academics have acknowledged the importance of peer relationships. Indeed Cottrell (1996) argues that " relations with others lie at the heart of the

adolescent experience...They place a lot of importance on belonging, on being included, and on being part of a group" (Cottrell 1996:1). There may be useful insights to be gained for residential child care from research into adolescent friendship groups that should not be disregarded because of the perceived 'voluntary' nature of these relationships. The degree to which free choice is in play in the choosing of friends is questionable. Young people are constrained by institutions and environments as well as the will of parents and carers as to 'appropriate' friends. Cottrell (1996:27) argues that adolescent friendships are highly segregated along gender lines. This he argues is as a result of the greater affirmation and reassurance amongst friends of the same sex. For young people in children's homes the significance of the relationship with other young people should not be underestimated. However it does require empirical foundation.

Conclusions

The legacy of the orphanage and of the large institution continues to have resonance in current residential provision for children and young people. It has not only impacted on the focus of research into children's homes but has continued to influence the ways in which children's homes are used and regarded by social work and its management. Children's homes provide a range of services for some of the most 'damaged' and 'damaging' young people in our society yet remain staffed by a largely unqualified and unsupported workforce.

The historical and political origins of residential care appear also to influence the way in which academia has viewed children's homes. There are very few studies that have used children's homes as a means of gaining insight into the social world of children and young people. Instead they have been seen as sites to research public policy and outcomes in the care of children. While

worthwhile, the academic fascination with measuring 'success' has left residential workers and residents further demoralised and devalued.

Without question, the young people who require a residential service have had to cope with a range of trauma in their lives, and although they may exhibit 'inappropriate' or 'unacceptable' behaviour, they remain young people who may shed light on the more general experience of being young. A significant gap in the literature to date has been research into the experience of living in residential care. Historically researchers have tended to direct their questions to managers or staff although more recently the views of young people and parents are being sought. As a result of their policy focus, such research provides little insight into the day to day experience of living with a group of peers and the costs and benefits that this may have. It is only recently that the voice of the child has been seen to be a worthy voice, both in sociological and social policy research. It is on this development that the next chapter will concentrate.

Chapter Two

The Innocent Child and the Troublesome Teenager

The previous chapter was concerned with examining the literature and research relating to residential child care. Of singular importance to this subject is the understanding of those who use and require the service, namely children and young people. As has been illustrated the 'voice' and experiences of residents have often been overlooked. More recently research in this area has begun to take a greater interest in those who require residential provision (Berridge and Brodie 1998). Such a shift is not restricted to this area of study; indeed sociological research into childhood and youth has increasingly begun to seek out the perspectives of these groups (Williamson and Butler 1995, Archard 1993). The dichotomous thinking concerning childhood and adolescence, as suggested by the title of this chapter, appears simplistic in its approach. Such thinking has, however, dominated public discourse and has, in many ways, influenced sociology with regard to those subjects who are deemed 'other' than adult.

Public discourse surrounding children and young people, despite having undergone significant change, remains influenced by ideas of what children and childhood ought to be. Fundamental to

this discourse is the notion of children as 'adults in training' (Hockey and James 1993). The result is the portrayal of two homogenous categories; one the innocent child in need of protection and guidance from a somewhat dangerous society and the other a dangerous group dominated by peer behaviours frequently of the 'deviant' or challenging kind.

This chapter provides a discussion of selected themes in the literature surrounding the sociology of childhood and youth. Rather than merely furnishing the reader with the ways in which children and young people have been considered within this body of work, I will reflect on how this has impacted on the subjects of this study, namely children and young people who are being 'looked after' by the state.

Remember The Good Old Days?

Until recently the study of childhood has been founded on a number of key principles. The most significant of these has been establishing the impact of childhood experiences and 'training' on adult behaviour, and beliefs. Sociological interest therefore centred on the ways in which children learned about and embraced adulthood. Children were studied as 'future adults' rather than as of interest in their own right (Jenks 1996). Such a view of childhood was closely linked with wider sociological interest in understanding social order and integration. Order was therefore created through the uniform beliefs and practices of society's members and in turn uniformity was made possible through the socialisation of children (James et al. 1998).

Socialisation is generally understood as the process by which cultural attitudes and practices are passed down through generations (Saporiti 1994). Children, through the process of growing up, are

exposed to the social world and interact with it. What is learnt from these experiences is internalised and consequently reproduced in the child's own behaviour. A developmental perspective of childhood has tended to be seen as central to understanding to socialisation and 'as such the child is necessarily incompetent or incomplete' (James et al. 1998:25).

Central to the notion of socialisation is that children are not active social agents in this process. Rather they are portrayed as passive recipients of social norms and rules (Hood-Williams 1990). From this perspective children were therefore studied with regard to the sources of these 'messages', the institutions and social forces that influenced children's development. As a result of this belief in the centrality of 'training' or 'preparation' for adulthood, research therefore focused primarily on adult institutions or sources of power. It was therefore the school, the family, the community and more recently the media that were seen as the key influences on children's development (Johnson 1994, Buckingham 1994).

A further central tenet of this early study of childhood was the presentation of the experience of childhood as uniform (Corsaro 1997, James et al. 1998). Scant attention was paid to the diversity of children and childhoods, the adult variables of class, gender, ethnicity and locality being rarely applied (James and Prout 1996). The dominant image of the 'normal' child, developed from psychological and behavioural milestones, became the benchmark against which all children were judged. The impact of this on the view of children and families both within minority as well as majority world countries was significant. The meanings and purposes of children's activities, education and play were contextualised not within cultural norms and practices but within the discourse of the 'normal' child (Mayall 1994, Ennew, 1994, James et al. 1998).

The Predicament of the 'Modern' Child

One of the first writers to examine critically the notion of a universal, 'natural' childhood was Phillippe Aries (1962). Although his work has since been questioned (see for example Pollock 1983, Jackson and Scott 2000), Aries proposed that childhood was socially and historically constructed. Thus the meaning and perception of 'normal' children and childhood was temporally located and changed over time. Aries's work concentrated on the portrayal of children through art and literature and from this he argued that it was only from the late middle ages that a separate 'childhood' was created as a stage between infancy and adulthood.

The impact of age as a biological and 'natural' force on skills and ability is not questioned by this school of thought. Rather it is the way in which society manages age and its meaning which is socially constructed (Edwards 1996). It may therefore be argued that childhood is a constant feature of all societies:

... children are universal in terms of the biological fact of being born, being small, growing bigger and getting older.

(Punch, 1998:12)

Social constructionism places no value on the biological and physiological explanations of childhood. Rather childhood is constructed and experienced in myriad ways, which vary from culture to culture and arguably over time (Goddard and White 1982). Constructionist thinking does not however dismiss the role that institutions such as the family, education and indeed the state play in how children are viewed and view themselves. Indeed it is through them that the psychological and physiological knowledge of the 'normal' child is disseminated (Jenks 1996).

It has become increasingly recognised that the way in which this biological 'fact' of ageing and how it is experienced will vary between cultures and times. More recently sociological studies of childhood have recognised this position and have attempted to explore the variety of childhoods that exist. Generally this has taken a broad cultural or international position. Research has been undertaken in a range of western and majority world countries (see for example Blanchet 1996, Stafford 1995, Qvortrup 1994). The result of this research has been to support the notion of social construction and develop an awareness of the diversity of childhoods. However at this early stage, much of this research has inadvertently served to promote a belief in the universality of childhood within rather than between countries or locations.

Therefore within sociology, interest has grown in researching children and young people in their own right (Hardman 1973, Qvortrup 1994, Mayall 1994, Sinclair 1996). Indeed Hardman argues that children ought to be seen as: 'people in their own right, and not just receptacles of adult teaching' (Hardman 1973:87) and as such marks a radical departure from the dominant socialization theories. Discontent with the unquestioned uniformity of socialisation theory, encompassing as it does the suggestion of the passive 'child', has led researchers to what has been described as a 'new' sociology of childhood (James et al. 1998). This paradigm stresses the value of researching children, with regard to their culture and social relationships, in their own right. It argues that children are active agents in their lived experiences and that ethnography is a useful methodology to study such experiences as it allows children a more direct voice in research. At its heart lies a social constructionist perspective of childhood (Prout and James 1990).

Although the agency of the child is a key aspect of this school of thought such agency must be regarded within the structural limitations that are in place. Children may be considered social agents but the agency of the adult population be it in the form of parents, social workers or teachers is always more prominent. Children's negotiation with the social world is restricted and controlled by that very world. Harden and Scott (1998) argue that childhood can be understood at three different levels. As already mentioned children operate within structural controls. The very experience of childhood is influenced by the institutions of the family, the school and the state. Adult-child relations and the socio-economic impact of this relationship shape the opportunities and restrictions that children experience. The second level identified is that of 'discourse'. Harden and Scott argue that the representations and developmental leanings provided for general consumption create a discourse, which shapes public understandings of childhood. Finally Harden and Scott acknowledge that, at an individual, situated level children act to shape and reshape structures and discourses, most significantly with regard to their relationships with others. However despite this recognition of the part that a child plays in his/her own 'construction':

Children's participation in constructing their own everyday world takes place within the constraints set by their subordinate location in relation to adults, where their own understanding of what it means to be a child has been shaped by their interaction with powerful, adult, social actors with pre-existing, albeit renegotiable, ideas about childhood and children.

(Harden and Scott 1998:7)

James et al. (1998) provide a useful framework to illustrate the ways in which the 'new' study of childhood deals with its subject. Firstly they identify the socially constructed child approach which has in many ways dominated more recent studies of childhood and which appears sympathetic to the ideas put forward in Aries's early work. This approach therefore regards childhood as historically

and structurally situated. As they state: '... in many parts of the world a child's age impinges very differently on local conceptualizations of children's physical and social skills' (James et al. 1998:175).

The tribal child approach, by contrast, concerns itself with childhood as separate or other than adulthood. Research in this field has tended to be concerned with identifying play, language or rituals which are 'unique' to children and which serve to reproduce children's culture (for example James 1993, Opie and Opie 1982). Studies of this kind, despite providing fascinating insights into aspects of children's everyday lives, have dislocated children from wider structural influences and inter generational relationships. By contrast the minority group child approach argues that children are comparable to other groups within society who have been similarly marginalised from power and restricted in their economic force. Research in this area has concentrated on children's experiences in an 'adult centred' world. Alderson (1993) for example explored children's perceptions of their own terminal illnesses and the way in which their ability to cope and manage this position was controlled or 'masked' by the adults involved. This example illustrates the move within this approach to explore areas of everyday life, which have, until recently, been explored either within an adult domain or from an adult perspective.

Finally, James et al. (1998) identify a social structural approach which regards children as a universal category, present in all social worlds. It is argued that without this acceptance of childhood as a defined point in the life course (and by association a 'universal' state) comparative work between childhood and other life course positions (e.g. old age, youth) would not be possible. Concern therefore centres around the implication that age has on children: 'Children are again very

much a universal category and they are seen to emerge from the constraints that their particular social structure proffers' (James et al. 1998:32).

It may be argued that by their very focus, each of the approaches mentioned above fails to address key elements of children's experiences as children. Solely accepting one position denies the diversity of the experience of being a child. For example to approach the study of childhood from a purely tribal position is to ignore the real structural limitations that are in place. Not only that, but such a position may lead the researcher to deny the methods used by children to negotiate around such controls. Collectively however these approaches have served to produce an ever-growing body of knowledge, which has at its centre the perspective and lived experience of those it seeks to study. Vital to their contribution to the 'new' sociology of childhood these approaches support the argument that children are active participants in their social, emotional and physical development and therefore have an essential part to play in research. Until recently the 'voice' of children in social research has rarely been heard. It is only now that children are themselves being considered as useful informants in terms of both data and methodologies (Sinclair 1996, Rigby and Slee 1993, Corsaro 1997).

Children's Groups

Studies of children and young people's social networks have tended to focus on specific areas of cultural reproduction or resistance. The study of children's friendship within sociology has either concentrated on the very young (for example James 1993) or has considered gender as defining the type and style of friendships that may occur (for example Hey 1997). Sociology has also concerned itself with peer groups in relation to identity and resistance, until recently focusing mainly on the

experiences of the working class male (Thorne 1993). In common, these approaches are often concerned with the function and meaning attached to peer relationships (generally from an 'adult' perspective) often at the expense of how children and young people organise and maintain their social groups.

The study of children and young people's groups has tended to support the notion that childhood is a time of development and growth and youth is the point in the life course where young people challenge or 'resist' adult institutions (Thompson 1998, Hendry et al. 1993). The belief in a separate children's culture has been expressed in the set of distinctive cultural forms which have embodied the practices of play, children's games and storytelling. Culture therefore suggests a shared set of beliefs and practices, passed down through generations of children. Alternatively children's culture has been regarded as the everyday context of children's social lives, the 'whole way of life specific to a generational group' (James et al. 1998:82).

For younger children the result of such study has been a concentration on play whilst for young people it has meant the exploration of 'sub cultural' practices. James et al. (1998) argue however that in approaching the study of children and young people's social groups in this way there is a playing down of the social context of children's everyday lives. They stress that the practices of children and young people do not operate separately from wider adult culture. Indeed Amit-Talai (1995) argues that children and young people's opportunity to forge friendship networks are often controlled by adult institutions. Children are placed in age related classes and therefore friendships between older and younger children are problematic as they rarely meet. Despite these controls

however children play a dominant role in forming their own social worlds, negotiating time and space together around and between adult controls (see also Valentine 1997).

Children's culture can be considered as a 'form of social action, a way of being amongst other children, a particular cultural style, resonant with particular times and places' (James et al. 1998:90). From this perspective it is argued that children and young people are socialised not only through the formal institutions of the family and school but also through their friendship networks and peer groups. Unlike previous notions of passive receptors of socialisation it is acknowledged that they are active contributors to their own cultures (Caputo 1995) and are competent social actors playing a dynamic part in their own social worlds (Mayall 1994, Waksler 1991). For example younger children, despite being 'forced' to play with the children of their parents' friends or their nursery school or school class mates maintain control over their play by choosing to include others and in doing so, to include them in a positive or negative way. Similarly the older the child becomes, and with it the more physical freedom he/she is afforded the more 'private' play becomes. Arguably time spent with peers occurs further and further away from the adult or parental gaze.

It may be argued that an illustration of the 'agency' of children and young people have over their choice of playmates and function of play is the bully/victim role. In the last decade one of the most prominent approaches to peer relationships to have been embraced by wider society has been the bully/victim stratification. This approach originated in the psychological study of children and identified traits or characteristics of the typical 'bully' or 'victim' (Besag 1989). In common with many sociological studies of organisations these roles were regarded as fixed and finite. In terms of social organisation it is argued the bully is granted status through fear and intimidation whilst the

child who is bullied is regarded as 'weak' or 'different' (Byrne 1994). Certainly the research conducted from this perspective appears to oversimplify the complexity of children's negotiations for credibility and position. Victims and bullies are pathologised and individual attributes are given as causes of these role allocations (see for example Lawson 1995, Tattum 1993) therefore removing the element of 'control' or agency from the child or young person.

Traditional accounts of children's socialization make much of 'peer group culture' as the site of cultural reproduction. Peer activity is seen as the testing ground for 'competent' adult behaviour and it is through such interaction that individual children are judged and judge themselves (Hendry et al. 1993, James et al. 1998). An interesting dichotomy exists however between the fear of the peer group and the lack of peer group attachment and integration. The 'friendless' child concerns parents who search for an explanation as to what is 'wrong' with their child. Children and young people who are seen to have no friendship network are pathologised and are regarded as deviating from the 'normal' construction of the happy, popular child (see for example Olmstead et al. 1991, Olweus 1980).

Equally however, group culture is regularly cited as problematic rather than as benefit to a child's social development. The peer group as a social organisation is blamed for deviance and delinquency. Indeed Harris (1999) suggests that it is children rather than parents who have the greatest influence on how children 'turn out' as adults. Research involving particularly teenage groups, identifies the peer group as a force which places 'pressure' on its members to conform to peers norms and values (Conger 1979, Heaven 1994). Media representations of peer groups perpetuate such beliefs. Popular culture bombards us with images of young people being 'lead

'astray' by their peers. These images are not only directed at adult markets, through for example 'Eastenders' but also through programmes developed for children (see for example BBC's 'Biker Grove'). Both perspectives seek to undermine children and young people's social agency; their ability to choose the way in which they behave or operate socially is disregarded and devalued.

Impact on the Residential Experience

Academic thinking around children and childhood has, to some degree, penetrated public consciousness and social work practice. Social work students are taught to recognise the stages of childhood growth and development either through the psychological work of, for example, Piaget (Daniel et al. 1999) or through the psycho-dynamic thinking of Erikson (Erikson 1962). At the same time they are furnished with the belief that childhood experience impacts on adult behaviour and self perception (Fahlberg 1991).

Within residential child care this latter belief is prominent; to understand the experiences of young people and to help them avoid 'inappropriate' behaviour, past childhood and familial experiences are explored. There remains a belief in the innocence of childhood having to be protected. Certainly this is the case within child protection legislation and also within legislation or guidance relating to children's experiences whilst in the social work system¹⁴. Whilst social work would be uncomfortable with any suggestion that it perceives children as being born bad it does give a degree of credence to the notion of generational or cyclical abuse/neglect, again being heavily influenced by a socialisation perspective. Many social work clients have a familial history with the department and therefore their children are in some ways expected to be in need of the service (Hunter 1995).

¹⁴ See for example The Children (Scotland) Act (1995), Children's Safeguard Review (1997), The Skinner Report (1992)

Underpinning much social work intervention with children and young people is the aim of 'producing' a responsible, competent adult. Like many of the 'pre sociological' schools of thought the child's projected adult competence is highlighted (Kahan 1994, Ward 1993). Social work texts talk of the child in need of residential care as being 'damaged' and indeed this notion of 'deviance' extends to project remits and promotional material. The Sycamore Project for example describes itself as a resource created to care for and work with 'disturbed young people' (Foley 1999). I am in no way attempting to challenge the belief that many of the young people who require residential care may have been hurt, neglected, disappointed and often physically, sexually and emotionally abused. The perpetuation of the belief in them being something other than 'normal' is however arguably felt not only by the young people but has also shaped the way in which wider communities and society views them. Central to this belief system is the notion that there is a normal child and a normal childhood against which all others can be measured.

Historically the conception of a 'universal' childhood has become synonymous with notions of innocence and purity; children ought to be protected and cherished. Children are therefore constructed as requiring the safety and nurture that will allow their progress into adulthood to remain untainted by 'adult' concerns or practices. More generally the state of innocence has become the defining characteristic of the 'normal' child (Jackson 1982, Scott et al.1998). Interestingly the purity of childhood is in constant struggle with its evil counterpart. Children, as innocents, are at constant threat from evil forces, normally in the form of adult figures. This was highlighted in the media coverage of the Dunblane shootings. The children involved were portrayed as innocent 'angels' representing all of society's children. The events were considered as a threat not only to the children of Dunblane but to all children (Scott et al. 1998).

By contrast those children who transcend this 'innocence' are portrayed as being so evil that they demonstrate no recognisable characteristics of children. Their behaviour is explained through psychological disturbance or uncontrolled, untamed forces. In demonstrating this unruly behaviour these children threaten childhood itself and consequently the future of society. They are described outwith any social context; their behaviour resulting from their own lack of self discipline and control. They are individualised and demonised to the point that they become unidentifiable as a child¹⁵ (Scott et al. 1998, Thompson 1998).

As a result society struggles to manage those children who fall outwith this construct of the innocent, carefree child. Those who are forced to live in poverty are seen as 'victims' of poor parenting or inadequate social and political will. Recent images of children living in poverty in the UK have dominated the media over recent months. T.V. documentaries have forced home the image of children coping with growing up in situations of poverty and neglect (see for example Eyes of a Child BBC, September 1999). Moreover artists such as the Scottish painter Ken Currie present their work as a response to the 'deprivation and misery' surrounding children and young people. Indeed Currie states: 'It was impossible to escape the feeling that the children were 'doomed'. Yet about them was a toughness, a steely will to survive' (Sunday Herald, 12th September 1999). Central to these presentations is the concern expressed at children and young people having to take on 'adult concerns' or practices. Indeed Currie's example presents the reader with language that is not commonly, or comfortably, attached to children.

¹⁵ See for example media reporting of the James Bulger murder.

There appears to be a tension between these 'romantic' media images of children and young people on the margins and the 'dangerous' youths who live in our neighbourhoods or play with our children. The distance that the media affords us to view the social world from the safety of our armchairs perpetuates the belief that these children are somehow 'other', removed from our environment. The children and young people who are visible to us however, who are 'running wild' or 'bringing themselves up', are to be feared and avoided. Indeed the media has also played its part in constructing these 'other' children as a 'Goldingesque' (1954) organised body who threaten to rock the moral fibre of society. Arguably without this level of 'moral panic' the government would have been unable to enforce its night curfews and policing of the very young (see for example The Scotsman 3/9/99, The Guardian 2/9/99).

Children who commit criminal offences or who are deemed to be 'beyond parental control' are pathologised to the extent that they cease to be presented as children and are instead constructed as 'monsters' (Scott et al. 1998:695). This appears to be particularly the case for young women and girls. Whilst violence or sexualised behaviour are deemed to be problematic if demonstrated by any child, it is particularly unacceptable for such behaviour to be undertaken by girls and young women (Alder 1999). The will to have these children removed from society gives some insight into the dominance of a biological or deterministic view of childhood. This centres on the belief that without the opportunity of a 'normal' childhood the child will be unable to grow into a 'successful' adult. Moreover anxiety concerning the power of these children to influence others to behave badly further fuels the desire to have them removed. There remains the belief that children do not have the capacity to make choices over the ways in which their behaviour is shaped by others, not least those who 'fail' to be children. They must be protected by adults from 'getting in with a bad lot'.

Added to this individualised, demonic presentation of 'bad' children is the way in which their families are presented. In keeping with the 'evil child' (James et al. 1998) approach to childhood, parents are assumed to have absolute power. Responsibility for a child's development and behaviour therefore rests, not with society, but with the child and his/her parents. Children in residential care are further marginalised or made suspect by their very placement: in an institution rather than a family home. The family maintains its position as the most appropriate site in which children should grow and develop. Despite society's growing awareness of the dangerousness of family life it remains the organisation of choice for the care and protection of children. It may be that the family represents an institution of which all people share a level of understanding.

Residential institutions by contrast are mysterious and therefore to be avoided. What people do know is that they are full of 'dangerous' children and, increasingly, adults.

Modern childhood is perceived as having much to do with risk and threat to and from children (Thorne 1987). The child as the 'innocent' requiring protection from society and the 'evil' child from which society requires protection remains, as it is, a dichotomy. Beyond an everyday sense popular thinking does not yet see a child as being able to embody both good and evil. Single actions or behaviours can leave children labelled as 'bad' or indeed 'good'. Those children in public care remain a challenge not only to sociological thinking on childhood but also to the attitudes prominent in the public domain. Children who are deemed to be in need of protection from the state frequently have a complex history (Berridge and Brodie 1998) which as a result of physical, sexual or emotional abuse or neglect arguably results in their loss of 'innocence'. Despite this it may be through their own 'evil' or 'abnormal' behaviours that their 'victim' status is revealed. Such

revelation is rarely disseminated to wider society and instead their removal is regarded as a means to protect other children and wider society.

When Will I Grow Up?

The question of when a child becomes a youth appears in most studies to have been left unexplored and in many cases left unchallenged. Few researchers describe the process by which their sample came to be defined or indeed raise the issue of age categorisation. The reader is assumed to agree with the terminology presented and more importantly to understand the meaning of such terms.

Frequently, it would appear that the research site is allowed to dictate the ways in which the problems of terminology will be addressed. For example, many of the studies of young people have used schools as the access point to their sample (e.g. Hargreaves 1967, Shek, 1998, Barker 1998, Hayden and Martin 1998, Mac an Ghaill 1994). In so doing, young people are already categorised and segregated by age. Simplistically they are regarded as children whilst in primary education and become young people as a result of their transition to secondary education. Despite this institutional definition the terms 'childhood' and 'youth' or 'children' and 'young people' are regularly used interchangeably (for example see James 1986).

The definitional divide gains clarity when young people in transition are the topic for debate. Those leaving school or the family to enter into the adult world of employment or 'independent living' fit more easily into an in between category. The generic term, children, stresses their dependency and naiveté. As a group they are assumed to require the care and protection of adults. Young people or youths on the other hand, make choices regarding their behaviour. They are able to resist adult

controls and are not yet bounded by the institutional restrictions that are placed on the adult population i.e. employment, families, mortgages. Indeed this transitional period of existence has underpinned many of the studies of youth. As a result of this lack of responsibility and restraint young people are free to challenge the system and the moral order whilst children remain controlled by it.

The use of such definitions is repeatedly translated into the media depiction of young people. When the article requires the reader to feel sympathy or horror at an event, young people are described as children e.g. articles describing situations of abuse, neglect or ill treatment. The reader is morally obliged to be repulsed by the actions of a responsible adult (portrayed as insane or as a 'paedophile') and his/her actions against a vulnerable incapable child. Conversely when young people are involved in law breaking or behaviour which is judged to be morally incorrect then the term 'youth' is likely to be invoked.

The Life Course

It is the physiological changes within the body which have underpinned much of the understanding of the terms 'child' and 'youth'. Physical maturity defines the allocation of an individual within these bounded categories and in turn 'it is the experience of socialisation which gives these life cycle terms concrete form in everyday life' (James 1986:155). There are few rites of passage within modern British society which indicate the transition from child to adult and those markers which do exist categorise by a process of exclusion rather than inclusion (Furlong and Cartmel 1997, Hollands

1990). A young person, for example, is not an adult because he/she has no right to vote, no access to mortgage provision etc. In other words to be a young person is to be "other" than adult.

Frith (1986) argues that 'young people are people of a certain age, between childhood and adulthood, who form a significant social group, but it is difficult to define this age group precisely' (Frith 1986:1). He goes on to argue for the importance of dependency in creating such categories. A child is thus a person who is fully dependent on others (adults) for all needs. However a young person, by contrast, has a level of independence but maintains a dependence on adults with regard to love, security, knowledge and subsistence. Few, if any researchers 'measure' a young person's level of dependence prior to conducting their research. Biological age and the topic under investigation remain the key variables in choosing a sociological stance, namely the sociology of childhood or youth.

It is not only sociology that has had to grapple with where childhood ends and youth and in turn adulthood begins. The legal system has also had to create age-related boundaries, which impact on responsibility, knowledge, understanding and involvement in decision making. The difficulties surrounding such a task are highlighted in the often ambiguous nature of the definitions presented. The degree of responsibility or understanding afforded is often dependent on what has taken place and the role of the child or young person within it. For example a child or young person who attends a children's hearing and who is angry and aggressive may be seen by the adults present as 'immature'. Therefore his/her feelings and wishes, despite their importance, may be given less credence than if he/she had presented in a more 'adult' fashion.

The most recent example of such ambiguous legal statements was contained within the Children (Scotland) Act (1995) with specific reference to young people's involvement in decision making. Section 6 of the Act refers to the requirement to incorporate the views of the child or young person in decision making. A child aged 12 or over is presumed to be sufficiently mature to form a view. However there is a rebuttable presumption that if a child is deemed to be insufficiently mature then there is no obligation to seek out and have regard to his/her views. What is of note is that the judgement of a child's 'maturity' rests with an adult. The child must therefore conform to subjective criteria of mature behaviour. Such behaviour can be particularly problematic at times of acute distress or anxiety, frequently the sort of times when children and young people's views are required to be sought.¹⁶

Although welcome, the definitions that attempt to problematise such categories, are not without flaws. The biological determinants as suggested by James (1986) are restrictive and like the argument suggested by Frith (1986) are heavily dependent on the 'white, middle class' notion of childhood, youth, and the family. Those children and young people who are, for example, in employment or living away from families are as a consequence regarded as 'other'. They are being 'robbed of their childhood' or are 'taking on adult responsibilities' etc. Children and young people who are being 'looked after' by the state are frequently themselves antipathetic to such definitions. Many of the children and young people have had 'adult' body experiences either through physical or sexual abuse or through the requirement to physically work or care for another (Berridge and Brodie 1998, Kent 1997).

¹⁶ The Act states that the requirement to consult does not apply to every decision, rather it applies to those 'major' decisions regarding type of placement, family contact etc.

Young People on the Move

Two areas of interest have predominantly influenced recent research concerning young people.

First the work initially dominated by the CCCS¹⁷, regarding youth sub-cultures. The CCCS moved British studies of young people away from the American focus on the connection between deviant gangs and the localities from which these gangs emerged. Instead British research began to look at style based youth cultures. The local focus of the American and early British studies was abandoned in favour of a subcultural approach; 'subcultures' had to be understood as the collective reaction of working class youth to the structural changes taking place in British post war society (Bennett 1999:600).

The second area of interest focuses on young people's transitions. Such research concentrated on the experiences of young people as they make the move from youth to adult. As the title suggests this section will address the latter.

School To Work

Although there has been research conducted on young people leaving the family home and entering the housing market (Burrows et al.1998, Jones 1997) many of these transitional studies have focused on the transition from school to work. Jones and Wallace (1992) provide a helpful argument pertinent to this discussion. They suggest that there have been two significant paradigms that have informed current youth transition studies. The first of these is the notion of individualisation. As such it is argued that the class solidarity that existed post war has lessened and as a result young people are demanding more control of their lives. This has been supported by an individualised

¹⁷ Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham.

workforce which stresses success and competition. Career opportunities are no longer so rigorously defined by class and instead encourage flexibility in attitude and practice. They argue that this degree of choice extends to family composition. Young women no longer have a short period in the workforce prior to motherhood and instead delay the birth of their children, return to work after the birth or indeed choose to have no children. Young women therefore enjoy the same 'extended' youth that young men have been afforded since the 1950s.

Such an argument however regards young people as a more or less homogeneous category. It is overly simplistic to argue that class and gender no longer have an impact on the life course. Indeed Jones and Wallace state that

individualization theory cannot be applied to young people in general, ignoring as it does inequalities of opportunity resulting from the continued stratification of our society by social class, gender and ethnicity.

(Jones and Wallace 1992:134)

The second paradigm presented is that of social reproduction theory. Within British sociology such a discourse has had a powerful impact and heavily influenced that most famous of transitional studies (Willis 1977). Central to the debate is the idea that work roles are reproduced through socialising organisations such as the family, education and the peer group. Those alienated or oppressed by such institutions create an anti school or anti work culture which validates their position as unskilled workers and eventually allows them to accept this position. Such studies give significant insight into the ways in which wider structural powers influence the life courses of many young people and into the limitations and restrictions placed on such young people by a middle class education system and a capitalist economy.

This paradigm can now been seen as an excluding one, the theory limited in its approach. Empirical work conducted in this vein was primarily restricted to working class males. The ever stressed concept of class, especially working class, was never problematised and often its importance was assumed rather than demonstrated. Further the experience of young women and of middle class young people was understated. The importance of ethnicity and location had limited impact as did young people's identification with their assigned class status. In other words the experiences of a small group of working class males became the template of understanding all young people's school to work transitions (for criticism see Griffin 1985, McRobbie and Garber 1976,).

The problems identified above have begun to be addressed within transitional studies. Interest is growing in the experiences of young women (Taylor 1993), in tertiary education students (Rudd and Evans 1998) and in young people from rural communities (Looker and Dwyer 1998). There remains, however, a sociological preoccupation with those young people who are seen to have limited access to the 'tools of adult success'. Youth studies have a long history of investigating the experiences of those deemed to be 'outwith' mainstream society in an attempt to explain the mainstream experience (Tait 1993).

Young People and Marginalisation

More recently attention has focused on notions of marginalisation or more contentiously 'the underclass'. Indeed, Roche and Tucker (1997) state that:

The youth question has almost become a metaphor for all that is wrong in society and yet in very real terms it is young people, or rather some sections of young people, who are bearing the brunt of critical changes in the way society discharges its responsibility to its citizens.

(Roche and Tucker 1997:3)

Since the 1980s much of the sociology of youth has been concerned with the impact of mass youth unemployment, a phenomenon which has become equated with ideas of marginalisation and exclusion. What has underpinned such studies is the belief that, from this transitional perspective, adult status is gained from entry into employment, leaving the family home etc. As a result of unemployment, which has hit this inexperienced, unskilled sector of society, entrance into adulthood has become 'extended' or 'broken' (MacDonald 1997)¹⁸. Much of the work has therefore focused on the ways in which young people have created their own transitional markers as substitutes for those that were previously provided institutionally.

One of the most prominent studies of such a group was that conducted by Williamson (1997). This study explored the experiences of young people aged 16 and 17 who were out of employment, education and training. Interestingly this study provided insight not only into the wider structural limitations placed on these young people (i.e. educational and familial experiences) but also their perception of themselves: 'The majority of these young people displayed a sense of low self esteem, and uncertainty and disorientation about the future. They were, from their point of view, being thrust from pillar to post with little sense of having much control over what was happening to them' (Williamson 1997: 77).

Despite the more holistic approach to youth transitional studies there remains an enduring and unspoken notion of 'normal' youth transitions. The struggles faced by young people have been identified as heterogeneous (MacDonald 1997, Pilcher 1995) yet the bulk of sociological knowledge remains with the working class or marginalised youth. The danger in such an imbalance is that

¹⁸ Cartmel and Furlong (1997) argue that post/late modernity is marked by the lengthening of youth and postponement of transitions e.g. by increase in tertiary education, delaying marriage etc.

young people remain in the public consciousness as disaffected and dangerous. The explanations for this marginalisation may now be being placed at the feet of the economy, government policy and rising poverty. However they do little to address the agency of these young people. By continuing this focus, both of sample and of analysis, sociology distances itself from 'our' children and young people. The threat, albeit as the result of exterior forces, comes from young people who are not 'our children'. As White states: 'It is the location of young people in the social structure which largely determines whether particular group activities will be socially acceptable or not, the subject of close social regulation or not, or the object of sensationalist media attention or not.' (White 1993: ix)

Often young people in residential care have made the transition away from the family home at an earlier point than their contemporaries. It may be argued that as a result, society places the 'disaffected' 'dangerous' labels normally reserved for older youths on to them. By so doing, young people in residential care are feared and consequently are marginalised from the community in which the individual unit is located. In such circumstances it is the other young residents become the principal 'community' outlet and support.

Young, Different and in Trouble

Since the 1970s the most pervasive method of explaining young people's group behaviours has belonged to the sub-cultural theory of the CCCS. The framework which underpins the CCCS work was drawn mainly from ethnographic studies conducted in the mid 1970s. Its foundation relies heavily on a Neo-Marxist explanation of the complex relationship between subordinate and dominant social classes. Subordinated groups are regarded as striving for mechanisms to resist their

oppressed status and to 'win space'. These attempts are reflected and manifested in cultural behaviour. Thus, such studies have the class struggle as a central tenet of their analysis.

The particular form of youth subcultures, beginning with the Teddy Boys, was seen as related to the growth in affluence amongst the population and working class males in particular (Frith 1986, Cohen 1988)¹⁹. These young men had easy access to employment and had an income that was no longer required to subsidise that of their families. They had therefore money to 'burn'. As a result there was a growth in youth-orientated leisure industries that characterised the post war years. This disposable income and free leisure time further allowed young people to mark themselves out as distinct from adult or child status and in the case of working class people from the dominant class. (Pilcher 1995, White 1993, Brake 1985)

Sub Cultures

It is argued that alongside a response to social or structural change the class and generational elements involved in subcultures interact to produce a distinctive sub-cultural style that is seen as a source of collective identity (Hebdige 1979). In creating such an identity young people mark themselves out as being separate from adult practices and beliefs as well as the middle class dominant culture.

With increased media interest, sub-cultures became increasingly synonymous with troubled and troublesome youth. Sub-cultural groups were regarded as actively challenging the accepted norms and morals of society and were therefore to be viewed as a threat. Sub-cultural studies with their

¹⁹ Pearson (1983) argues that such behaviour has been present since pre industrial times - he argues that every 'history' creates its 'demons'.

emphasis on Neo-Marxist thinking were perhaps in some way contributory to such a belief. Young people, they argued, were resisting cultural norms and were creating an alternative way of conducting themselves.

Typical examples of sub cultural studies have explored the 'spectacular' youth cultures that have existed post Second World War. These included Cohen's (1972) study of East End London youth and the rise of mods and skinheads (Clarke 1976) and Hebdige's (1979) exploration of various youth styles. Their focus has been on the dress, the behaviour and the attitudes of these young people in comparison with mainstream youth practices. In so doing mainstream and youth subcultures are defined against each other and in turn both groups are devalued (Thornton 1995).

The majority of the studies however have, like their contemporaries in transitional studies, focused on the experience of white, working class, young men. In so doing the issue of class is given priority over variables such as gender, ethnicity, locality, disability and age. Indeed 'working class' is seen as a homogeneous experience. Such assumptions have been challenged (see for example the work of McRobbie 1991, 1980, 1978). However the framework and concepts used have consistently been those drawn from the same school of thought as the CCCS. Class remains the focus of subcultural work.

The Search for the 'Normal' Youth

A further criticism of sub-cultural writing has been the notion of 'normal youth' and normal youth behaviour. Many of the writings on subcultures have stressed their sense of separateness from society and the ways in which style and conduct have expressed this. Like transitional youth

sociologists, subculturalists fail to describe the 'norm' that is their benchmark. Instead they focus on the behaviours and styles which mark out the young people's groups as 'spectacular'. Thus we have a one sided image of the experience of participating (whether by force or choice) in a sub-cultural group. For example we know only of the mod when he is with peers. Little is known of the mod at work, the mod in the family, the mod as a partner. Sub-cultural labels therefore come into play only when he undertakes so called mod behaviours.

There have more recently been the beginnings of a resistance against the use of the 'normal youth' benchmark. Thornton (1995:93) for example questions the use of 'mainstream' youth. She argues it is left undefined and is therefore unhelpful in trying to locate other young people's group experiences. In her study of dance culture she explores with her sample group their attitude toward 'mainstream' youth and interestingly finds that, despite their clarity in describing their own sub-cultural groups as diverse, they too have a homogeneous, ambiguous construction of 'mainstream' youth and their activities.

This lack of heterogeneity is apparent in much of sub-cultural thinking. Even those accounts which attempt to redress the balance away from white working class males, spend little time unpicking the diversity of the group under study. We therefore are at a point where we have knowledge of 'ravers' (Thornton 1995) 'surfers' (Stedman 1997), 'girl gangs' (Walter 1998) etc. but know little of the characteristics and differences which make up the individual participants of these groups.

It remains the case that those who do not conform to the social norms are the prize interest of subcultural writers. The tacit assumption that there is a state of normality to which these groups are

'sub' is implicit. Indeed it would appear that it is through the attention, not just of sociologists but of the media, to these 'resisting' groups that normality in others can be reinforced: 'It is around pathological children- the troublesome, the recalcitrant, the delinquent, that conceptions of normality have taken shape ... expert notions of normality are extrapolated from our attention to those children who worry the courts, teachers, doctors and parents. Normality is not an observation but a valuation' (Rose 1990:123).

A Rock and a Hard Place

As has been previously stated young people and the term 'youth' have become equated with the notion of 'social problem'. From a transitional perspective young people are regarded as being excluded from the trappings of adulthood. It is increasingly difficult, as a result of mass unemployment and the demise of heavy industry, for young people to enter the labour market. This situation has had the greatest impact on those young people who have limited qualification or training. Young people are likely to be paid the lowest wages and to be offered the lowest status jobs.

As a result of the difficulty in accessing employment, young people have further difficulties in relation to their eligibility to state benefits. With the removal of the right to benefit until the age of 18 this has left many 16 and 17 year olds in poverty. Despite the guarantee of training placements for all, there appears not only to be a shortage of placements but also a sense of mistrust and unwillingness by those eligible for training. Young people regard many of these training placements as abusive, both in terms of the salaries paid and also in the job tasks that young people are expected to undertake (Craine 1997:139).

A knock-on effect of limited access to state benefit or to employment is that young people face increasingly limited access to housing. The result of this has been a rise in youth homelessness as well as many young people being forced to remain in abusive familial situations (West 1995). What is perhaps more common is the feeling of powerless and entrapment. Young people are forced to remain dependent on family provision.

From a sub-cultural perspective, young people's group behaviour is dominated by resistance to adult and class enforced power. Researchers in this field have illustrated the ways in which young people have used style and behaviour as a way of marking out territory both individually and collectively. There appears also, as a result of the focus on the peer group element and of the 'spectacular' group, a link between sub-cultural behaviour and delinquent behaviour. From the Teddy Boys onwards, sociological research, as well as an ever hungry media, have focused on behaviours which become particularly associated with the subculture under the spotlight. Currently the research on young people and dance culture has highlighted the use of illegal drugs and the role that these drugs play in 'clubbers' behaviour and attitude (Henderson 1997).

This focus is one that is regularly illustrated in media representations of young people. Their behaviour is often portrayed as hedonistic and that consequently they are set to challenge the very moral foundation of society. What has been interesting over the last decade is the way in which 'club culture' has incorporated a wider class, gender and ethnic spread. Clubbing does not appear to have the same restrictions and boundaries that previous youth cultures demonstrated (Thornton 1995). The way in which this has been handled by the media is interesting. Young people who

have been involved in drug use are portrayed as being the victims of either older drug dealers or dangerous individuals. The young drug takers themselves are regarded as passive receivers, exploited by the dangerous 'other'.

Despite the 'victim' connotations resulting from the exclusion and marginalisation of young people through unemployment, poor housing and limited opportunities they remain a social problem. From a sub cultural perspective, young people continue to 'resist' through club culture, football hooliganism or drug use. This stigmatisation of young people adds to the construction of the young as socially problematic and threatening to the future of society. Underpinning all this is the approach to young people as 'adults in the making'. Not only does their behaviour and attitude threaten current stability but also the future stability of society.

What remains unchallenged within sociological research is the starting point of much of the existing analysis. By maintaining the focus of 'adults in training' research is allowed to continue to be dominated by 'adult' concerns. Many of the questions and hypotheses that such research addresses relate directly to adult questions about the experience of youth rather than the issues which may be relevant to young people themselves. Very few studies look beyond mass culture or transitions to the individuals that constitute these groups.

Conclusions

This chapter has aimed to draw upon existing literature to highlight the perceptions that abound in relation to children and young people and in so doing the ways in which these relate to young people who are 'looked after' by the state. In many ways the sample group involved in this thesis

constitutes the amalgamation of all our 'respectable fears' (Pearson 1983). As children, their innocence and purity were often left unchecked and their experiences of growing up and of negotiating with the wider social world were marred by conflict, violence, and neglect.

The sociology of childhood, despite recent developments has predominately explored the 'normal' uniform experience of growing from child to adult. Indeed the process of growing itself has come under investigation. Children entering public care do not 'fit' with such a trajectory, their experience of love, security and stability has often been problematic. Arguably this lack of 'fit' is not simply the case for children being 'looked after' but for many who contradict the dominant norms upon which much of this thinking is based. The 'new' sociology of childhood has called for greater recognition of the diversity of childhood and a greater understanding of these many 'childhoods'. This thesis adds to this body of work by shedding light on the experiences of young people living together as a group.

Both the sub cultural tradition and transitional sociology have targeted those young people who have been regarded as 'other' than mainstream youth. Both approaches have focused on an undifferentiated experience, rarely unpicking the diversity of experiences, biographies and beliefs that constitute individual group members. In its quest for the 'spectacular', sociology has fuelled the public perception of the dangerousness of young people. Individual young people are not therefore treated as a whole person; it is their deviancy that defines them.

A mystery surrounds the youth group, the expectation being that young people's practices are in some way different from adults. Media and more recently academic portrayals, for example Harris

1999, have resulted in parents fearing their sons' or daughters' time alone with peers. A recent public information advert shows parents wondering where their son is whilst alternate shots show the viewer the son conducting acts of vandalism and theft. The message is clear that children and young people cannot be trusted outwith adult (parental) scrutiny and that time spent with friends will result in problematic behaviour.

It may be argued that from this perspective young people living in residential care constitute the worst case scenario. They are likely to be teenagers and they have made the transition away from the family home long before it is 'normal' to do so. Regardless of their biographies they are likely to be perceived as deviant or 'dangerous'. This perception extends to the belief that they have made this transition from their family of origin as a punishment. Young people in residential care are more likely to leave care with poor educational qualifications or training and many of the young women will leave either pregnant or having had a child (Baldwin et al. 1997).

It could be argued that a significant, yet unexplored, threat to wider society occurs from the young people living together as a group. The numbers of young people who are resident are likely to outnumber the staff at any one moment in time. Their dangerousness then is amplified. It is to this resident group that this study turns. It attempts to move beyond a 'deviancy' focus, instead examining the everyday experiences of individual young people who live away from their family of origin and who, more specifically, live predominantly with other young people.

Chapter Three

There is Method in my Madness

As the previous chapters have illustrated, research related to residential care for young people has historically been concerned with 'outcomes', evaluations and recommendations for practice. All of these concerns are worthy and it is not the aim of this work to undermine what has gone before; rather this thesis offers an opportunity to add to this body of knowledge by providing a different perspective on residential care. Similarly, within the sociology of childhood and youth, residential care settings have rarely been regarded as an opportunity to gain insight into the social world of children and young people. The central tenets of this thesis, the perspectives of young people and the acknowledgement of their social agency, are notions that are increasingly valued within the 'new' sociology of childhood (James, Jenks and Prout 1998).

This chapter aims to explore critically the 'mechanics' of the research process (Chapter Four provides the site for a more personal and reflexive account). In so doing I discuss the use of ethnography and its associated techniques and in turn the appropriateness of this method to the

substantive focus. Further, this chapter identifies the particular difficulties and dilemmas arising from research with children and young people. The structure of the chapter allows for the 'story' of the research to be told. Common to most research, the process of collecting data was not the smooth process that many a methods manual would lead one to expect. Arguably it has been as a result of the adjustments and reassessments of data collection techniques and renegotiations with the young people involved that this thesis has become what it is. The story is therefore important, not just in terms of illustrating methodological decisions, but as a source of data itself.

The Research Biography

The Pre-Pilot Study

This research has, since its conception, had the perspectives of young people in mind. It is a common assumption that, having been young, adults can have an insight into the experience of youth that they cannot necessarily claim to have with other research subjects (Fine and Sandstrom, 1988).

For me this assumption was magnified by my employment history of working with young people 'looked after' by the local authority. I approached this project in the belief that I could communicate with young people and that I had a high level of empathic skill. In many ways this was the first assumption concerning this thesis that required 'bracketing'.

In order to compensate for the lack of relevant research, and as a means of addressing my own assumptions, a small pre-pilot study was conducted in order to uncover some of the issues that might arise from research in this area. I was particularly interested in how young people saw their fellow residents and what purposes, if any, the resident group served. It was planned that this data would then feed into a semi-structured interview schedule, ensuring to some degree that the appropriate

aspects of group living were addressed. At this point in the research I was employed, part-time, as a social worker in a residential school. After consultation with senior management, the boys (there were no female residents at that time) in two of the residential units were approached to participate in focus groups. Two short focus groups were held, each of which was tape recorded. Both sessions began with a brainstorm asking the groups to tell me about what it was like to live with other young people to whom they were not related. It was felt that focus groups would provide a context in which the participants had a degree of control over what was discussed and therefore some sense of the levels of importance given to issues could be gained (Kitzinger 1994).

The main finding from these groups was the extent to which group organisation, indeed the perception and understanding of the groups' functions and modelling, was based around a familial framework. Thus, the boys described each other in terms of 'he's the baby' 'he's the oldest' 'everyone can talk to him, he's like the big brother'. The boys were able to take this analogy to a further level of analysis by discussing the desire to move beyond the 'baby' role, up the hierarchy to the 'big brother' position. Such a move appeared to occur as the result of age rather than any other form of negotiation. Just as in a family, changing status from 'baby' to 'big brother' occurred only as the result of the appearance of another, younger child. They viewed their treatment of each other as "brotherly"; a mixture of affection, support, falling out and at times aggression. Similar to other sociological research on young people, the boys were keen to stress the importance of the support gained from each other and the value that was placed on 'helping' (Gordon and Grant 1997).

Developing a Schedule

From these initial findings a semi-structured interview schedule was designed which was to be administered to about fifty young people resident in children's homes all over Scotland. These interviews were to be taped and fully transcribed (Appendix One). The schedule aimed to encourage young people to talk about their admission to care and their initial perceptions of the resident group. They would be asked to discuss their care histories, not in terms of reasons for admission²⁰, but with regard to a potential knowledge base of care provision i.e. what kind of young people needed residential care and reasons why they might be admitted. Young people were then asked to describe the building and how they perceived it. The schedule progressed to exploring the ways in which residents regarded new admissions, whether they were subjected to testing or behavioural expectations and the advice that the interview subject would give to a new admission. Much of the interview would try to uncover how these initial days of admission shaped the young person's positioning in the group and indeed whether they thought there was a structure to the group's organisation.

It was felt that the schedule would require piloting to test its appropriateness, develop my interviewing technique and to check the words and terminology used. In order for a pilot study to be worthwhile, not only have the aims of the pilot to be clear but there also has to be some strategic planning of how feedback will be given to the researcher (Gilbert 1995). I decided that, after completion of each interview, I would discuss with the individual participant how they had felt whilst being interviewed. This concentration on 'feelings', I argue, allows young people to become more empowered in the research relationship and eases a discussion of interview style. I was

²⁰ It was felt that such questioning would be overly intrusive and not relevant to this study.

anxious that any direct questioning about how they felt I had conducted the interview would be problematic, both from the position of power dynamics (would they be comfortable criticising an adult, research 'expert') and also from a concern about the methods, and more critically the language, by which it could be critiqued.

The Pilot Stage

In order to conduct the pilot, an application was made to two children's homes in one local authority in Scotland. I decided to approach a local authority where I was known as a social worker and where I had previously conducted research. It was felt that this would ease the access process by establishing the 'one of us' mentality, limiting the perceived threat of 'exposing' bad practice (Hawkes 1991). I was aware that the young people in both identified units were used to 'collaborative working' in terms of their participation in decision making and in relation to the numbers of social work students that were placed in the units as part of their training.

The children's homes approached to take part in the pilot study appeared to be not unrepresentative of residential child care provision in the United Kingdom (Berridge and Brodie, 1988)²¹. The first, referred to in this thesis as 'Strathmore', was a purpose-built children's home opened in 1982. It provided care for eight young people aged twelve to eighteen. The unit itself was part of a council estate on the outskirts of a large coastal town. It had been designed to merge in with other housing provision in the locality by its use of building and design. In reality however, although similar to the surrounding houses, its institutional purpose was somewhat obvious by its size, uncultivated

²¹ Berridge and Brodie (1998) identified a range of provision for young people being looked after. The two units involved in this thesis had equivalent numbers of young people in their care and were both located in the community. They were also both managed by the Local authority and provided care for young people in a similar age bracket to the units identified by Berridge and Brodie (1998).

garden and large car park. The second unit, which will be referred to as 'Brunswick', was by contrast, an impressive Victorian villa located in the centre of a large town. It was unremarkable in comparison to the housing around it. This unit catered for five young people who required long-term residential care.

Brunswick and Strathmore were different from the majority of institutions involved in Berridge and Brodie's survey in relation to the number of social work qualified staff employed. 'Strathmore' had a 95% social work qualified staff team whilst 60% of the 'Brunswick' team were qualified. Such provision has, I will argue, significant implications for this study that will be discussed more fully later in the chapter. Suffice to say at this point that these units were identified as appropriate for pilot study for demographic and functional reasons.

The local authority granted access in September 1996. Common to many studies involving people in residential care settings, whether as employees or residents, this 'top level' access was the first step in negotiating access and consent from those one would wish to participate in the study (Berridge 1985). The next layer of negotiation was undertaken with the management and staff in both units. Staff members were particularly concerned with the dissemination of the results and issues of confidentiality. Both staff groups were anxious that the research would have some meaning for their unit and viewed the research as an opportunity to re-assess their practice and organisation. Whilst willing to comply with this request, the aims of the research were reassured and the non-evaluatory aspect of the project was stressed. As a result of these meetings it was felt that consent to take part in the study should rest with the young people. Both units agreed to my approaching the residents and attempting to ascertain their consent. They assisted with this by

inviting me for an evening meal thus providing me with an opportunity to meet with the young people.

Although discussed more fully later in this chapter, the issue of consent is a contentious one, particularly with regard to young people. Like any 'disempowered' group one has to take into account the extent to which they feel able to refuse participation in research. Aligned to this is the notion of 'informed consent'. In other words the young person must understand the aims of the research, the process and the potential dissemination of the results. It is only once this has been fully achieved that he/she can make an objective decision regarding his/her involvement (Stanley and Sieber 1992). In order to maximise this position I met with the group informally over dinner. I was introduced as a research student from the University of Stirling who had a background in social work. Prior to my arrival the young people had been told of my visit and had been given some information regarding the proposed research. In many ways this was a strong starting point as the young people had had time to discuss the project amongst themselves as well as having time in which to question the research process and aims.

In both units, over an informal dinner, we discussed the research aims. In general, this was done through a process of clarification. A significant number of the residents had mistakenly understood the research to be concerned with exploring bullying within the units as opposed to the ways in which the groups operated at a more general level. This appeared to have come from information provided by the staff. I found that by making clear that I wanted the young people to tell me about the whole experience of living in a group situation the residents were able to establish a clear picture of the aims of the research. Fine and Sandstrom (1988) suggest that anxiety is increased if

information regarding the research aims is withheld from young people. Indeed if such information is withheld, what results is an understanding of research aims derived from the young people's interpretation of whatever knowledge they have combined with their view of the researcher with whom they have contact. The point being that they will form any understanding rather than risk having none at all. Such reasoning became a further motivation for my openness about the purpose of this project.

After the meal I spent a further period of informal time with the young people as a group. In both units this was during the smoking of cigarettes. Smoking appeared to create a relaxed, unthreatening atmosphere in which young people felt comfortable. The practice of smoking, a shared activity where all parties have a similar level of skill, allowed cigarettes to become the focus of initial discussion and to act as a form of 'social cement'. We ceased to be researcher and researched and became 'smokers'. Solberg (1996) experienced a similar outcome whilst conducting her research on children involved in the fishing industry. She argued that by sharing the task of 'work' the roles of researcher and child were suspended. In their place was the shared role of 'worker'.

During both initial meetings the young people used this smoking time to ask questions of a more personal nature for example where I lived, when I had left the local authority and to explore my knowledge of various young people and social workers. This time was invaluable, not just in establishing relationships but also in creating an atmosphere where the power imbalance could immediately be addressed. I was the recipient of the questions, I was the interviewee and they were the interviewers.

Each young person was then asked, individually, if he/she wished to take part in the pilot study.

The construction of me in a student role was paramount during these negotiations as I was able to stress the importance of using their knowledge to help design an appropriate schedule. The aims of the research were repeated and the young people were asked to keep this in mind when considering their experience of the interview itself. I asked too that feedback be given to me about my style of interviewing. To try to ease this potentially difficult aspect of the pilot, I informed them that in order to find the best method of interviewing I would be trying out different ways of asking questions, sitting, use of language etc. In so doing I hoped to create an atmosphere where they would feel comfortable with critiquing my presentation as well as the questions asked.

Once the aims of the research and more specifically the pilot study were made clear I discussed the issue of confidentiality with the groups. The way in which this relates to young people in general terms is addressed later in the chapter. However it is argued that confidentiality is not a new term to young people in residential care having been involved, to some degree, in the social work system. Like most children's homes, confidentiality between the young people and staff in both units was something of a moveable feast. Generally, although young people 'looked after' in residential care are encouraged to talk openly and feel a degree of confidence in the privacy of their exchanges of information they are, or should be, aware that information is passed between staff in the unit and on occasion to outside professionals.

Confidentiality is an elusive concept as, within social work settings, it is very much dependent on the nature of the information and how it will impact on the young person's care and protection. It was for this reason that it was stressed to the young people that no information would be shared with

any member of staff, either inside or outside the unit, nor would any approach be made to the young person's family. To try to explain how this would impact on the feedback given to the staff and the resident group the young people were encouraged to provide their own pseudonyms and to tell only myself what they were. A further reason for this recommendation was that young people could identify their own statements within the text and could feel a degree of ownership of the material (Fine and Sandstrom 1988).

All the young people, with the exception of one young man, agreed to participate in the pilot study. After further discussion it was agreed that all the interviews would take place in the children's homes and dates and times for these were set. Before leaving, the young people were given my name and contact number should they wish to discuss the study in the intervening period.

The Way Forward

The individual interviews were conducted during November 1996 and, at the conclusion of each, a discussion was held to elicit the young persons' views on the schedule, interview style and to explore suggestions for topics not covered during the course of the interview. The young people were then gathered together as a group. These group discussions took the format of a group interview. It was felt that the young people would feel more confident in exploring issues with their peers, allowing mutual support and a greater sense of anonymity (Folch-Lyon and Trost 1981). This sense of 'group support' perhaps contributed to an atmosphere in which the young people could openly critique the research or contradict my opinions (Kitzinger 1994). The 'Strathmore' group session was conducted first. It began with a brainstorming exercise relating to what it was like to live in the unit and moved on to explore ways in which this type of information could be explored

with other young people. Two vital insights were gleaned from this session. The first was that, despite my attempts at confidentiality, the young people had told each other, and in some case the staff, their chosen pseudonyms. This included the young man who had selected the name 'Hunter' as his pseudonym! The young people stated that they consented to other people knowing what they had said during the interviews and had 'nothing to hide'. This was problematic as I felt that their testimonies should remain anonymous. I decided to overrule this decision although it left me feeling uncomfortable with the project's aim of involving the young people in the research process²².

The second outcome of this group session was the recommendation made by the young people in relation to the future design of the project. Despite arguing that the schedule would provide me with useful data with which to understand the experience of group living, the young people stated that they felt it was limited in its approach. They had found it problematic to try to 'explain' their experience of the group and argued that it would be more appropriate for me to encounter it first hand. In their words I 'should come and live here, like one of us, to see what it's really like'. This option was discussed at length and I attempted to identify with the young people the potential problems that might occur: would they feel that their privacy was being invaded? Did they want a twenty-six year old woman constantly around? How would new admissions feel about my presence and how could access be negotiated with them? The conclusion to this discussion was that the invitation remained extended to me to live with them and I agreed to discuss this with my supervisors, the unit staff and 'Brunswick'. The outcome of these discussions was that the research was to proceed as a participant observation based ethnographic study.

²² For an example of a similar situation and outcome see Fine (1987).

The pilot and pre-pilot stage, therefore, provided me with initial data relating to the residential experience and the ways in which the young people themselves understood this. The first two stages of the research were participatory in nature, with the young people contributing to the methodology and the research aims. The issues of confidentiality and 'informed consent' were highlighted as problematic not only because of the research subjects' ages but also as a result of their location within the pre-existing structure and system of social work. As a result of the group interviews it was decided that the research would proceed with its original aims but would use a participant observation approach to gather data. The practicalities of this are presented later but first ethnographic techniques and the issues relating to research with young people are discussed.

It's All Very Well To Go And Live There But...

In order to address the research questions fully, the young people argued that I would have to 'experience' group living first hand. This certainly would allow for an attempt to understand the young people's constructions of their care experiences and the meanings and representations given to the resident group. Arguably, the opportunity to conduct an ethnography into this aspect of residential care would result in an 'inside out' rather than 'outside in' view (Lee-Treweek 1994) which would be uncommon in this field.

Ethnography as a research approach was originally developed by anthropologists as a means to understand and describe 'other' cultures. It became adopted, and adapted, by sociologists in their investigations of 'other' cultures within western culture, particularly in relation to deviance and marginalised social groups (Goffman 1968, Taylor 1993, Whyte 1955). In relation to young people, ethnographic studies have been successfully used in the study of education (Burgess 1985,

Delamont, 1984) and transitions to work (Willis 1977) and more recently in the exploration of dance culture (Thornton 1995) and female friendship (Hey 1997).

In other residential settings ethnographies have presented in-depth studies of care, care workers and practices (see for example Hockey 1990). Indeed this approach has been adopted in the study of residential care for young people, principally in Polsky's study of life in a therapeutic community (Polsky 1962). Arguably it is at times '*techniques*' influenced by ethnography rather than ethnography in its true sense which has been adopted in research on young people in residential care. Berridge and Brodie for example state that:

The main method used to gather information on our 12 homes was participant observation and in 1995 one of us visited each home intensively for four or five days.

(Berridge and Brodie 1998:34)

The extent to which these researchers entered the social world of the staff and the young people and therefore the extent to which they were able to gain insight into the construction and meanings of this world are debatable. However even to this degree it may be argued that ethnographic research allows the researcher a level of insight unavailable through the use of other techniques. By using ethnography the researcher is able to become closer to the research subjects' view of the social world (Atkinson 1990).

Ethnography is a generic term for a set of research tools, which places emphasis on uncovering the participants' understanding of their social world. In its most prevalent form it involves the researcher being present in that social world as observer or more commonly semi-participant

observer. In other words subjects are researched in their 'natural state' (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). In its attempt to gain insight into the world of the 'other', ethnographers have resisted using this technique to test out previously held assumptions or theories. They aim not to construct generalisable theories. Indeed this is:

...downplayed in favour of detailed accounts of the concrete experience of life within a particular culture and of the beliefs and social rules that are used as resources within it.

(Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995:10)

As a result of this 'naturalistic' stance, ethnography has been criticised for its descriptive nature and lack of methodological rigour. Furthermore this criticism has been countered from within the 'field' itself (Lee-Treweek 1994, Hammersley 1990). Much of this disagreement is centred around the need for ethnographic researchers to acknowledge their impact on the data, not only in terms of its collection but also the way in which it is analysed. The result of such debate has placed emphasis on the importance of reflexivity and avoidance of any 'truth' assumptions (Stanley 1990).

Ethnography remains a method befitting the exploration of the meanings and constructions held by research participants of their social world. With regard to this thesis ethnographic techniques offer an opportunity to uncover the 'lived' experience of residential care and how this is translated into group practices and shared meanings of group life:

... the aim is to explicate the social processes and practices organising people's everyday experience from a standpoint in the everyday world....This means a sociology that does not transform people into objects, but preserves their presence as subjects. It means taking seriously the notion of a sociology concerned with how the phenomena known to sociology express the actual activities of actual individuals. It means exploring how these phenomena are organized as social relations, indeed as a complex of social relations beyond the scope of any one individual's experience.

(Smith 1988:151)

The notion of 'walking a mile in another man's (sic) shoes' cannot be underestimated. Although this thesis acknowledges the limitations of ethnography and its subjective nature it was clearly the most appropriate methodological approach for the issues I wished to explore. The inclusion of young people in the research design, data gathering techniques and analysis has gone some way in limiting the extent to which the findings from this project have been solely *my* version of their experiences. Indeed as this chapter will illustrate it was the young people who dictated what information and interactions could be used as 'data'.

Research With Young People

Should it be any different?

The challenge of doing qualitative research (for that matter, all research) with children stems from the problems posed by the combination of their physical closeness and simultaneous social distance.

(Fine and Sandstrom, 1988: 10)

In many ways the above quotation illustrates the central problem concerning research with children and young people. Children and young people are all around. They are not regarded as sociologically 'strange'. They are physically close, perhaps even living in the same house! Yet as Fine and Sandstrom (1988) claim, they are in many ways socially distant. Children and young people have practices and shared meanings that do not extend to the social world that they inhabit with adults and, as adults, it is naïve of us to assume that we have an understanding of what these might be. Thus, in order for research with children and young people to be worthwhile, the adult-centred view of the child's world and the potential research problem must be dismantled. Whether this be in an attempt to uncover sociologically what is interesting to children and young people or as

honesty about the motivation to develop 'understanding' of children's social world, this refocusing of research into children and young people must be regarded as a positive methodological advance.

One problematic aspect of research into children and young people is these very terms. Homogeneity does not necessarily exist as a result of similar age categories and the generalisability of child/young person related research must be resisted. James, Jenks and Prout (1998) stress that this understanding is a central tenet of the 'new' sociology of childhood. The period of late modernity has highlighted the diversity of experiences and the need for an individualising of understanding. Sociologically, the study of childhood is now moving away from the basic divisors of age and gender to incorporate what were previously regarded as 'adult' categories such as 'persistent' offenders (Jamieson, McIvor and Murray 1999) or employees (Solberg 1996).

Researching Young People in Residential Care

As stated in Chapter Two, there is a growing notion that despite an acknowledgement of the shared nature of 'childhood', sociology must approach this life stage as open to the possibility of many 'childhoods'. In light of this, this thesis is timely in its interest in young people in residential care. Despite sharing categories such as age, gender, ethnicity and class with many other young people, it is their placement away from the familial home, and in some ways the reasons behind such a placement, which marks these young people as sociologically 'other' from their contemporaries and therefore worthy of research in their own right.

The majority of studies involving children and young people seek consent for participation in the research not only from the participants themselves but also from their parents (Alderson 1995).

This element of the research process was seen to be less straightforward in relation to the young people involved in this study. Although the Children (Scotland) Act (1995) does make provision for parental rights to be assumed by the local authority this is not an automatic response to a young person's admission to local authority care. Indeed none of the young people who participated in the project had had parental rights transferred. However staff members in the residential units were 'in Loco Parentis', allowing decisions to be taken on a day-to-day basis without a legal requirement to consult parents.

After consultation with The Scottish Child Care Law Centre it became apparent that consent would not be required from parents for their child's participation. This advice was founded on the age of the young people involved (13 being the youngest) and how this relates to the age of legal capacity²³ and secondly, the emphasis placed on young people's right to consultation under the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. The issue of consultation with parents was at no point raised by any social work staff at either a management or unit level. This perhaps gives insight into the ways in which not only parents of children in local authority care are regarded (Bilson and Barker 1995) but also young people more generally. Hammersley and Atkinson state that there is:

... an assumption that children's private lives are legitimately open to scrutiny in a way that adults are not, especially professional, middle class adults.
(Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 267)

This is particularly the case for those young people in public care. The very term, 'public' care, has extended their 'ownership' to a wider domain. It may be argued that the lack of consultation with parents is a limitation of this research, solely in terms of the limited discussion that the issue

²³ Age of Legal Capacity (Scotland) Act (1991)

received during the research process. However it may also be regarded as a strength of the thesis.

Often research with young people, particularly if access is gained through a school setting, requires the consent of parents. Therefore despite the notion of social agency and researchers working hard to create a position of informed consent it may be adults who ultimately decide whether or not a young person will take part in research. I am also concerned that not all of the young people involved in the study would have wished their parents to be consulted. Nor would I consider the consultation of some of the parents to have been in the best interests of the young people, especially those parents whom the young people regarded as abusive or negligent (Grisso 1992). To contact parents would potentially have created anxiety and tension not just for the young people but also for their parents.

One aspect of gaining informed consent that is rarely mentioned in literature is the exploration of participants' motivation to be involved in the research. In an attempt to clarify not only their motivation but also as a means of re-affirming the potential impact and outcomes of the findings each young person involved was asked why he/she wished to take part in the research project. A number of the young people stated that they thought the project was interesting and still more said that the subject had been one that they had thought deserved reflection. The most significant number of young people however, stated that they wished to participate because of their belief that research would "change things" and "make things better for the next lot of kids". This motivation concerned me somewhat. I wanted to make clear to the young people the likely impact that the project would have in terms of policy or practice. I explained that ultimately this was an examination that would result in a further qualification for me. I went on to say that I would be keen to talk at conferences, publish papers and feedback to their local authority but that I could not

guarantee that the research would have any direct effect. Interestingly, many of the research manuals suggest that research will have significant impact, in a positive or negative sense, and this impact must be considered from an ethical stance (see for example Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). Whilst this is not problematic in itself, little mention is given to what surely is the more likely outcome i.e. that the research will be likely to remain within academic circles.

In retrospect I would argue that this was a significant point in the research process. In many ways it limited the 'performance' time of the group. Their behaviours and practices were being researched in their own right as opposed to some form of 'investigation' that would then have influence. I think that this allowed the young people to more readily 'be themselves' rather than perform for me. A further outcome of the discussion was the way that this supported the construction of me as 'student'. The young people in both units were accustomed to social work students being on placement and the questions and uncertainties that these students brought. By having this student role as my initial reference point the young people were more open to being asked questions and more willing to volunteer information. They also regarded me as someone who needed their help. It may further be argued that by my admitting to the shortcomings of the research the young people were given the opportunity to know that I would be 'straight with them' which added to the weight given to my other assertions regarding confidentiality (Fine and Sandstrom 1988).

Confidentiality

There are significant considerations to be given to the issue of confidentiality with regard to research with young people and these concerns were increased after a decision was made to proceed with an ethnographic study. Confidentiality was re-negotiated for two main reasons. First, the level of

access that I would have to the young people was increased as a result of the use of ethnographic techniques. I was to live as part of the resident group and therefore it was felt that my level of exposure to the young people, as well as the development of researcher/participant relationships, might result in the young people choosing to demonstrate behaviours that could cause me concern. Alternatively, they might choose to disclose information that related to a young person's safety or protection.

I was anxious that by not offering total confidentiality my role as participant observer would become confused with that of staff member (something that as a result of my employment history I was keen to avoid) and would in turn mean a limited access to the young people's group. After some discussion a compromise was reached. As a result of my professional background it was judged that I was competent of assessing 'dangerous' practices or disclosures relating to issues of safety or protection. It was agreed that if I was party to such information I would advise the young person of my concern and suggest that a member of staff be informed. I would offer to accompany the young person to facilitate this or indeed offer to pass on this information myself. The outcome would ultimately rest with the young person him/herself although I was clear that if I was party to what could be constituted as a 'child protection'²⁴ issue that I would inform the young person of my need to pass this on. Central to this confidentiality bargain was its discursive element. Young people would be aware of any information that I would be passing on and would have the opportunity to negotiate this with me first.

²⁴ This related to information or behaviours which I was party to which suggested that a young person was at risk of physical, sexual or emotional abuse.

The second reason for this compromise was the concerns held by the management and staff in one of the units about the sexual practices of one of the young men in their care. It was suggested that this young man was having sexual relations with a number of the young women in the unit but that none of the residents had come forward to disclose this information. Without adequate proof the situation appeared to be at stale-mate and the staff were anxious that I divulge any information given to me regarding this case. I agreed to do this but only in so far as it fitted with the newly established terms of access. However I was concerned that this left me with information that set me as 'other' than the young people. I was anxious to maintain the participatory aspect of the research and did not want to be granted access to information regarding other residents to which the group members were not privy. It was also for this reason that I declined the opportunity to use case files as a source of data.

Establishing Good Research Practice

Further ethical considerations regarding "good practice" were left solely for me to resolve. As I would be living in such close proximity to the young people I decided that I would keep my bedroom door locked at all times. Since the implementation of the Skinner Report (1992) the majority of children's homes in Scotland have locks on all bedroom doors for reasons of personal safety and security of possessions. It is unusual in such settings for young people to choose to lock their doors at all times. However I felt that despite locking my door I could still make plain to the young people that they were welcome to visit. This would allow me to have some degree of control over how and when this was done. I felt that this decision allowed me to be confident that I would never be seen dressing or undressing, that access to research materials would be controlled and that I would never be in a position where I was alone with a young person without some protective

measures being taken (i.e. the bedroom door remaining open, staff being upstairs etc.). The motivation for these 'private rules' was not only for my safety but also for the safety of the young people.

It was crucial, if participant observation was to be utilised, that relationships were built with the young people. A number of obstacles existed to conducting this type of research with young people.

Adults, especially adults within the institutions similar to the one under study, are there in an authoritative capacity. Despite the skills of the workers involved in any form of residential care, the young people remain cognisant of the power imbalance that exists. Staff members have control and guidance responsibilities of which the young people are aware. Fine and Sandstrom (1988:17) argue that ethnographic researchers should attempt to construct a 'friendship' relationship with young people, suspending their beliefs as to appropriate behaviour and putting aside value judgements that are in conflict with those of the young people. I viewed that my background as a social worker would make forming this type of relationship more challenging, and that throughout the course of the research I would need to prevent myself from slipping into the role of social worker in the ways in which I dealt with the young people and their behaviour. On the other hand however I was aware that in my working life I had built up knowledge of young people in residential care and had developed an anti-discriminatory approach to my practice.

Allied to this was an attempt on my part to avoid the use of social work jargon and interviewing techniques. Although many of the skills gained during my professional practice were incorporated into my research practice (e.g. active listening) the ways in which I communicated with the young people were adapted from the style in which I would talk informally to friends. Young people who

have been in the care system have been asked biographical details and views on their care on numerous occasions and I was concerned to get beyond the arguably scripted disclosures that the young people were used to producing. Not only is the asking of questions a reinforcement of an 'adult' role but, for these young people, such interviews have often led to changes in circumstances. Answering questions therefore is far more significant for young people who have experience of the social work system than for those who have not. My use of language, dress and behaviour affected the ways in which I would be perceived and were therefore crucial to the success or failure of the research (Delamont 1992).

Despite the uniqueness of conducting such social research with young people this work is in many core ways no different from research conducted with adult participants. Young people require the same level of freedom to refuse participation (Stanley and Sieber 1992), respect (Alderson 1993) and confidentiality. However, as with research into any social group these issues are not always simplistically determined. Researchers are required to ensure that participants have a full understanding of the research process if informed consent is to be attained and this, whilst not impossible with young people, requires time and flexibility on the part of the researcher. Research aims need to be articulated in a way that is accessible to young people. Account must be taken of the perceived 'freedom' to refuse the researcher or from real or perceived pressure from an institution, whether that be a family, school or children's home to participate or not (Grisso 1992).

I take as axiomatic that young people's experiences, abilities and practices are not homogeneous, that there are, indeed, many different childhoods (Grisso, 1992). It follows that the approach taken to explain the research process varied from young person to young person. For some young people

this meant talking to them alone about the research whilst others preferred such discussion to be held in a group setting or with a member of staff present. Young people had varying levels of knowledge about research and academia and my language and use of terminology were altered accordingly. There were young people who wanted to be informed of the research on more than one occasion and I was conscious of the need to allow all the young people ongoing opportunities to ask questions about the research, both formally and informally.

Confidentiality with young people also requires a great deal of thought in terms of the level at which it can be offered, balanced with concerns regarding safety and protection. Researchers, as responsible adults, have an ethical duty to ensure the safety of their young research subjects but this does not necessarily remove the right to confidentiality. Finally, in this section I have argued that particular ethical considerations must be given to *ethnographic* research with young people. Both the young people and the researcher must be made to feel safe. Without these precautionary measures the creation of trusting relationships cannot occur.

From Planning to Practice

Laying the Foundations

The decision to proceed with an ethnographic study was taken in December 1996. I continued to visit both units, informally, throughout that month in an attempt to familiarise myself with the young people and staff and allow this familiarisation to be reciprocated. I hoped that this time would allow primarily the staff, to learn more about the research and the ways in which it would be conducted. My motivation for this was that I wanted to have established a level of trust with staff members that

would allow me, from the point of 'admission' into the units, to spend all my time with the young people.

During these visits I stressed to the staff the ways in which my time would be managed and reiterated the focus of the research. I wanted to have established an understanding of the research that would make clear that I would not be evaluating staff practices nor would I be able to be thought of as an additional staff member. I suggested that I was to be regarded either as 'invisible' or as another young person and in order to achieve this I attempted to outline examples of where this might come into play. I was anxious that I would be seen as troublesome or untrustworthy for failing to intervene in situations involving the young people and that staff requests for my assistance in matters of care would compromise my position and the research itself.

This time also allowed staff members to ask about the research in terms of its process and aims and, as with the time spent initially with the young people, allowed a clarification of ideas that were held. That the majority of staff members were social work qualified eased this process in two ways. First, they had an awareness of what research involves and the potential outcomes regarding dissemination. Secondly, the standard of social work practice meant that I was more readily able to resist the pressure to 'be a worker'. From a professional perspective I felt, at all times during my fieldwork, that the young people were being appropriately cared for and protected. This level of professionalism freed me to focus on the young people rather than on staff practice.

Into The Field

It was decided that Strathmore would be the main research site. Strathmore was the larger of the two units and I felt that as a result it would require a greater length of time to build relationships with all the young people and staff members. Strathmore was also more regularly used for shorter placements. This decision allowed Brunswick to become the 'testing' ground for the themes that would emerge from the data. As a result I was a full-time resident at Strathmore for a period of six months. Residence at Strathmore consisted of residential blocks of five nights/six days in the unit with four days at my own home. This pattern was not dissimilar to the experience of some of the young people. My time away from the unit was understood, almost without ever saying it, as 'home leave'. I then spent a further six months visiting Strathmore every month. These visits normally consisted of a series of four day stays. In comparison I spent two 'full time' residential months in Brunswick, following a similar pattern to my period of residence in Strathmore, with further day visits over a three-month period.

As previously mentioned I decided, prior to commencing the fieldwork, that I would not go outwith the unit solely in the company of the young people. In so doing I felt that I could maintain a non-worker role, even to some degree a non-adult role. All adults in the unit understood that I would not intervene in young people's interactions or attempt to prevent 'bad' behaviour. However this level of understanding would be more problematic to develop in the wider community (Fine and Sandstrom 1988). Like them however, I did have evenings out to try to limit the potential isolation that can occur during ethnographic research. This was normally with sympathetic staff members who would meet me at a local pub. During these meetings the young people, the unit and my research were 'banned' from discussion. Instead I played pool and talked about my home life. The

young people were aware that I spent social time outwith the unit with some of the younger members of staff.

During the initial month of residence I took field notes and kept a field diary. These field notes are what Schatzman and Strauss (1973) refer to as 'observational notes'. They argue that these should record:

... events experienced principally through watching and listening. They contain as little interpretation as possible and are as reliable as the observer can construct them.

(Schatzman and Strauss 1973:110)

In essence they consisted of a record of the date, time and location of the situation being observed as well as the physical location and description of the main characters. It was in these notes that any verbal and non-verbal communication was logged. 'Theoretical notes' (Schatzman and Strauss 1973:111) by contrast, were written daily in my field diary. This diary served as a record of my own thoughts and feelings as well as any theoretical ideas that emerged. I also used the dairy to explore the ways in which my presence may have impacted on the environment.

After the first month of fieldwork I met formally with the young people to discuss how they were experiencing my involvement. From this discussion the young people stated that they were unhappy with my use of field notes, finding my continual disappearances distracting. From my own perspective I had found it problematic to participate fully in the life of the group and was concerned that without this participation, especially in this initial phase, I would not be granted group membership. I had further been concerned by the awareness the young people had of my need to

write down their interactions. This was highlighted when, during a verbal disagreement between two of the young men, they had paused, mid fight, and said 'Sorry Ruth, are we going too fast? Will we do it again?' This was not 'naturalistic' research! We concluded that tape recording interactions would allow all members to feel less aware of research being conducted and would free me to participate more fully. The young people did however agree to my writing brief supporting notes.

In retrospect, the change in data collection techniques was extremely positive. The note book that I carried became a doodle pad with the front and back covered in drawings and messages. I also used the note books to indicate my own growing levels of trust, leaving them on the table rather than clutching them. As the fieldwork progressed the young people took increasing control over the Dictaphone, switching it off and on and checking that it was recording. I found that the more established I became in the group the longer the machine remained on and therefore the more data was collected. This empowerment of the young people served to guide the research at a pace that the young people were comfortable with and in turn assisted the establishment of trust. Polsky (1962:111) argued that with hindsight he had rushed the young men in his study to understand his interest in them and that this initial focus on research aims, rather than on building relationships, had slowed down the research process.

The success of the change of technique was illustrated when two of the young women suggested that they keep recorded diaries of events whilst I was on home leave. This idea spread amongst the group and during the last seven months of fieldwork the majority of the group took a turn of keeping recorded diaries. They gave me an interesting insight into what the young people valued in day to

day interactions and the meanings that they attributed to them. It also provided data regarding the differences in the material young men and young women chose to record. Young women tended to talk extensively of their analysis of situations, with emphasis given to the emotional element of interaction whilst the young men recorded what they regarded as 'the facts'.

Each tape of interactions and diaries was then transcribed in full and merged with my field notes to provide daily records of events. This material along with my diaries was then analysed. One further source of data was the original pilot interviews. It was decided to undertake an interview with each new admission thus allowing not only data to emerge but also a forum where the research could be discussed and participation in the ethnography could be negotiated. Such interviews provided real insight into those initial days of admission and provided a bench mark for my own experience of being 'the new girl'.

Analysis

Analysis began after the first month of residence was complete. I had decided to take a sequential analysis approach (Becker 1971). Therefore the initial stage of analysis involved gaining an understanding of the setting and identifying the ways in which that understanding had come about. Secondly, I attempted to focus on the frequency and typicality of each observation and the characters that were involved. During the last six months of fieldwork I was able to move from a substantive focus to a more theoretical approach and it was during this time that the analytical framework was devised and discussed with the young people²⁵. Therefore after the fieldwork was completed I read through the transcripts to identify the themes that were in play and constructed

²⁵ See Chapter Five for a fuller discussion of the analysis

files of material that related to each. These themes were then broken down into sub themes. I also compiled a file consisting of data that was relevant to the experience of admission to the units in an attempt to reflect on and support my own experience of admission. The resultant analytical framework was then 'tested' during my fieldwork at Brunswick. The findings were debated with the young people and staff at both a textual level and in relation to the suggested analytical framework. I presented my thoughts during the final few months of fieldwork at an informal level and included the young people's feedback as data. I also gave a formal presentation to the young people and staff after the analysis was completed.

Conclusion

This thesis has had the perspective of young people with regard to their group care experience as its central focus and therefore a methodology was required which would allow the knowledge around group living, as well as the practices employed, to be uncovered. With the assistance of the young people I was able to use an ethnographic approach which allowed insight into these aspects of the everyday social world.

This chapter has reported how data were collected and analysed. It has been argued that young people responded positively to participation in the research aims and process and indeed their participation resulted in much of the fieldwork being guided by them. Consideration has been given to the ethical issues arising from conducting research with young people and attempt has been made to highlight the issues that have arisen from conducting ethnographic research in this field. It is further argued that, by taking this participatory approach, the experience of getting 'inside' the

everyday world of these young people was eased. This process of acceptance will be explained in the next chapter.

A number of issues arose during the fieldwork, which have relevance to a wider sociological debate on methods. In particular the importance of exploring motivations to participate and the importance of considering the social location and experience of those under study. In this case, the impact of having a care history was discussed in terms of the way in which interviewing would be perceived as well as how notions of confidentiality had previously been experienced.

The limitations of the study were also highlighted. Ethnography by its very nature focuses on the experiences of a few and as such the findings cannot be made statistically generalisable. Despite this, the study does provide an insight into care that is lacking in existing literature. Ethnography must also be regarded as the researcher's account of the group under study. Although, in this case, precautionary measures were taken in terms of participation in analysis and the reflexive nature of the thesis, it must still be viewed as 'my account of their account' (Lee-Treweek 1994:54). I was interested in the level of involvement by parents in the consent procedure and the lack of discussion with management and staff that took place on this issue. The variation of setting and the impact that this has in the process of consent with young people is perhaps a finding in itself.

This chapter has provided the reader with insight into the ways in which the data were gathered and the problems and issues that arose as a result. That I lived as part of the resident group in order to collect these data cannot, if they are to be credible, simply be stated. Providing the 'mechanics' and

biography of the research therefore provides a back drop to the actual process of negotiating inclusion into the resident group and it is this that is the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter Four

'You Had to be There': A Reflexive Account of the Research Process

Whether we like it or not, researchers remain human beings complete with the usual assembly of feelings, failings and moods. All of these things influence how we feel and understand what is going on. Our consciousness is always the medium through which research occurs; there is no method or technique of doing research other than through the medium of the researcher.

(Stanley and Wise 1983:157)

As the above quotation illustrates, the research process and more specifically data collection and analysis cannot be considered as independent of the researcher. The subjective nature of particularly, ethnographic methodology has been debated both inside and outside the academy. A prominent challenge came from feminist writers in the 1970s and 1980s centred on the notion of reflexivity (e.g. Finch 1984, Smith 1988). Many feminist methodologists stressed the importance of accepting the subjective nature of research, whatever the methodological approach. Data, they argued, are always presented through the 'lens' of the researcher and therefore, in order to address subjectivity the impact of the researcher on the data gathered must be highlighted rather than futile attempts being made to remove it.

Not only does the researcher shape the interpretation of the data (as Stanley and Wise (1983) suggest) he/she also impacts on the production of that data. Reflexivity, as a sociological concept, allows for this dialectic to be embraced. Thus the reader is granted insight into the ways in which the data are interpreted and furthermore provided with a sense of how the data are gleaned. Reflexive practice stresses the point that social researchers are not 'other' from those that they research. Indeed such researchers share the social world with those that they study. It implies that the researcher's own social biography and relationship with the field constructs the 'lens', through which the researcher views the field. This may be seen as recognition on the part of the researcher of his/her own 'cultural capital' and 'habitus' (Bourdieu 1986). As such, rather than attempting to disregard or eliminate the impact that the researcher has on the field and on his/her interpretation of the data, reflexivity acknowledges and gives them prominence (Gouldner 1971:490).

The aim of this chapter is to problematise the ethnographic process of engagement in the field. It does not suffice to say that, in this study, the young people were observed and their social practices and communications analysed. Rather, it is the ways in which my relationships with the young people were established and the resultant degree of access to their everyday lives which are presented. Also in this chapter a brief introduction to the young people and staff in the units will be given. Furthermore the impact of my presence and the subsequent effect on the data generated from the settings are discussed. This chapter therefore tells the 'story' of the research, from my admission to the units to the point of my departure. I suggest that this experience has some similarities to that of a young person being admitted to residential care. Therefore throughout this chapter reference will be made to data drawn from the young people both to support and challenge my claim. As Gouldner (1971) recommends:

[by adopting a reflexive sociology] we would increasingly recognise the depth of our kinship with those whom we study. They would no longer be viewable as alien others or as mere objects for our superior technique and insight; they could instead be seen as a brother (sic) sociologist, each attempting, with his (sic) varying degree of skill, energy and talent to understand social reality.

(Gouldner 1971:490)

Moving In

As described in Chapter Three, I was invited to conduct an ethnographic piece of research by young people living in the two children's homes originally targeted as pilot sites. As a result of the pilot and the subsequent discussions regarding methodologies, the young people had met with me prior to the beginning of the ethnographic study. I had knowledge of both research sites prior to 'moving in' as a participant observer but had taken field notes on my initial impressions of the building and my feelings about entering them for the first time.

First Impressions

I had at one time been employed as a social worker at Strathmore although it had been three years since I had been in the building. The unit itself had been purpose built as a children's home in the 1980s, a time of change with regard to child care provision (Berridge and Brodie 1998). In line with this 'new' community-based approach to child care it had been built alongside other local authority housing in an attempt to integrate the unit and the residents into the wider community. In some ways, this objective had been achieved. The unit itself was built in a similar way to the surrounding houses and as such was not obviously distinct.

On further inspection however, it was set slightly apart from the other houses, was larger and appeared more physically open to the outsiders' gaze. Unlike its neighbours, it had a large open car park and an impersonal garden. A sprawling lawn with the odd shrub and a large wooden fence, which enclosed part of the building, signified its 'aberrant' status. This strange mix of open and restricted access allowed for a public view of visitors and staff, whilst they were in the car park, yet maintained a somewhat private, hidden view of the young people who remained concealed behind the fence.

Brunswick, by contrast, was a turn of the century villa located in the town centre. The following extract from my field notes gives insight into the initial impression the building gave:

The house itself is large and in a gothic style. Built from granite, it appears dark and imposing on such a miserable rainy day. It is set slightly back from the main road, resting on raised ground, adding to its size. Four turret-like spires rise from the roof, the garden is enclosed by black iron railings. All this adds to an intimidating feel. All of a sudden I feel very nervous!

(Field notes 19th November 1996).

Like Strathmore, despite parts of the building being visible (in this case the front of the house), the majority was enclosed behind a high brick wall. Unlike Strathmore, however, this was in keeping with the other houses in the area and indeed such enclosure added to its typicality. I felt that these initial physical impressions of both sites had impact on the subsequent choice of language used when referring to them. Strathmore throughout my field notes was cited as 'the unit' or 'the home' whereas Brunswick I frequently referred to as 'the house'.

As mentioned above, I was filled with trepidation prior to entering the units. I was uncertain as to how the young people would regard me. I was also concerned about the experience of living in the

units without the safety and protection that being a member of staff can provide, not least because they get to go home at the end of their shifts! The young people shared such feelings as they recalled their admission to care:

You know, I thought it would be like a big castle or something, you know, a prison or something. It is big like, bigger than a normal hoose but when everyone speaks about a 'home' they think about a big castle or something with millions of mental kids running about. I did think I would get a hiding (assaulted) like, ye ken, that it would be full of nutters.

(Hilary, Bedroom, Strathmore, February 1997)²⁶

The following example from Neil highlights where some of these preconceptions may have originated and the 'public' perception of not only the young people who require residential care but also of the physical building:

My social worker kept saying 'you better sort yourself out or I'll put you in a home' my Mam was saying the same. I telt my mates and they were like 'better sort yourself, you'll be battered, its all the murderers and that' that bide (live) there.' I can minde the first day ... I walked in the kitchen door and I didn't expect it to be so good, you know for a home because I'd never been in one afore ... I felt tired, really tired.

(Neil, Bedroom, Strathmore, February 1997)

Being Admitted

The majority of fieldwork was conducted at Strathmore and as such the sense of 'moving in' was more apparent with regard to this unit than it was to Brunswick. The staff members initially controlled the physical act of admitting the young people and undertook to do this with me. Lorna (staff) showed me to my bedroom and helped me to make my bed, explaining that this was part of the normal routine with new admissions. She explained that the staff hoped that helping the young people to make the bed would enable them to feel more welcome and would make them immediately

²⁶ All the names mentioned in the course of this thesis have been changed.

aware of the practice of working *alongside* 'adults'. Like other new residents I was supplied with a handbook which Lorna guided me through. It contained information about the way in which the unit functioned, where the unit fitted into the wider social work system and information regarding potential concerns of young people being 'looked after' i.e. access to families, school, complaints procedure, pocket money etc. A member of staff had designed this handbook with direct input from the young people. It was easy to read and contained not only information regarding the children's home but also the wider community. Literature was also available to parents covering similar areas. This literature was provided in both English and Doric (the indigenous language of this area).

Despite the numerous bedrooms, the comfortable lounge and the welcoming kitchen, I soon discovered that the young people had colonised what was referred to as the 'Quiet Room'. This was the only room in the building in which the young people could smoke. It was perceived by all as the young people's space, the staff rarely frequenting it and as such it became the setting for the collection of the most in-depth data. The young people accepted that, as a resident, my smoking would take place in that room and therefore my right of access was agreed. This was not, however, a universal welcome. In the initial few months of field work one young man would leave the room as soon as I entered whilst at other times conversations would end as soon as I opened the door. In so doing, the young people quickly made me aware that although accepted and welcomed at one level I was clearly not yet one of their group. At times this was difficult and upsetting and made spending time with the staff group even more attractive. In hindsight however by resisting this temptation my position as a non staff member was enforced.

During the initial months of fieldwork, the young women appeared to take a more active role in welcoming me to the unit. It was they who would invite me to join them and who would include me in discussions. I felt conscious not only of my gender but also of my age and regularly expressed my feelings of anxiety and fear around living in the unit and of being accepted by residents. I found that this 'accidental' honesty facilitated discussion and added to the construction of me as 'student', in need of help. I quickly became less of a threat and more of an object of pity, which in the longer term became a role that was difficult to shake off. The part the young women played in making new admissions welcome, I later discovered, was not restricted to me. Other young people talked of the help that they had received from female residents and I was able to observe this as the fieldwork progressed:

Well it was Bryony and Allie really ... Bryony just sat doon and told me about herself and like if I was in my room one o' them would come up to my door and say would you like to come down and watch telly, do you want a cup of coffee or something, come down and speak to us.

(Sharon, Quiet Room, Strathmore, May 1997)

Typical of my experience of such help was the visit that I had to my bedroom from two of the young women who were armed with posters and pictures that they wished to lend to me to decorate my bedroom walls. They suggested that if I did so the room would be 'more homely' and I would in turn feel 'more at home'.

The overarching feeling during this early stage of admission was of being overwhelmed: by noise, people, smoke, information, routine etc. This was particularly felt at points in the day when large numbers of people were gathered together. Perhaps one of the most difficult times in this respect was meal times. Not only were large numbers of people gathered but also conversation was shared

amongst them. New admissions were often asked about themselves, normally in a perfectly friendly way. What was problematic was that the response had to be given in front of as many as twelve other people. Meal times became moments in the day that I later looked forward to precisely for this sharing of information but during this initial stage I found them intimidating and exposing. I was not alone in this as Fraser observes:

Is she not coming doon for tea? ... God she never eats that new lassie ... What is it
wi all the new folk nae eating in front o us?

(Fraser, Dining Room, July 1997 Strathmore)

During these initial weeks in residence I attempted to set boundaries to my relationships and role. I made clear that I would not distribute cigarettes or money nor would I accompany young people outside the building (see Chapter Three). Fine and Sandstrom (1988:25) suggests that 'gifts' both material and financial, can, on occasion help to establish research relationships with young people and in some ways address the power imbalance. I would argue that this would potentially have quite the opposite effect and would in fact lead to confusion over roles and create a sense of being 'bought'. The young people accepted my position and, although it set me apart from them and their behaviour with each other, it served to clarify my role and arguably limit the 'performance for pay' behaviour which may have occurred. As mentioned in Chapter Three the issues of confidentiality and of data collection techniques were frequently discussed in the initial period. I regarded this as positive, in that it seemed to refine my role as researcher and continue the participatory approach to the research itself. In my view this was a far more helpful way of addressing the power imbalance than material gain would have been.

In many ways this was a confusing period of fieldwork. I quickly became aware of not being a member of staff and felt, at times, very alone. Young people during their admission shared the sense of loneliness:

When I first came here ... I hated it ... I couldn't sleep in my bed at night. I wasnae in my mam and dad's hoose ... I felt like no one wanted me ... like no one here kent (knew) me. I suppose I just felt lonely ... aye, lonely.

(Bryony, Kitchen, Strathmore, April 1997)

I was open about my own feelings in this respect with the young people. I would argue that this helped to allow them to see me more as one of them than as one of the staff. Many of the comments that I made were given in response to questions about how I was feeling or how I was settling in. I took the decision to be honest and found that many of the points that I made were shared by the young people.

The Staff at Strathmore

As stated previously, Strathmore Children's Home was a purpose built unit opened in the early 1980s. The unit had been designed to offer care to twelve young people, ten full time places and two 'emergency' beds. At the time of my fieldwork this had been reduced to eight young people with no official placements available for emergency admissions. However from discussion with staff members there appeared to be an unspoken expectation that Strathmore would cater for more short-term placements, Brunswick having been ear-marked as a longer stay unit. Despite this there were a number of long stay placements at Strathmore during my fieldwork.

Strathmore had an appointed Officer-in-Charge and a Deputy Officer-in-Charge. Both of these managers were social work qualified and had been in post for a number of years. Both were white

males in their forties and had children of their own. They in turn were accountable to the local authority social work manager for children's services. Both the Officer-in-Charge and the Deputy Officer-in-Charge were recognised practice teachers and regularly accepted students on placement into the unit. They officially worked 'office hours'; Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm although in reality these hours were usually extended and, on occasion, included sleep-in cover. As senior practitioners they were responsible for the supervision of all other staff, the monitoring of work being undertaken both within the unit and any outreach support that was being offered. Their role also encompassed managing unit budgets and advancing staff training and unit development. Despite their managerial responsibilities they were actively involved in the care and 'treatment' of young people and their families. They regarded interaction and relationship building with the young people as a key aspect of their role. Like other residential workers they were involved in assessing young people's needs and finding the most appropriate ways to meet those needs. They conducted one-to-one work with the young people (building self esteem, disclosure of sexual/physical abuse, undertaking life story work, bereavement and loss counselling, anger management etc.) and work with the young people and their families (task centred interventions, joint work with fieldworkers etc.).

At the time of my fieldwork there were seven full-time residential workers. Of these, six had a social work qualification. Sue, Andrea and Lorna had worked in the unit for five years or more, one of them having been there from its opening. The majority of workers were female (five of the seven) and all were white. Interestingly four of the workers had once been students on placement in the unit and had returned there to work after they had gained their social work qualification. As such they 'had no post qualifying experience beyond the unit. The staff team also included two

female 'sessional' workers who were employed to cover staff absences or to provide extra staff support if required. Both of these workers were unqualified in social work but had a background in childcare. One of the workers had been accepted on to the Diploma in Social Work course whilst the other was going on to study nursing. The age of the residential workers ranged from mid-twenties to early fifties. Three of the staff had been born and had grown up in the area where the unit was located whilst others were from the East Coast of Scotland. Only three of the nine residential staff were from outwith Scotland, two from England and one from Northern Ireland.

The staff culture of the unit appeared to be a supportive one. Theoretically, the practice was based around notions of 'life space' working (Redl and Wineman 1951) and therefore there was an acknowledgement that all who worked and lived in the unit had direct effect on that milieu. The unit was regarded as an organic whole where each person who entered it should be supported and valued and where a sense of openness was encouraged. Because of the value placed on each member of the staff team in terms of his/her impact on the 'life space', the team had no apparent cliques or sub groupings. Rather it regarded itself as a whole. The support and respect demonstrated by the staff toward each other was something that the young people were aware of, as the following quote illustrates:

They all stick together that lot. No, I mean really together. I dinnae think that they're like pals or anything, ken oot o' here but when they're in here they dae look after each other, ken. It was like when Fiona's gran died the staff were dead good tae her, we were too like.

(Bryony, Quiet Room, Strathmore, March 1997)

Residential staff worked on a three week shift pattern. The shift began for two staff at 2 p.m. each day and would start with an hour-long meeting with the previous shift staff. This 'change over'

meeting was spent discussing each of the young people in turn, what had occurred for them during the previous 24 hour period and the work that had been undertaken, both with regard to the young people in the unit as well as their families and those receiving an 'outreach' service. Information was also passed on regarding changes in family circumstances, contact with family and friends and any identified work that needed to be undertaken during the new shift. This meeting also offered an opportunity for staff to discuss their own feelings regarding the previous shift and analyse the work that they had undertaken. After the meeting was completed the new shift were in place for the next 24 hours. There was no 'waking' night staff, both the staff on duty slept in the unit. The shift pattern included two 'day shifts' which allowed staff to conduct outreach work and to do direct work with young people and their families. It also contained a long weekend off every three weeks.

The staff team included a full-time cook and cleaner and a part-time secretary. All three women were in their early fifties and lived in the town in which the unit was located. These three women were regarded as an important part of the team and as such interacted and built relationships with the young people living in the unit. This was particularly the case for the cook. Young people would often spend time helping her prepare meals or chatting to her whilst she was cooking. Indeed she was often regarded as a link with the community outwith the unit, knowing all the local news and gossip. Both the cook and the cleaner worked from Monday to Friday from 8am to 4pm whilst the secretary worked mornings only.

During my fieldwork there were also two social work students on placement. Each of these placements lasted for a period of three months. Although students followed the shift pattern they were regarded as 'surplus' workers, therefore were never expected to work alone or to take on sole

responsibility for the care of any of the young people in the unit. They were however, expected to take on a staff role and to interact with young people to a similar extent as the staff. One of the students returned to the unit near to the end of my fieldwork as a full-time employee.

Young People at Strathmore

As mentioned previously, I made clear to the young people prior to undertaking the fieldwork that I would not at any point consult their social work files nor would I talk to either their field social workers or families about them or their admission to the unit. During the fieldwork I made no enquiries to the staff about the backgrounds of the young people in their care. The following discussion therefore presents information that was given to me by the young people themselves.

During the year-long period of my field work fifteen young people spent a period of time in residence at Strathmore. Only one of the original resident group remained when my fieldwork was completed. Of these fifteen, eight were young men and seven young women. At the beginning of my fieldwork the young people were aged 15 and 16, only one young woman was 14. Throughout the duration of my time there the ages of the young people living in the unit ranged from 12 to 17. The length of stay was also wide-ranging, from overnight to three years. The majority lived in the unit for a year or more although for some this included extended periods at home or at residential school.

Only two of the young people were originally from the town in which the unit was located. Young people came from towns and villages across the local authority, some from as far as 50 miles away. Two of young people's families lived outwith this area, one some 200 hundred miles away and the other in Wales. The families of both these young women had left the area after they had been

admitted to the unit. Contact with family members ranged from no contact to regular thrice weekly visits home. All the young people had telephone contact with a member of their family but not always a parent.

The reasons given by the young people for their admission to residential care presented an interesting split, by gender, in responses. The young men understood their admission to be on the grounds of their own 'bad behaviour'. Those who discussed this issue with me pinpointed specific incidents or 'crimes' in which they had been involved which had led to involvement by field social workers and in turn the decision of the children's hearing system to have them placed in Strathmore. Although many discussed problems that they had experienced within the family they did not connect this with their own behaviour. Such problems included marital breakdown, drug and alcohol abuse and male violence against them, their mothers and siblings.

The young women by contrast contextualised their admission within the breakdown of wider family relationships. This encompassed statements such as "I just can't live with my mum and dad" (Sharon) to "I had to come here because I hate my step dad and he hates me and it was him or me so I had to leave" (Hilary). Again the problems surrounding parental use of drugs and alcohol featured strongly in their descriptions of family life. One of the young women identified her own use of drugs and alcohol as influencing her admission to the unit. None of the young people attributed their admission to issues of personal 'safety' or 'protection' although they did discuss these issues as they related to others. It was hinted that a number of young women had been subjected to sexual and physical abuse and that some of the young men had been the recipients, as

well as the perpetrators, of physical abuse. I was told by a number of young people that one of the young men had been accused of sexual assault against a very young female relative.

It may be argued that the young people's views regarding their admission to care were shaped by a need to 'protect' their identities and notions of 'self'; to maintain them within a 'cultural norm' of which sexual/physical abuse stands outside. Seale (1998) argues that in relation to chronic pain and dying, individuals employ two main strategies to reconstruct their lives. The first relates to the ways in which they engage practical interventions and support in order to accommodate physical change. The second, and more relevant, refers to symbolic methods. The chief method employed is a reconstruction of biography and self identity: '... so that a sense of meaning and purpose in life is restored' (Seale 1998:26).

The majority of young people described having had long-standing involvement with the social work department and indeed many had had previous 'looked after' experiences. These ranged from short-term foster placements to longer-term residential and foster placements. All the young people had been placed in the unit under the instruction of the children's hearing system and as such all had had experience of attending a children's hearing.

The majority of the young people living in Strathmore did not have a positive experience of education. Five of the young people had left school by the time my fieldwork began. Three of the remaining group attended or began attending residential school during the time I spent with them. Strathmore therefore acted as a stop-gap between mainstream school and a place being found at residential school or, as was the case for two of the young men, acted as a 'home base' for

weekends and school holidays. The other young people had very low school attendance (although since their admission two of the young people were attending full time) and work was being done to try to get them to return to full time mainstream education. One of the young people had one-to-one tuition three times per week and one was attending mainstream school full time. The problems surrounding school attendance had been apparent prior to their admission and were influential to the young people's admission on residential care. Of those who had left school, one of the young men was in full-time work, gained during my period of 'residence', and one of the young women worked voluntarily part-time at a nursery. The remaining individuals in the group were unemployed.

Staff at Brunswick

Brunswick had originally been used as social work offices having been reopened as a children's home five years before my fieldwork began. As stated previously it was a large Victorian town house located near to the town centre. It was 20 miles from Strathmore in a north east fishing town.

At the time of my fieldwork, Brunswick had recently been through quite a significant period of transformation. The previous Officer-in-Charge had been off ill for a long period of time and had been transferred to a different post. In his place an Officer-in-Charge had been appointed on a temporary basis. The postholder, a woman in her late twenties, was social work qualified and had a background in residential childcare. Like the managers at Strathmore she too was a recognised practice teacher and was keen to have students placed in the unit. After a short time in post she had been able to secure funds to renovate the building and this work had just been completed as my fieldwork started. The assumption that Brunswick was a long-term unit had been one that the new

manager had encouraged and she regarded the young people in her care as in need of long term placement. Like her colleagues at Strathmore, she worked a majority of 'office hour' shifts but these were often extended to include sleep-in responsibilities. The managers at both units worked closely together and regarded their units as complementary.

Brunswick, which had five residential places available, aimed to have four full-time residents at any one time. As a result of its size, Brunswick was managed solely by one senior practitioner. The staff team however was not significantly smaller than that of Strathmore. The team consisted of 6 full time residential workers and 3 'sessional' staff. The team members had, in the main, been in post for some time and had worked under the previous Officer-in-Charge. There were three full-time male staff and three female, two female sessional workers and one male. A number of the female staff were from around the local area. There was a concentrated group of staff in their forties at Brunswick. Interestingly the qualified workers were in their twenties although one of them had been in post since the unit had opened. Brunswick ran a similar three week shift pattern to that of Strathmore. Two workers did each shift which involved 24-hour cover plus an hour-long change over.

The appointment of the new Officer-in-Charge had been met with a variety of responses from the team and there remained a level of discomfort at the changes that were being made. In the main, the team appeared supportive of her but were adjusting to what was reported to be quite a different, more 'hands on' style of management. Due to the long-stay nature of the unit, her vision of the unit as a 'home' to the young people was central to the practice that she encouraged. She stressed the

importance of the young people making strong relationships with the staff and with the unit as a whole.

The Young People at Brunswick

Due to its long-term nature there were only 6 young people living at Brunswick during the period of my field work. Three of the young people were present throughout this time. The young people in residence were aged between 14 and 17 and consisted of three young women and three young men. In the initial period of my fieldwork the 17 year old young woman left the unit to live with a family member whilst one of the young men was discharged to live 'independently'. There remained a core group of one young woman and two young men who remained in the unit throughout the year in which I was in contact. One other young woman lived briefly in the unit before being discharged home.

Aside from one resident the young people had been accommodated in the unit for a period of two years or more and had therefore been admitted prior to the new manager's appointment. One of these young men, who was later discharged, attended residential school. The remaining core group of three attended the local secondary school. At the point of admission all three had had difficulties with education and negotiating their re- entry into mainstream school had been a key target of work by the staff team. Aside from one of the young men, all the young people had originally grown up in the town in which the unit was located and as such were able to maintain friendships and relationships outwith the unit. All had had previous 'residential' experience of care either in foster placements or other residential units.

The reasons behind admissions were discussed with all the young people although I found the young women to be more forthcoming with this information. These young people pinpointed problems within their family lives as well as their own behaviour and identified both aspects as contributing to their admission to residential care. The young women seemed more willing to identify strongly with the unit and more forthright in regarding it as 'home'. One of the young men reached a similar conclusion near to the end of my fieldwork whilst the others regarded the unit as a 'holding' place until they reached 16 and could live 'independently'. The majority of young people had regular contact with family members although the frequency of this varied. One of the young men had no contact with his family.

Like the young people at Strathmore, all the young people in residence at Brunswick had been placed there by the children's hearing system and had experience of attending a children's panel. Both the young people at Brunswick and at Strathmore had a range of experiences with regard to their field social worker. The majority regarded fieldworkers as people who wrote reports about them for the children's hearing system and few stated that they had formed a strong relationship with these workers. The opportunity to meet with fieldworkers also varied, from those young people who had regular meetings to those who reported only seeing them prior to a hearing or a local authority review.

The young people in both Strathmore and Brunswick had knowledge of the other unit and knew vaguely who was in residence and who was employed there. They had met the managers of the other unit on a more regular basis and welcomed them when they visited. However an element of 'competition' existed at times when discussion of the other unit arose. Young people at Brunswick

regarded their unit as far more physically attractive and would make comments about Strathmore being '*a dump*'. Strathmore residents, by contrast would comment on the size of Brunswick, that it was too small and that the young people who lived there were '*spoilt*' and were '*babies*'.

Gaining Trust

Defining Trust

Before research relationships can be built, a level of trust must be established (May 1993). The young people made clear the value that they placed on being able to trust not only me, but also other new admissions. Trust was constructed as a level of safety and of mutual understanding about the group's expectations and demands of social practices and beliefs.

The young people did not expect to be at risk of physical or emotional harm within the unit, and they valued loyalty to the group and willingness on the part of the new admission to become included in the resident group. These factors could not always be taken for granted, not least because of the young people's understanding of the remit of residential care. They were aware that residential care existed to provide for all young people who were experiencing difficulties at home. These difficulties could relate to the behaviour of their parents or carers as well as the young person's behaviour (for example truanting, aggression, staying out, alcohol or drug use).

It was therefore viewed as essential to '*suss out*' the suitability of any new prospective group member. There appeared to be an acceptance that the young people could, in no way control *whom* they lived with but could control, or at least have influence on *how* they lived with them. Allie provides an example of the importance of '*sussing people out*':

Well you get all sorts in here ... it's not just for the folk that dinnae get on wi their mams and dads. You do get folk who have been bad used (abused) at home so they have to bide (live) here for their safety but you get them that have been put here for doing it and a' ... We've had a loon (boy) here who had sex wi his wee sister. Its up tae us like. The staff, they are nae allowed tae tell you but we always find out one way or another.

(Allie, Kitchen, Strathmore, February 1997)

The reality of a service provision for 'the abused' alongside those who have been labelled as 'abusers' is a dichotomy not missed by the young people. Nor is the complexity surrounding such behaviours. What did seem to matter, primarily, was the ways in which new residents were going to behave toward the existing members of the resident group and it was this that was tested out.

Testing Out

Testing out new admissions was commonplace in both units. It was understood as a means of protecting the group and of restricting access to the group until safety and understanding could be assured. Indeed during my fieldwork some residents appeared never to get beyond this testing out stage; their calibre was never fully confirmed. The degree to which new admissions were tested varied, and this variation appeared to rely on the initial presentation of the young person, the group's previous knowledge of him/her and his/her care biography.

I would argue that, particularly at Strathmore, the young people were acutely aware of being regarded as 'other' by the outside community. They perceived themselves as different and as being seen in hostile, negative terms by those living in the town. This initial period allowed the young people to monitor the new admission's reaction to them as much as their reaction to him/her. It appeared to me that being approved by the resident group was not only dependent on being acceptable to them but was also dependent on being accepting *of* them. As Gregor advises:

Just try to be friendly ... if you dinnae they get the wrong idea ... like that you think you're better than them or something ... Its the same when folk come in and they think they're hard ... like they rule the place ... its mostly cos they think they have to be like that cos we're hard.

(Gregor, Quiet Room, Strathmore, February 1997)

The strategies developed by the young people to maintain or make permeable the group's protective boundaries could be seen as having been translated into social 'tests'. I was aware, during the initial three months, of being monitored and discussed and at times of being placed in positions where my relationships with the young people could be assessed. One of the most significant 'tests' placed before other new residents and me was the test of loyalty, of not being a 'grass'. To 'grass' on fellow residents was disliked by all the young people. I was later to see that this apparently straightforward philosophy was in fact much more complex and was concerned more with the way in which information was passed on rather than to whom (discussed in Chapter 8). However, such subtlety was not immediately apparent to other new admissions, or myself. Instead it appeared we were being judged solely on the ability to hold counsel.

This element of the test was particularly relevant to me, as confidentiality was a central component of my research. Furthermore I regarded the young people's recognition of this to be crucial to my acceptance by the group. If I was to be approved in my role as participant observer rather than, as my age and employment history would suggest, another social worker, I was required to demonstrate my loyalty to the group. Significantly I did not realise at the time that I was being tested beyond the regular 'you won't tell anyone will you?' comments that I had received from the young people. In fact, as it transpired, the young people at Strathmore had together decided to construct a situation whereby I would be given a piece of information regarding a member of the

group. After this information was passed to me I was monitored to see whom, if anyone, I discussed it with. Such set ups were not uncommon:

Yeah ... we just like ask them (new admissions) heaps of questions ... put them in a trance ... sort of test them ... depends on who they are depends on what questions we ask ... make sure they dinnae grass. No kid likes a grasser.

(Neil, Quiet Room, Strathmore, February 1997)

My sense of daring as a group member was also tested as the following extract from my field notes demonstrates:

Whilst Fiona (staff) was in the big store cupboard Neil and Hilary pointed to the open tin of condensed milk, sitting on the table between us. ' Go On!' whispered Hilary ... Sharon handed me a spoon ... 'Go On' I put the spoon in the tin, then to my mouth ... just as Fiona returned the spoon dropped from my mouth. As I bent to pick it up the others laughed.

(Fieldnotes, Strathmore, February 1997)

Although in this case mildly 'deviant', the act itself seemed to be unimportant. The group required a demonstration of my willingness to prove my allegiance to them and that, like them, I was able to take risks.

Daring acts were not always about setting up conflict with staff. Indeed such acts were at times undertaken out of respect for rules or behavioural expectations. For example, I was asked to keep look-out and 'cover' for a group of young people who had, earlier in the day, broken the shower curtain rail whilst they had been 'mucking about'. They understood the shower should not be broken and that they themselves were at fault. The young people stated that they would rather fix it themselves than face telling the staff. I was stationed at a look-out post and had to distract a member of staff away from the scene whilst the young people set to work. I was praised for my

successful implementation of this to the extent that I was recommended and used for future look-out positions when the need arose.

Having Agency

I, like any other new admission, was not powerless during these initial months and took my own steps to aid my acceptance into the group. One major principle in my research practice was the pace that I set. I viewed the fieldwork as taking 6-8 months and therefore felt that I had time to slowly become accepted by the group. As such in the initial two to three months I spent time away from the young people, trying not to follow them around as they moved from room to room. As far as possible I waited for invitations to participate although always having smoking as a legitimate means of being with them in the 'quiet room'. In retrospect this pace worked in my favour and as the weeks went by I found myself increasingly being invited to be more active in the group. This notion of pace was not exclusive to me. I saw a number of new admissions behaving in similarly 'sensitive' ways:

... anyone that comes in this place, well anyone with a brain, is always quiet, they dinnae speak a lot, you've got to speak to them ...you dinnae want just someone coming in and wrecking the place that's the thing aboot emergencies and that, they forget ... well dinnae ken that this is our home

(Duncan, Games Room, Brunswick, October 1997)

Smoking was an enormous research aid in both units and used by new admissions, such as myself, as a mean of gaining access to the groups. In Brunswick, staff and young people smoked together in the cloakroom. This was a sociable time, so much so that non-smoking staff and residents would also join in the discussions that took place there. Interactions in this space took on a more relaxed style. It seemed the roles of 'staff' and 'young person' and indeed 'researcher', were left to the

side. There was a sense that business took place somewhere else. Equally, at Strathmore smoking was a shared, non-threatening activity, although as a result of departmental policy, not one shared with the staff. My presence was therefore not only accepted but also understood. Young people saw smoking and cigarettes as a way of welcoming new admissions and of making the initial difficult social approaches easier:

Its like when Jack came in we just looked at each other then we just ... just try to make them feel comfortable and like take them for a smoke, gie them a fag if they havenae got any.

(Bryony, Quiet Room, Strathmore, June 1997)

As previously mentioned, the young people constructed me as a student who wanted to know what it was like to live in a children's home. I was not universally welcomed nor trusted and those that felt unsure were often the ones who would either remove themselves from my company or who would 'act up' as the stereotypical (in their view) child in care. I would therefore be the audience to what were 'displays' of aggression, self-injury and vandalism. This is not to say that at times in my fieldwork, as discussed in later chapters, such practices were not apparent. However in my initial period of fieldwork I did believe that such displays were put on for me. It may be argued that, by behaving in this way, the young people were able to test out whether my claims to not be a member of staff were valid:

..(laughs) mind that time that we burnt holes in the table ... I couldnae believe Ruth just sitting there, nae daeing anything ... (sarcastically) 'one o' us' right enough

(Fraser, Quiet Room, Strathmore, May 1997)

Being a student helped to remove me from the social work role that I was so afraid of being seen in or becoming involved in. It also allowed me to question the young people's understanding and

behaviour. Both groups of young people regularly debated issues relating to the units, ranging from staff practices to décor. In my student role I was able to join in these debates from the premise of trying to gain understanding. I had much to learn regarding the day to day routine and rules of the unit and therefore I relied on the young people to teach me. Again this 'dependency' increased my difference from other 'adults' and also gave me insight into what the young people taught each other, what was valued and encouraged and equally what was omitted or criticised.

The uncomfortable position of wishing to be accepted at any cost and yet maintaining the young people's awareness that they were being researched was to be my experience for the bulk of the fieldwork. I did attempt to address this by continuing my discussions on data collection, allowing young people control over the Dictaphones and debating my analytical ideas. I was also helped enormously by the staff. I believe that the staff acceptance of me allowed the young people to judge me on my own merits and further freed me to spend my time with them without fear of reprisals. They bought into the notion that I wanted to become as close as possible to the reality of group living and would, like their treatment of the young people, publicly reprimand me for my misdemeanours. The staff also helped in maintaining awareness that I was conducting research, which I regarded as a positive step. They would make reference to the research and ask about its progress. By making this humorous, it further removed the threat that such endeavours may evoke. I was, for the bulk of my time at Strathmore, known as the 'invisible researcher' and could therefore be ignored, walked into etc. in the name of humour.

As Delamont (1992) suggests the use of language, dress and behaviours had significant impact on this initial 'stage of fieldwork. As I had spent the last ten years in the North East of Scotland my

own Scottish accent had become more integrated with the local dialect, incorporating some of the indigenous words and phrases. I therefore understood many of the Doric words and was comfortable with the speed at which the young people spoke. This 'shared' language had further impact in that it helped me to be regarded with less fear and distrust:

I thought you'd be posh like ... I didnae think when they said you were fae a university that you would be like us, ken I thought you'd be auld (old) and snobby

(Duncan, Dining Room, Brunswick, 1996)

Young people tended to be informal in their interactions and would regularly use slang and swear words. I communicated with them in a similar way but to a level with which I was comfortable. As Cottle (1973:348) suggests young people are resistant to researchers who try to 'be like them', they appear false and patronising. My clothing was informal and as I was in the units most of the time and unlike the staff was not required to leave the building or act 'professionally' I rarely wore shoes. These small differences marked me out from the other adult staff and also signalled a level of relaxation which, in turn relates back to the notions of accepting as much as acceptance. The young women in particular were favourable about my dress sense to the extent that they would borrow items of clothes or make-up. Such props helped me in moving to the next level of building relationships.

Building Relationships

As the fieldwork continued into its third month, the young people became increasingly accepting of my involvement in their resident group. I spent extended amounts of time in their company, becoming an active participant in the group. As such, I was expected to offer opinions, challenge

speakers and join in the 'fun'. This was a somewhat gradual change and appeared to begin with two of the young women's approach to borrow clothes. The three of us spent time in my room as they selected the items that they wished to wear. The discussion then moved on to my selection of make-up products and how they compared to their own.

From this apparently insignificant exchange I was allowed to interact as a young woman rather than as 'student' or 'researcher'. On this occasion we stayed in my room chatting for most of the afternoon and afterwards I was invited down to the quiet room to smoke. Almost immediately the degree to which I was included appeared to increase. Although by this point the young people had begun to be more open in their discussions whilst I was present, I had taken a somewhat silent role. Instead I was asked for my opinion and enjoyed the debate that followed.

The level to which relationships were built varied amongst the group. My relationship with the two young women became increasingly similar to that of a 'friendship' and as such they were more willing to share secrets and private thoughts. In turn I was also expected to be more open about my 'personal' life. It appeared that as a direct consequence of my age and experience I was given the role of 'older sister' (Fine and Sandstrom 1988). Throughout such discussions I would remind the women that I was conducting research, often by asking if I could record our exchanges. The young men were more challenging in respect of building relationships. In both units they appeared to place me alongside the other female members of the group yet maintained a reserve that was not so apparent with the young women. There were three exceptions to this. These young men appeared to accept me as a fellow smoker and as someone that they could talk to. Again this 'sisterly' role was enacted. What seemed to add to the building of relationships was the willingness on my part to

answer questions relating to my 'private' life and my unexpected non-adult behaviour (i.e. lack of sanctioning, lack of authority, telling jokes).

As the fieldwork progressed my 'role' as a non staff member was aided by phone calls that I received from my friends and family as well as the use of 'home leave'. On returning to the unit or from receiving a phone call I, like other residents, would be asked what I had done whilst I had been away and in turn I would be anxious to catch up on the events in the units in my absence. I became increasingly trusted with information and would be sought out for advice, often being regarded as someone between a young person and a member of staff. In retrospect, I was being allowed to belong. The young people demonstrated this sense of belonging in a number of ways. As a group we would talk about past events or memories and as time passed my part in these 'stories' became more pronounced. We now had shared memories and experiences that set us together. The young people would further demonstrate my belonging by physical acts for example when writing out lists of players for a game they would include me, or when discussing who would be attending a young person's birthday tea.

A further aid to the acceptance by the group was the appearance of new admissions. The group's attention would turn to 'sussing out' these new members and therefore there was less time to devote to me. As a mark of my acceptance into the group I was accorded involvement in this testing out process and my opinion was sought on the behaviours and practices of the new resident. Like the provision of advice, I felt concerned about supplying my opinion. As far as possible, I sat on the fence being rather non-committal in my judgements. Interestingly this seemed to work in my

favour. The young people regarded me as someone who listened and who encouraged them to make up their own minds.

One of the highlights of the fieldwork was being invited to join the young people on a residential weekend to an outward-bound centre in the Highlands of Scotland. Looking back at my field notes it is clear that by this point the young people had accepted me to the extent that I was regarded as 'one of the girls'. I recorded having to do dance routines, put make-up on others, take part in a play, smoke, play cards, protect one of the young women from attack etc. My daily entries are full of participatory acts not all of which I was that keen to undertake.

I attempted to cross into both sides of what seemed to be quite distinct gender divisions during this time away. The young men spent much of their time mountain biking and playing cards and my attempts to join in were met with patronising acceptance. The young women regarded such attempts with a strong sense of disapproval, accusing me of disloyalty. This disapproval continued when I made consistent mistakes in the dance routine that we were practising. The young women criticised me for not dancing correctly. However when I offered to remove myself this was seen as exemplifying my lack of commitment. These dances were not simply a matter of practice but also required performance, in front of the young men and the staff members. The girls had chosen to perform to the Spice Girls, an all female group who dress in revealing clothing, have 'sexy' dance moves and pronounce themselves the bastions of what they refer to as 'girl power'. I felt rather uncomfortable undertaking this but did so, badly, with the benefit of humour.

Being accepted exposed me to further conduct that I was not at all comfortable with. As mentioned in Chapter Three the staff at Strathmore were concerned about the sexual behaviour of one of the young men in the unit. I had, for the majority of the fieldwork, found him to be distant and uncommunicative. However, with my new found group acceptance I discovered that I received increasing attention. This culminated in an incident one evening when I was watching television in the living room. One of the young women came in to join me and sat on the arm of my chair. As we chatted the young man entered and proceeded to sit on top of the young woman. He reached his arm around her and began to stroke my hair. I was uncertain how to manage this, concerned that any extreme reaction would be seen as my acting as a member of staff. Instead I waited for a while and then said that I hated having my hair played with and did he mind stopping. I tried to laugh as I said this and hoped that my more general dislike would limit a perceived attack on him. He laughed and left the room and the incident appeared to have little affect on him. Interestingly the young women who had been with us praised me for 'standing up to him'.

Being a participant member of the resident group resulted in my having an acknowledged impact on the group members' practices. To remain separate however would arguably have restricted their behaviours further. As far as possible I attempted to respond in ways that I recognised others responding. Like any new admission, I attempted to become accepted by being like the group, often waiting for other members to respond. In many ways I let others define my role.

I just waited ken, watched what ab'dy else done ... It's a'right here. Once they suss you oot and you suss them oot then you just get on wi it. No ab'dy's gonna be your best pal but ... well chances are you will find a good pal amongst them. It's a laugh most of the time.

(Jack, Bedroom, November 1997 Brunswick)

Leaving

In both of the units but particularly at Strathmore, as I neared the end of my fieldwork I had achieved a level of acceptance with both the young people and staff. I had maintained and developed the relationships established during the middle section of my fieldwork and felt that I was an active participant in the decision making and activities of the group. I felt that I had knowledge of how the units and, more specifically, the groups functioned. The level of acceptance and sense of belonging that I achieved created a sense that despite the conflicts that arise there was something comforting in having people around all day, having time ordered and meals provided. It also served as a reminder that, although ethnography does allow researchers to 'get alongside' those that they research, the experience will always be different. In this case ethnography gave me the opportunity to live in a children's home. However I did so as a result of choice and with none of the ongoing family and personal problems that the young people had to face. In terms of 'pulling out' I knew from the beginning when I was going to leave, knowledge that very few young people in residential care have. Leaving became quite a personal issue for both the young people and myself.

Like many of the young people leaving the units my disengagement took place gradually over a period of months. It was assisted by a number of factors. After the six-month block period at Strathmore I visited each month for a block of four days. The reduction in time allowed my leaving to be slowly accepted by the group and myself. It was aided also by my loss of bedroom, which had had to be given to a new admission. From the end of my six-month stay I slept in different rooms each time I visited, increasing my role as student visitor rather than as resident.

Changes within the group also made my disengagement more manageable. Many of the young people with whom I had lived had moved on or were moving into their own flats or returning to their families. Two of the young people were being moved to a residential school. In this way, despite the units appearing to be the same in terms of physical appearance and routine, they were in fact very different with new members comprising what were becoming quite different resident groups. One physical difference, which did occur near to the end of my six-month block, was the banning of smoking in Strathmore. The quiet room became a small lounge and the smokers were forced outside. This loss of group space added to the changes in the group and the level of accessibility to new members:

... it just insnae hame anymore ... Every time I come back, ken tae visit, it's different ... new staff, new kids, new cups and a'thing ... but then I still come do I?

(Bryony, Kitchen, Strathmore (after she had moved out))

As these monthly visits continued, my time was increasingly spent testing out my analytical ideas and discussing them with the young people and staff. Due to the perceived changing nature of my task I was increasingly less 'one of us' and more an outside researcher. I visited each of the residents who had moved on from the units and discussed my findings. This provided a formal ending which both the young people and myself found useful. This level of formality was later to be transferred to those who continued to be residents. I returned to both units to give a formal presentation of my findings and to facilitate further discussion. Again this formal procedure allowed for a distinct conclusion.

Most of the young people accepted my 'moving on' but there were some who found it more problematic. During my visits to the units some of the young people appeared hostile and

unwelcoming and I found this quite distressing. I was somewhat reassured when going back through the data to find that other young people had experienced similar responses after leaving the units. This behaviour was rationalised by young people as jealousy for moving on and leaving others behind and a sense of betraying the group.

Conclusions

This study required me to be an active participant in the resident groups of both the units studied. Such a methodological stance occurred at the behest of the young people and as such has allowed for richness in data that would not have otherwise occurred. Ethnographic research however does require a use of 'self' that is perhaps not so essential in other forms of research work. It is the 'use of self' that this chapter has attempted to address. It is not enough to merely state that I spent time with the young people, rather the call for reflexivity in ethnographic research requires that I reflect on the process of gathering data and the impact that I had on this.

In so doing, I leave myself open to the criticism that by becoming an active member of the group I influenced the young people's interactions and social practices. I would respond to that understandable allegation by acknowledging that my presence did have impact. However by reflecting on this process I was able to gain insight not only into the ways in which my presence had influenced the group but also into the experience of admission to both the units and to the resident groups. The opportunity to conduct a purely observational study would have impacted in its own way, my silent presence being a source of mistrust and caution on the part of the young people.

Instead, although having influenced the group, I hope that as far as possible I have influenced procedures no more than any other new resident.

Central to the credibility of this piece of work is the length of time spent with the groups and the pace at which relationships were able to develop. The young people were given time to accept my presence, question my involvement and equally I was allowed the opportunity to shape my own admission in a similar way to that which I witnessed other new admissions undertaking. Gouldner sums up the aim of conducting such research and indeed of including a chapter such as this to my thesis:

... the assumption that the self can be sealed off from information systems is mythological. The assumption that the self affects the information system solely in a distorting manner is one sided: it fails to see that the self may also be a source both of valid insight that enriches study and of motivation that energizes it.

(Gouldner 1971:495)

Chapter Five

Where To Hang My Hat: The Search for a Conceptual Analysis

The temptation for any researcher, and arguably, particularly for a PhD researcher is to "tag on" sociological theory in an attempt to make their work suitable for academic consumption. The danger however is that the 'theory is stretched to make it 'fit'' (Polsky 1962: 26) at the expense of what may in fact be interesting and worthwhile data. 'Theory' in its broadest sense should instead be used to enhance and guide researchers in the exploration and development of their findings, to give added meaning and shape to what would otherwise be one-dimensional findings. In many ways theory provides the foundation to empirical work and becomes the mechanism by which data are made meaningful beyond the experience of the researched (Gilbert 1995).

The following chapter aims to illustrate the journey from raw data to the development of a conceptual analysis. In so doing, it presents the theoretical knowledge considered in the attempt to 'make sense' of the data. It begins with an examination of a study undertaken by Howard Polsky in the late 1950s and moves on through the concept of status to models of deviance, small groups and

subculture. The journey ends with an exploration of some of the work of Pierre Bourdieu and the ways in which his ideas came to be employed as a basis for the analysis used in this study.

Although this 'journey' began prior to the commencement of the fieldwork, the means of analysing the data was developed in the latter stages of data collection. Indeed it grew out of the themes and issues arising from the data themselves. It was therefore produced not only through organisation of data but also by practical application of theoretical insights and negotiation with research subjects. During the course of the analysis I wanted to find an existing sociological explanation for what was occurring. I realised during the fieldwork that certain behaviours were important to the group and as it continued it became clearer as to why this was and how these behaviours were enacted. The sociological thinking presented in this chapter is given in the order in which it was consulted. As such it illustrates my desperation to 'hang my hat' on existing theory, and demonstrates my growing confidence in my own analysis of the data.

As stated in Chapter Three, the data were analysed using the method of sequential analysis. This chapter concentrates on the last stage of this sequence, the development of theoretical insight. The analysis of the data and the application of conceptual ideas are often under explored and under explained in sociological research. It is, however, a key element of this thesis. The aim therefore is to tell the story of the analysis, to provide the reader with a sense of the way in which the analysis was developed.

The Diamond Effect

Background to the Analysis

The literature search, which took place before the fieldwork began, identified few empirically based writings on young people living together outwith the 'family' home. One of the exceptions to this was 'Cottage Six', a study that had as its focus the experience of young men living together in a therapeutic community in the USA. Howard Polsky (1962) wrote 'Cottage Six' at a time when the philosophies underpinning the management of 'delinquent youths' were changing. There was a move in the Western world, away from the punishment of young people for their 'abnormal' or deviant behaviour toward a more treatment-based approach. The young person was still regarded as the site for change and input. However the ways in which this was to be accomplished had altered (Abrams 1998).

'Hollymeade', the location of Polsky's research, was a therapeutic community set up for the treatment of 'delinquent' children and young people from a mainly Jewish background. Its treatment ethos was founded in psychotherapy and it was therefore run and directed by trained professionals with a psychiatric or psychotherapeutic background. The young people had individual 'treatment sessions' with a psychiatric social worker and a psychotherapist, the aim being to 'cure' the delinquency and allow for re integration into mainstream society.

'Hollymeade' itself was set in a sprawling landscape, isolated and self-sufficient. The young people were educated and cared for within this domain and were further restricted to the community for recreational purposes. Outwith structured education or work the young people lived in 'cottages'

which held between 15 to 20 children and young people. It was in one of these cottages, Cottage Six, that Polsky's research took place.

Both Polsky and the 'Hollymeade' administration recognised the significance of cottage life to the young people. They were aware that the interactions and relationships that took place within it had a significant impact on the residents, which was, in their view, often at odds with the treatment programme. Indeed Polsky acknowledged that: 'Enormous pressures may be placed upon individual boys not only within the community but within their own social organisation as well.' (Polsky 1962: 28) It was to this 'social organisation' that Polsky turned. He lived within Cottage Six as a participant observer over an eight month period and attempted to study the resident group in terms of its interactions, status allocations and behaviours.

Polsky's Analytical Framework

Polsky's analysis was centred on two theoretical notions. The first is that of the primary group concept. He argued that society was mediated for the boys through the peer group. Such primary groups were defined by face to face interaction and group cohesion and were the tool with which individual behaviour was shaped: 'The individual finds his niche and commits himself to a set of values in primary groups ... His identity is largely shaped by these emotionally charged relationships' (Polsky 1962:18). The second concept utilised by Polsky is that of the deviant subculture. He is precise in his definition although is limited in the ways in which he applies it to his knowledge of the resident group: 'A deviant subculture can be defined as persistent collective behavior and related value system of a circumscribed group that violates conventional social norms' (Polsky 1962: 20). He argued that 'delinquents' pass on 'delinquent' techniques to each other and in

so doing not only manufacture a new army of fellow delinquents but also decrease any anxiety or dilemma which may occur as a result of 'law' breaking.

Polsky's findings show an organised peer group, constructed hierarchically by methods of violence, intimidation and aggression. He argues that the resident group within Cottage Six can be illustrated by a diamond, with those most powerful at the top and the lowest ranked boys at the bottom. Within this diamond, position or status is gained through the use of five available means, which serve to maintain social control: aggression, threat gestures, deviant skills and activities, ranking²⁷ and scapegoating. Such 'skills' are used most frequently by those at the top, indeed from his analysis it would appear that these higher level boys are the only members who have access to them.

Time, Location and Emphasis: Some Points to Consider

'Cottage Six' is one of the few studies which considers the resident group as sociologically interesting. Indeed throughout this work, the power of the group in affecting young people's behaviour and experiences is highlighted. However Polsky's study can be seen to have limited applicability. His research was conducted during the late 1950s when attitudes toward children and young people in difficulty were quite different from those of today. Currently young people in need of 'care' are regarded as being products of familial and societal influences and as such are 'treated' within the context that the 'problem', theoretically at least, does not lie solely with the child (Abrams 1998, Fahlberg 1991).

²⁷ Polsky describes 'ranking' as 'verbal, invidious distinctions based on values important to the group'. He states that frequently such verbal 'abuse' centres around comments made to a young boy about his mother. In more general terms it refers to a high level of teasing, designed to make the boy 'crack'.

The era and geographical location of Polsky's work results in the site of Polsky's research being outwith mainstream society. In current social work practice in the United Kingdom children and young people who have to be removed from their families are placed, if not in foster care, then in children's homes located within communities (Berridge and Brodie 1998, SWSI 1999). There are some young people whom it is deemed appropriate to remove from society to 'secure units', residential schools or therapeutic communities but these children are the exception rather than the rule.

Despite the inclusion of young women in residence at Hollymeade, Polsky did not consider them other than with regard to their relationships with the boys of Cottage Six. In so doing, the experiences of the young women were denied and their relationships to the boys in Cottage Six were viewed in simplistically sexual terms. This was not uncommon in sociological research as a whole and in the study of deviance in particular. Indeed Hey (1997:6) for example, argues that even currently young women are often seen purely in relation to the young men under study or are researched using methods or theoretical insights designed from a patriarchal position.

Polsky's account is further limited by its focus on the importance of 'deviant' behaviours in the negotiation of group position, accepting these 'negative' means as the only method to gain status. He views the group as powerful and oppressive and, I would argue, does little to uncover the significance of the group to its members beyond its ability to intimidate and offend. There is no discussion of any positive elements of group life, the sharing of experiences or the possible security gained from living with others who have experienced the same difficulties. He appears to tackle the group from the position of threat and negativity thus denying the existence of other functions.

The durability of the structure of the group, as a result of the length of time the boys are resident in the cottage, as well as its socialising properties is highlighted. As a result Polsky gives little sway to the changing agents within the group and the impact they may have. Furthermore he does not systematically examine individual biographies or wider structural power. The group becomes an all-powerful entity that is larger than the individuals who have constructed it and appears to be resistant to any changes that these individuals may wish to make.

I had read Polsky's study prior to the commencement of the fieldwork and regarded it as the most comparable study that I had encountered. Although this thesis did not set out to 'test' the appropriateness of Polsky's model, it did provide a useful starting point. After a period of five months in residence I began to look more closely at the data which I had gathered. It became apparent that although the young people did demonstrate many of the behaviours identified by Polsky such demonstrations did not automatically result in these young people being granted higher status by their fellow residents. The rigidity of Polsky's model was not supported by my data at this point. Indeed it appeared that the status positions of the young people were constantly changing and evolving. Status appeared to be a somewhat moveable feast, transferred from young person to young person through a subtle means of interaction and negotiation.

Despite being a useful starting point, it quickly became evident that the resident groups in this study were structured in very different ways from those at Hollymeade. That both units in this study were located in the community may have had significant influence in terms of the importance granted by the young people to group life. Furthermore the changing population, particularly at Strathmore,

may have influenced the lack of rigidity, evident in the Hollymeade group structure. Two crucial 'variables' were strikingly different from the evidence produced by Polsky. First young women made up almost half of the resident population under study and were central to the social processes which I observed. Second, from early on in the data collection it became apparent that there were a significant number of 'positive' social interactions taking place amongst the young people. They demonstrated support and affection to each other as well as a willingness to share experiences in an attempt to guide others away from 'deviant' practices.

In discussion with the young people they argued that although Polsky's model made sense to them it was not applicable to their groups. They regarded the hierarchical model devised by Polsky as having been founded on 'bullying' behaviour. Such behaviour, they argued, was not a regular feature of their residential experience. Indeed it was stated that neither the staff nor the young people would tolerate it. A further point made by the young people was that no one member of the group could be seen as continually being at the 'top' or the 'bottom' of the group structure. Rather it was felt that the group was much more flexibly organised with no 'fixed' stratification of position. The young people were, however, in agreement with Polsky in relation to the idea that the resident group acted as a key feature of their residential experience. Indeed they regarded the group as one of the most significant influences on their behaviour and identity.

From this early analysis I was able to argue tentatively that although 'deviant' and aggressive acts were demonstrated by the group members, they were only one aspect of a large repertoire of behaviours that appeared to have an effect on how individual young people were viewed by the resident group. Indeed it appeared that many of these behaviours were motivated at least in part by

the influence that they had on 'position' or at least in how they were regarded by their fellow residents.

Position and The Influence of Structures

The Problem of Definition

Status as a sociological concept has been used primarily to explain the variance in social position within and across various social groups. Status can on one level be regarded as simply a position in a social system. In other words it refers to what a person 'is' rather than, as is inferred by role, what a person does or is expected to do. However status has also become synonymous with notions of honour or prestige. As such it has been used to denote the relative position of a person on a publicly recognised hierarchy of 'worth'. It therefore goes beyond economic stratification to become a social determinant of life chances (Giddens 1989).

The means of gaining status, as opposed to its definition, have been more readily addressed in the literature, which argues that it appears to be closely related to the wider structural or cultural positions of the groups under study. Roy (1960), for example, discusses the high status of one of the workers in his study of a factory production line. Initially Roy regarded the higher status worker as having derived his position from the small number of managerial tasks that he had been allocated to perform. After further study however, he argued that his initial understanding of status allocation had been misplaced. Instead he discovered that this worker gained status through the 'story' of his daughter's marriage to a university professor. Such an analysis cannot be understood without considering the structural position of his fellow workers that of immigrant, low paid

workers. In presenting his argument Roy suggests that status has become synonymous with notions of 'respect', derived from a 'sense of one's place' within the wider social order.

Respect however, can be understood and experienced in many ways. The young men, who had reached the top of Polksy's hierarchy through violence and aggression, assumed status. Therefore despite 'respect' occurring as a result of these young men's skills in conflict, 'respect' in this case was also born of fear. Regardless of the experience of granting or indeed of being granted status it would therefore appear crucial that some understanding of the structure of the social system be established. Without this level of insight the process of status allocation as well as the meanings attributed to it become dislocated and potentially lost.

The term status as traditionally used within sociology has associations with social and economic power. Weber, the most prominent sociologist to use the term considers status as associated with macro level understandings of power (McIntosh 1997). As such it may be argued that to use such a term to explore the micro interactional methods employed by the participants in this study to negotiate their position within the group is problematic. However the positions granted to young people were born of a respect for the use of skills or knowledge. It elevated the young person within the eyes of the group for a moment in time. During this time these young people were given a defined social position. However the short term nature of their position limited the opportunity to create a fixed hierarchy. It was essential that some blanket term was invoked to describe the position of these young people. As such status is used to 'stand in' for the wide range of terms that the young people used to explain what was occurring within their group.

Small Groups in a Wider Sense

The opportunity to look at the ways in which this negotiation of status occurs then led me to the sociological work on small groups. The study of small groups has been dominated by the symbolic interactionist school of thought (e.g. Stone, 1984, Denzin 1984). Within this groups are regarded as: “ a field of experience that is symbolically and interactionally produced by its members” (Lewin 1951). The emphasis is placed on the development of shared activities, meanings and values which bind individuals together creating a sense of “ weness” (Cooley 1910). Symbolic interactionists concern themselves, to varying degrees, with the production of these meanings and the resultant behaviour.

Roles are attributed to individuals as a means of identifying their accepted purpose in the group and in containing or creating expected behaviour. This differs from role behaviour where perhaps many different roles occur simultaneously. Stone (1984) states that:

Role behavior, however, must be distinguished from role, that is, the personal transfer of expectations with respect to a person in a situation, and indeed corresponding to the identity explained by one of these persons and confirmed by the other.

(Stone 1984:12)

Maines (1984) goes further to suggest that roles are always situation specific and in so doing suggests that the roles which we are allocated or create may differ from context to context.

Small group research does provide this study of the resident group with some interesting insights. Like Polsky’s work however there are a number of limitations to its applicability to the experiences of young people in residential care. Small group research relies heavily on the voluntary nature of

group involvement, indeed Denzin (1984:43) talks about the fusion of small groups around a common interest which is often one of the motivations to join. The other more subtle motivation may be in order to counteract non group results e.g. loneliness. By coming together and focusing on a shared activity the individual members resist this state.

The ‘choice’ available to young people to be admitted to residential care is limited. It would be unfair to say that there are not young people who choose to live in a children’s homes. However the options available to them are restricted and certainly they have no power over who later joins their group. The study of small groups has tended to focus of those groups which come together to share a common activity. There is a sense of purpose to group members’ contact which is, more often than not, time limited. This is not the case for the young people in this study; they are ‘forced’ to live together unable to have control over the selection of their own or fellow residents’ participation.

Small group research takes little account of the structural nature of society as it ignores the often enforced nature of group participation that is common to many group activities. Furthermore it does not consider any historical elements, whether they be of a personal or collective nature, that are brought into or become embodied in the group. In cyclical terms Denzin argues that: “Out of these interactions, which transform strangers into personal interactants, arises an embedded, embodied social order that is knitted together through relational bonds” (Denzin 1984: 43).

As with Polksy’s work, such theorising suggests a durability which is often not present in current residential groups of young people. Little is said of the wider context of group experience and how this impacts on the development of social order within the group, nor the impact the group has on

the wider societal experiences of those involved. Indeed Stone, one of the exponents of small group research acknowledges its preoccupation with dislocating ‘subjects’ from the wider social frame (Stone 1984).

Small group research relies on the fixity of, if not roles, then certainly role behaviour. The management and function of the group develop out of the interactions that take place between its members. The group is in many ways controlled by the expectations of behaviour, the behaviour which allows participation and acceptance in the group (Becker 1963). Status within the group is therefore achieved through the experience of group membership and becomes fixed. It relies on an ‘overthrowing’ of high status members rather than any fluid transaction between all members of the group.

What is helpful to my research is the ways in which the allocation of tasks or skills to group members are addressed by this school of thought. Of particular note is Denzin’s (1984) use of the notion of ‘practices’. These he describes as habitual activities which involve some skill or expertise. Practices become associated with individual group members and become part of “the persons behavioral repertoire” (Denzin 1984: 38). What is disappointing however is his apparent failure to make explicit how these practices occur and his lack of consideration of their impact on the group structure. This notion will be revisited in the later discussion of the work of Pierre Bourdieu.

Position and the Resident Group

Lay knowledge surrounding young people in residential care is supported by research such as Polsky's (1962) and that of others writing in the field of youth culture (Cohen 1955) and assumes that position amongst young people is founded on 'negative' practices such as violence and intimidation. A 'moral panic' surrounds young people who come together in groups resulting in their being regarded as something to fear. A recent article by one of the founders of the Cotswold Community, a therapeutic community in England, actually warns of the 'dangers' of young people coming together as a group (Whitwell 1998). Indeed when young people's behaviour is other than negative, a note of bewilderment is sounded. For example media coverage of the Scottish music festival 'T in the Park' resounded with surprise at the 'acceptable' 'friendly' behaviour of the young people who had attended. The worth of such behaviour became a signifier of hope for this 'future' generation, these adults in waiting. Indeed the local Chief Inspector remarked: 'If these youngsters are representative of their generation in Scotland, it bodes very well for the Country' (Perthshire Advertiser July 28th 1998)

Young people, particularly those living at Strathmore, spent much of their time within the unit. From a research point of view this allowed for long periods of time during which the young people could be observed. For the young people however it provided a somewhat insular environment. In many ways these long, often monotonous days can be likened to the production line studied by Roy (1960). Roy describes the 'talking, fun and fooling which provided solution to the elemental problem of "psychological survival"' (Roy 1960:158). Indeed he goes on to argue that such interaction between workers created a 'liveable' environment out of the monotonous, twelve hour working day. A similar point is made in Taylor and Cohen's study of long term prisoners. In this

work they too talk of the strategies employed by these men to cope with prison life and the closed environment in which they live (Cohen and Taylor 1981). At Strathmore the young people spent much of their time in the company of other residents, talking, watching T.V., playing games, with few expeditions into the outside world. Interaction and negotiation for position occurred as a means of passing time and filling days.

More significantly young people newly admitted to the units would frequently demonstrate 'deviant' behaviours as a result of the negative perception that they held about residential care. Such demonstrations were an attempt to establish quickly a sense of 'respect' and to ward off expected 'bullying' or violent attacks. This 'lay' belief extended beyond young people to their parents and friends as well as on occasion to social work staff. An example of this was a lengthy discussion that I had with a student on placement in one of the units studied. She recounted her fears of entering the building for the first time and her belief that violent 'uncontainable young men' (my emphasis) would greet her. Reflecting back on this early assumption the student argued that these beliefs had resulted from an association between particular young people in need of residential care and criminality. That there were to be significant numbers of young people living together only served to heighten this anxiety.

Structural Influences on Position

The demographics of the resident groups were constantly changing and this organic nature of group life was true at every level. Not only were relationships within the group at Strathmore always changing (many of the friendships and 'dating' relationships taking place within the confines of the resident group) but the actual turnover of young people through the process of admission and

discharge was marked. This differed from the group at Brunswick. There, as previously mentioned, nearly all of the young people were from the local area and had relationships that extended into the 'community'. The majority attended the local mainstream school and as the unit itself had been designated as a 'long stay' unit it therefore had, throughout my fieldwork, more or less the same group of young people in residence.

It is important to note that the young people involved in this research operated within a number of structural limitations. 'Position' or credibility therefore related not only to how each young person was regarded by his or her fellow residents but also in terms of the ways in which they, as a group of young people in residential care, were afforded position in the wider world. The Social Work Department, by selecting Brunswick as its long stay unit and Strathmore as its mixed care unit, had an impact on the 'care' experience of the individual young people. Young people were further affected by their understanding of their admission into care and of the care system itself. Without exception, the young people talked of their admission in terms of self blame, rationalising the process, at least in part, as 'their fault'. The degree to which young people viewed their admission as solely the result of their own misdemeanours varied. However the overwhelming majority regarded their stay in residential care as closely linked to 'punishment'. Compared to the wider social world, including the wider social work system, young people perceived themselves to be at the bottom of society's hierarchy of worth. By being 'looked after' not only did they view themselves as 'lesser' than other young people in the community but by being placed in residential care this banished them to the lowest position of care provision.

The structural implications of age and its relationship with power also influenced young people's group experiences. The benchmark age of 16 was regarded by many as the time of 'freedom' and until that time they understood that they had little control over major decisions regarding their care. Such perceptions are arguably not restricted to young people who are being 'looked after'. However, for these young people, the chance to participate in their care and to view care as an opportunity for their development appeared, for them, to be lost. Instead they regarded themselves as relatively powerless amidst the wider structures. This is not to say that young people lacked agency in such situations. As will be discussed in more depth in the presentation of data, the young people in this study found other ways of exerting their power over the system from swindling extra clothing allowance to refusing to attend meetings. Wyn and Whyte argue that young people are not rendered incapable by structural frameworks, but instead, they learn to operate within these structural constraints: 'It is our view that young people negotiate their own futures, lives and meanings, but they do so in the context of specific social, political and economic circumstances and processes' (Wyn and Whyte 1997:24). Such a finding had significant impact on the development of the analytical framework in that it stressed the agency the young people felt in shaping and controlling their resident groups.

The focus of this thesis is the young people's experiences within their resident groups. However these young people were operating within wider structural limitations. Indeed, although this thesis provides little direct discussion of these many structural constraints, the data provide insight into how some of these structures were challenged, resisted and also embodied.²⁸ Position can therefore best be understood as multi-layered with high status in one setting not necessarily being translated to

²⁸ See in particular Chapter Seven and the discussion of 'insider' and 'system' knowledge.

another context. Indeed despite young people in this research regarding themselves as in an 'enforced' low place within wider society, in their own everyday social world the organisation and allocation of position was controlled and negotiated by them.

Deviance and Subculture

Labelling 'Deviance'

Although the focus of this thesis is the 'inner world' of the residential groups the young people involved were still part of the 'outer world' of mainstream society. Indeed it may be argued that this 'outside world' had a significant impact on how residential life was experienced. The young people in this study talked throughout my fieldwork, not only of the preconceptions that they had had about residential care and the 'type' of young person who lived there, but also of the difficulties they had experienced in mainstream society as a result of their 'looked after' status. They spoke of feeling 'labelled' and considered themselves to be viewed by others solely as a young person 'in care'. As Neil, one of the young men involved in the study describes it:

It's like see when you ging doon the shops, it's like they watch you ken, ab'dy thinks 'oh here we go, here's the wee thief's' I mind one of the staff telling me that whenever there was washing stolen ken, off o' the lines, the folk would come straight to here ken. Straight away they'd be thinking 'it'll be those thief's fac the home'.

(Neil, Strathmore, Kitchen, 20th Februaury 1997)

Becker argues against the taken for granted notions of crime and criminal activities by suggesting the importance of these categories as subjective. It is the social processes by which the behaviour of individuals is labelled as 'deviant' and the consequences that such a label has on subsequent behaviour that is of interest. The social meanings that are attributed to certain acts, rather than the acts themselves, result in them being identified as 'deviant': 'Deviance is not a simple quality

present in some kinds of behaviour and absent in others. [It] is not a quality that lies in the behaviour itself, but in the interaction between the person who commits an act and those who respond to it' (Becker 1963:14).

In suggesting this approach Becker implies that it is not just the 'deviant' which must be investigated but also the 'social audience'; those who label the individual as 'deviant'. It is a select group of the members of this social audience who create the rules and values which allow for certain behaviours to be defined as 'abnormal' or 'criminal'. This, Becker argues, is closely related to distribution of power within a society. The 'rule makers' are not immune from 'rule breaking' but are subject to less surveillance by what he refers to as the agents of social control.

The application of deviant labels serves not only to punish but also allows the social audience to produce a sense of order in their social relations. Followers of this school of thought argue that individuals are categorised and labelled to provide an ease of understanding. These deviant labels not only affect the way in which individuals are regarded but also the way in which they regard themselves. Individuals are responded to in the light of the label. It becomes the defining characteristic rising above the other roles or 'identities' those individuals may have (e.g. the young person who steals is labelled a 'thief'). This behaviour becomes the prism through which the rest of his behaviour, roles and attitudes are judged.

The notion of the deviant subculture arose from the study of those individuals placed 'outside'. These were groups of people who were labelled in a similar way and who often participated in 'deviant' acts together. Rubington and Weinberg (1978) argue that: 'A subculture is apt to come

into being when people are in contact with one another, suffer a common fate, and have common interests ... When enough people become aware that they share such a problem, a deviant subculture can arise to provide a solution' (Rubington and Weinberg 1978: 273).

There appears to be a tendency within this school of thought to focus on the deviant act itself. It may be suggested that all behaviour, attitudes and values are seen through the prism of deviance therefore denying the existence of the 'whole' individual. For example, research may focus on the drug user with this label as the predominant characteristic. All other behaviours are then regarded with this drug use in mind. This emphasis on deviant acts extends to the study of the organisation of deviant groups. Such research has been heavily gendered, the majority of studies having concentrated on the activities of young men. Young women by contrast are regarded as deviant by association or as passive appendages to their male counterparts. The study of deviance has placed great stock on the aggressive or trickster behaviours that allow people status within their groups, again negating other aspects of interaction. The deviant group and its members are situated within a specific context and remain inter-linked throughout the research. We hear little of the drug user as, for example, a daughter, mother, son or friend.

Deviance and the Young Person in Residential Care

The bulk of the literature around deviance has concerned itself with 'criminal' activity, perhaps an over simplistic view of the concept of deviance. It may be more meaningful to associate the term with 'otherness'. With regard to this thesis the young people under study have in some ways been labelled by wider society as 'deviant'. Many of the young people argued that this had occurred, at

least in part, on grounds of their residential placement. This spatial element of their 'otherness' is rooted in the idea that they deviate from 'normal' society because they live outwith the family home and are cared for within an institutional setting ('normal' children are assumed to best be cared for within a family home). This relocation of children and young people is connected with notions that they have been removed as a form of punishment, because they are 'bad'. 'Badness' results not only from perceived criminal activity but also the 'bad' that has been done to them, making them different from others of the same age. By applying a deviancy model, the focus becomes the process by which this labelling has occurred rather than a study of the wider social context which, in the case of young people in care, suggests that there are many other children and young people at risk or in need of substitute care that remain within the family home. As a result of their hidden deviancy, be it their own behaviour or those caring for them, they remain within society rather than on its margins. It is in many ways 'being in care' that acts as the direct label rather than the deviancy itself.

Deviance as a theoretical model provides a helpful way of looking at the experiences of young people in residential care as they negotiate and interact with the wider social world. Their feeling of otherness inhibits their ability to interact with this world and strengthens the power and influence that the residential group may have. In this sense this form of labelling gives credence to Polsky's belief in the residential group as a 'primary group'. However if the primary group concept is accepted then the agency of individual young people and variety of their experiences in relations with the outside world is neglected. In terms of the focus of this thesis, the study of deviant groups or subcultures is limited to providing insight into the importance of the deviant acts rather than the whole individual and what he or she brings to the group. Indeed it highlights the belief that the

behaviour and values of residential care violates social norms. In this respect wider sociological writings on group organisations using this theoretical standpoint are not unlike those of Polsky. Deviance and deviant acts become the defining principle of the group and its functions.

Finding a Way Out

Identifying Limitations

The theoretical thinking presented thus far allows for some degree of insight into the data generated by my fieldwork. From the data, it emerged that there was an acknowledgement by the young people of the importance to them as individuals of the resident group. Not only did this compare to some of the suggestions made by Polsky in his discussion of the primary group concept it also related to the sense of marginalisation and stigma suggested by theories of deviance. The ways in which the groups operated and the resultant positions or roles that were granted to the young people did not however tally with the model presented by Polsky, nor did it appear to be based purely on deviant acts or a set of shared valued or norms. Position and the granting of position was a central element of the organisation of the groups studied in both Brunswick and Strathmore. However the means of achieving this appeared to be subtle and ever changing.

The theoretical approaches that I considered appeared to provide little acknowledgement of the fluidity of the groups studied nor of the wider structural limitations and influences on them. Indeed they gave limited insight into the apparently complex ways in which the position of group members was negotiated and achieved. There appears to be a lack of significance given by these models to the biographies of the participants and indeed the history of the groups under study. In general

terms they dislocate those under study from their wider social frame resulting in a concentration on one element of the young people's social worlds.

This thesis is concerned with exploring the ways in which young people living together in a children's home organise and structure their resident groups and the value and meaning they place on living as a group. Initially the notion of status and roles became the obvious analytical tool. However the young people were difficult to categorise and appeared to demonstrate a number of behaviours which resulted in status yet were often switching these behaviours amongst them.

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Emerging from the data there appeared to be a significant relationship between the situation or context, the behaviour that was demonstrated and the individuals who participated in the interaction. Therefore it was felt that to analyse the group in a 'subcultural' way would deny the importance of this relationship and the repertoire of behaviours and knowledge which had emerged from the data. Instead it would in fact result in a highly structured framework of analysis into which the data would be 'fitted'.

Cultural Capital

It was at this point in the analysis that I turned to the work of Pierre Bourdieu. Initially my interest was aroused as a result of discovering the concept of 'cultural capital'. Although the empirical foundation for this was the educational institutions of France, rather different from children's homes in Scotland (!), there were interesting potential comparisons. Bourdieu argued for the importance of an individual's cultural history in relation to their progress through the education system. He suggested that if an individual was in possession of middle class, bourgeois 'cultural capital' he/she

would progress more smoothly through the middle class dominated structure of academia. This acknowledgement of an individual history and its relationship to dominant culture which in turn impacts on current experience appeared relevant to much of my data. It emerged that the young people placed great importance on previous experience of care, shared experience etc. and would seek out this 'history' from new residents. It appeared that those who had been in the care system prior to their admission to the units studied had already gained some knowledge of the group structure, allowing an ease of access and acceptance by the group. The notion of dominance may therefore extend beyond class to include dominant 'type' or behaviours. This though clearly not cultural capital, could be regarded as capital none the less.

Bourdieu argued that everyday life is concerned with the pursuit of 'power' at every level. 'Power' may relate to that which allows the individual a sense of control over his/her own destiny or daily practices and is achieved through the demonstration and accumulation of capital: 'The source resides in the actions and reactions of agents who, unless they exclude themselves from the game, have no other choice than to struggle to maintain or improve their position in the field ...' (Bourdieu 1990: 193). Indeed there is an intrinsic signification within his work that the motivating force underpinning social life is the pursuit of status and power. It is capital that serves as the means by which such status or power is pursued (Calhoun 1995:141).

In his analysis Bourdieu takes into account individual interaction, individual history and the wider social structure. He responds to the fluidity of interactions and relationships and acknowledges the importance of situation or location: 'efforts to find ... the source of their symbolic efficacy are destined to fail as long as they do not establish the relationship between the properties of discourses,

the properties of the person who pronounces them and the properties of the institution which authorizes him to pronounce them' (Bourdieu 1992:111).

His work spans anthropology, philosophy, sociology and cultural studies and is an intimidating prospect to study. However one of the central themes throughout his work is the attempt to understand and explain the relationship between 'subjectivity' and the objective social world. He attempts to oppose agency structure dualism, bringing together these notions through the relationship between 'habitus', field and practices. It is these central themes on which I wish to focus.

Habitus, Field and Practices

Habitus is a vital component of Bourdieu's attempt to deconstruct the agency- structure dualism. He regards social life as a 'mutually constituting interaction of structures, dispositions and actions whereby social structures and embodied (therefore situated) knowledge of those structures produce enduring orientations to action which, in turn, are constitutive of social structures' (Postone et al. 1993:4). Practice does not however follow directly from these orientations rather it is improvised and structured by culture, personal trajectories and an ability to 'play the game'. Habitus is the sum of this - it is Bourdieu's attempt to capture theoretically 'the mastery that people have of their social situation, while grounding that mastery itself socially' (Postone et al. 1993:4).

Habitus can be viewed as the embodied history which May (1996) argues is apparent and exists in social practices. It can be objectively viewed as the embodiment of perception, thinking, feeling, evaluating, speaking and acting that in turn structures the 'practices' of individuals in relation to their behaviours and verbal and non-verbal communications (Krais 1993). Central to the

understanding of the habitus is its 'unconscious' nature. An individual is not aware of the ways in which the habitus shapes their behaviours and interactions: "Socially competent performances are produced as a matter of routine, without explicit reference to a body of codified knowledge, and without the actors necessarily 'knowing what they are doing'" (Jenkins 1992:76). Thus the habitus is an unconscious entity, influencing our interactions without conscious thought. Bourdieu suggests that: 'the habitus implies a sense of one's place but also a sense of the other's place' (Bourdieu 1990:131). As it is the product of history, the habitus can change as the individual encounters further experiences. It can therefore be modified or reinforced through everyday life: 'As people succeed or fail, meet with approval or disapproval, in trying to carry out their manifold projects of daily life, they may adjust slightly the traditional information they have received from various others in the course of previous interactions' (Calhoun 1995:149).

If we regard habitus as providing us with a 'feel for the game' it must be seen in tandem with the game itself or as Bourdieu describes it a 'field'. May (1996:128) argues that there is a two-way relationship between the habitus and the field, one impacting on and shaping the other. The field shapes the habitus as a result of its position as the place of embodiment and in turn it is the habitus which constitutes the field as meaningful. In his discussions on the notion of 'field' Bourdieu acknowledges the taken for granted fields that are accepted as being closed or restricted communities of knowledge or skill, for example the artistic field, the scientific field, the religious field. Underpinning these, he argues, is the quest for power: "... the field of power informs all other fields and thus constitutes a 'meta-field'" (May 1996:129). The notion of field however extends to that of any given social context where power and the struggle for power is a key characteristic. Indeed it is this very engagement with the struggle for power (not always taken on

willingly) that reproduces a field of relations. Lash regards the field as a site of 'collective symbolic struggles and individual strategies' (Lash 1993:197). The struggle centres on the opportunity and ability to produce cultural 'goods' which, on production, may lead to a position of relative power (Lash 1993). As Bourdieu argues: 'The source resides in the actions and reactions of agents who, unless they exclude themselves from the game, have no other choice than to struggle to maintain or improve their position in the field, thus helping to bring to bear on all the others the weight of constraints, often experienced as intolerable, which stem from antagonistic coexistence' (Bourdieu 1990:193).

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Practices are the result of the relationship between these two concepts and refer to what the individual actually does. They are located in space and time with temporality being an axiomatic feature of practice. Jenkins argues that: 'time is both a constraint and a resource for social interaction - time and the sense of it is socially constructed' (Jenkins 1992:69). In other words practices can only be thought of in the context of where and when, of time and space. Time and space are however socially constructed and cannot be taken for granted. Bourdieu argues that practices are fundamentally a cognitive operation, a setting to work of thought that can only refer to the function of the 'action', social structures or classifications (Bourdieu 1977). Practices are arguably the most 'conscious' of all the elements of human behaviour. Bourdieu is therefore arguing that whilst we can clearly understand and indicate what we have done we may not be so aware of why we did it.

In theories of deviance, practices are usually seen to be governed by rules. Bourdieu does not dismiss this notion out of hand. However he does suggest that by identifying rules, the ways in

which researchers view individual practices are in many ways overly restricted and ordered. He prefers to use the notion of strategies and in so doing gives room to both the freedom and spontaneity yet also the restriction and limitation that is characteristic of human interaction. The conscious and the unconscious are acknowledged as playing a part and therefore Bourdieu moves beyond purely observable phenomena as the arena for interaction²⁹. Bourdieu argues that individuals generate structures, using and negotiating with existing structures to achieve this. The use of strategies as opposed to rules allows for the fluidity of exchanges and behaviours as well as providing scope to acknowledge the many complex motivations for their demonstration (Krais 1993). Bourdieu further dismisses the concept of 'role' by his use of 'habitus'. Habitus relies on the structures and dominations being incorporated or embodied rather than referring to a set of norms or expectations which exist independently or externally to the agent. Strategies allow for a sense of generativity rather than a set of fixed, finite rules. Individual behaviour will be influenced by expectations of behaviour. However these are not fixed and change through the individual's interaction with them.

Taking Issue with Bourdieu

Bourdieu is not without his critics. His style of language has been widely criticised as being so dense as to restrict common access to his work (Wacquant 1989). Jenkins (1992) begins his book on Bourdieu by stating: 'Idiosyncratic usages and neologisms, allied to frequently repetitive, long sentences which are burdened down with a host of sub-clauses and discursive detours, combine with complicated diagrams and visual schemes to confront the reader with a task that many, whether they be undergraduates, postgraduates or professional social scientists, find daunting' (Jenkins 1992:9).

²⁹ This moves Bourdieu firmly away from interactionist thinking for example theories of deviance and labelling.

It is certainly true that Bourdieu is difficult to read. One reason for this, beyond stylistic choice, is his development of words and concepts specific to his writing. Interestingly in a recent seminar Turner suggested that Bourdieu should be read from secondary sources as his direct works were so problematic to read (Turner 1999). In my own use of Bourdieu I found the use of secondary sources helpful in the first instance, primarily as a means to familiarise myself with the language and concepts used by Bourdieu. This allowed me greater access to his work. The danger in doing as Turner suggests is that we are left to trust the secondary source as giving a true reflection of Bourdieu's writing. Wacquant (1989) however argues that Bourdieu has been frequently misinterpreted and misrepresented.

Many of Bourdieu's theoretical tools, for example 'habitus' rely on the unconscious nature of much of daily life. This leaves many social scientists uncomfortable with its 'unresearchable' status. The quest within social science to explain through 'observable' means sits uncomfortably in many ways with his work. So much of understanding both habitus and cultural capital lies in the acknowledgement of the importance of unobservable past history or experience and of an acceptance of the embodiment of the past and the ways in which this affects both the present and the future. As previously mentioned Bourdieu has been criticised for his use of language and terminology. This criticism has extended beyond the use of his own personally developed terms to his use of more widely used concepts. Brubaker (1985) for example found fault with his use of the term 'class'. Within Bourdieu's writing it covers a myriad of attributes not just the designation of a particular social group. He frequently uses the term metaphorically to explain all types of social structures e.g. gender, ethnicity, generation etc. As Brubaker points out this becomes not only confusing but also unhelpful.

Like Foucault's, Bourdieu's writing can appear vague with links between concepts appearing weak (Jenkins 1992). The attempt to overcome the agency-structure debate, allowing for an account of all influences on practices, creates such lack of clarity. It counteracts the rigidity of many existing theoretical stances but as a result appears somewhat abstract. One significant point is that unlike Giddens, to whom he is often compared, Bourdieu's theoretical stance is grounded in the empirical work that he has conducted throughout his academic career (Calhoun 1995). Bourdieu is in fact uncomfortable with the notion that he has been responsible for the development of a theory, rather he considers that: "There is no doubt a theory in my work, or better, a set of thinking tools visible through the results they yield, but it is not built as such". (Bourdieu 1989: 14) It is with this in mind that a selection of Bourdieu's tools have been utilised in the analysis of my data.

Using Bourdieu in the Analysis

From examining the data it became evident that 'position' within the group was granted as a result of both a subtle negotiation between individual members and the context in which they were operating. At a simplistic level, young people had various 'competences', which were acknowledged as valuable by the group. Unlike roles however, they were fluid and interchangeable and were not restricted to the repertoire of individual members of the group. For example after a difficult telephone conversation with her father Sharon entered the Quiet Room tearful and distressed. Hilary immediately comforted her, cuddling her and smoothing her hair. For that moment in time the group granted Hilary a high position because they admired and respected her appropriate skill of support and had given her the opportunity to demonstrate it. The use of support and advice had been appropriate for the context and was valued by the group members. After Sharon regained composure Bryony offered her knowledge of how to pass on the information

Sharon had received from her father to the social work department. Again for that moment in time, by using her knowledge of the 'system' Bryony was granted a higher position by the group. The significant group member therefore is one, who, at any given moment in time, displays the knowledge or skill appropriate to what Bourdieu would refer to as the 'field'.

A second relevant aspect of Bourdieu's work is the notion of strategies. Like Bourdieu, I was uncomfortable with the rigidity of group rules. The young people developed, through the habitus, a shared meaning of the field and the expectations of behaviour. From the point of admission and indeed sometimes beforehand they developed and shaped the skills and behaviours necessary to progress and survive the rigours of residential living. Previous knowledge of residential care gained either through friends or relations or indeed through personal experience became embodied in the habitus and influenced the ways in which their placement in one or other of the two units studied was experienced. The ways in which the groups were created and managed became part of this habitus and the methods of gaining position and acceptance became shared strategies. These strategies were experientially learned rather than taught and were not rigid in their imposition or durability. There was a spontaneous nature to interactions, which is supported in Bourdieu's use of strategies. Although formal rules did exist these were very much the creation of the adult members of staff³⁰. Indeed rules or knowledge of these institutional rules by members of the group became in itself a competency or skill which could be brought into play if the social context or field allowed.

The data were therefore analysed by identifying what appeared to be the main 'competences' employed by group members. Lash (1993) argues that the habitus serves two main functions. These

³⁰ See the discussion of 'insider knowledge' in Chapter Seven.

functions can be seen as supply or production and demand or reception. The production of capital creates a 'disposition to actions'. Bourdieu himself frequently refers to social or intellectual competence as being a crucial element of social 'survival'. Competence he argues is neither conscious nor unconscious, rather it lies somewhere in between. As Jenkins explains: 'If you have to think about what you are doing, it is more likely to be done clumsily or wrong' (Jenkins 1992: 179). Competence is seated firmly within a social context rather than in individual cognitive ability and therefore can be externally judged by the social world as competent or incompetent.

From my data, it appeared that the areas of competence displayed and accepted by the group had, when presented in the right social context, direct impact on the quest for power in terms of the way in which the 'demonstrator' was regarded for that moment in time. These areas I have termed "social currencies". The social currencies identified were named as follows: Support and Advice, System Knowledge, Insider Knowledge, Humour, Smoking, Touch, Space, Verbal and Physical Aggression, External Network and Sexual/Relationship Knowledge. The data suggested that the way in which they were utilised and the impact which they had on the group was contextually and temporally located. This allowed for the ways in which the perceived position of the group members was constantly changing and highlighted the wide repertoire of behaviour and/or knowledge that was valued by the group.

I began both the data collection and the analysis with the belief that the young women and young men would behave in similar ways. I considered that they would have equal access to power and control and would use similar methods to achieve this. To an extent this was a reaction to what I had considered a gendered account of young people. Studies of young people have tended to focus

on one or other gender. Such a move has begun to balance the predominance of studies of young men and to create a better sense of the range of experiences of being young. Whilst this has been a much needed move it has resulted in a somewhat segregated picture of youth. The second, and perhaps more influential reason for my decision to take this position was my own inexperience of conducting research. I was concerned that by having preconceived ideas of the differences between the young men and young women I would fail to analyse the data correctly. By taking this position I had to have evidence to 'convince' me of gender differences that existed. The data showed that both young men and young women had access to the full range of social currencies, although they may have employed them to differing degrees and in differing ways, and that both gender groups therefore had access to position.

Social currencies are one method of illustrating the complex way in which young people gain and maintain position. These currencies are not randomly bestowed on individual young people. Rather they are demonstrations of knowledge or behaviour, which, if used in the appropriate social context or field, create a sense of 'respect' or credibility from fellow residents. It is the young people themselves who deem currencies to be of value to the group and therefore to grant the users of currency, position.

The Development of Social Currencies

The previous sections have highlighted the theoretical insights which were used to 'make sense' of the data generated by the young people. During my fieldwork it became apparent that position was temporally granted to group members and that this resulted from displays of competence which were in direct relation to social context. Competences were therefore acknowledged only in so far as

they related to what was occurring in the social world. They became 'active' at times where the context allowed for their display. Social currencies therefore may be regarded as active competencies demonstrated in the temporal and social context of the group. In relation to Bourdieu, the notion of social currencies provides a flexible amalgamation of his use of the terms competence and strategies whilst acknowledging the impact of habitus and field. The young people brought with them knowledge and/or skills that influenced their quest for power in the field of residential living. Such knowledge was often translated into strategies, both in terms of expectations of group behaviour as well as a means to gain respect and power.

Gaining Value

As previously stated, during my fieldwork the value that was granted to each social currency changed over time. Indeed it may be that the currencies that were demonstrated during my fieldwork are no longer apparent in either unit. Critically however, I would argue that the relationship between demonstration of social currency, social context and social position remains the same. That is to say that although the actual currencies in play may change in value or indeed in nature there will always be social currencies in operation. From the data it appeared that the experience of group living could not be separated from the individual member's life before his/her admission nor could the experience be made distinct from the wider social and structural elements that remained in place. The value given to social currencies by the group therefore appeared to have much to do with the influences impacting on group living.

The data highlighted the importance of the individual biography or 'habitus' that the members brought to the group. During the period of study the group in Strathmore was made up of young

men and young women who had had widely varied familial experiences. At the point of my departure however, the membership of the group was beginning to change significantly to one that was made up almost entirely of young men with a history of violence within the family home. As such the value of the social currency which relates to physical and verbal aggression received a higher value within the resident group. Interestingly the data showed that during the initial months of fieldwork this currency was also demonstrated frequently. It appeared that as a result of pressure from the majority of members and the discharge of one of its key demonstrators, its value became increasingly diminished.

There appeared to be transfer, through the habitus, of the outside world into the units. The young people brought with them their own embodied history in the form of the habitus and had expectations of behaviour that they placed upon the young people and staff in the units. Many of the young people arrived expecting a 'testing out' of their physical strength and courage. This expectation appeared to be derived from the perception that they had held concerning residential care as well as their own experiences of day to day family life. 'New admissions' were frequently seen to be demonstrating their physical strength or aggressive behaviour as a (misplaced) means of gaining respect and safety. The majority of existing residents initially tolerated such displays but gradually, through the demonstrations of 'appropriate' behaviour and direct challenges to those involved in unwelcome or inappropriate displays, such behaviours were reduced. The 'agency' of the young people therefore, was instrumental in creating a social environment wherein certain social currencies were given value.

A further influence on the 'field' was that of the staff culture. In both units much emphasis was given to instilling in the young people the notion of individual responsibility for behaviour. Young people were challenged in their use of violence. Indeed the staff regarded one of their main aims as providing 'alternative' adult role models of behaviour. The staff groups in both units were concerned that they be seen to be providing a united, consistent approach to those in their care. Both staff groups had an obvious respect for individual social work practice and there was an openness displayed in both the support and challenge of team members. Staff were openly affectionate toward each other and there was a tangible sense of 'caring' that extended beyond care for the young people to the staff teams themselves. This notion of 'collectivity' I would argue was taken on by the young people in their own group cultures. I found the culture of both staff groups to be of a supportive nature with great emphasis being placed on the holistic nature of group care³¹. This notion of caring for all members of the milieu was again one that was assimilated into the group culture of the young people. Furthermore, unlike many institutions, neither Brunswick nor Strathmore relied heavily on a hierarchical managerial framework. All staff members were regarded as competent and there was no sense of a 'wait 'til the boss sees you' mentality. Young people were sanctioned, praised, comforted and challenged by all members of the staff team, regardless of gender, age or experience. From such observations it is argued that the type of staff culture that is in place will be translated to some degree into the creation of a young people's culture founded on similar principles.

³¹ The cultures of the staff groups were in no way systematically researched. The comments made regarding the practices of staff members in relation to team work and team membership are based solely on my experience of living in the units. Staff members would regularly enquire about each other's health, home and work life. This would occur both in front of the young people and in staff-only interactions. During the hand-over meetings that I witnessed staff would query each other's practices and discuss collective strategies for working with young people and their families.

As previously mentioned the use of residential care by the wider social work department further impacted on the culture of the resident groups. Strathmore, with its higher turn-over of residents, saw the value and use of social currencies in relatively constant flux. Significantly during the most 'settled' period at Strathmore it was found that the group placed value on the more 'caring' currencies rather than those reliant on aggression. This may be linked to the perceptions that young people had of residential care. If a significant number of young people are admitted simultaneously and bring with them the notion that they must prove their might against a resident group that they regard as violent or deviant then it is more likely that such aggressive behaviour will be demonstrated.

The type of social currency evident was, for the most part, influenced by the social context. As mentioned previously those who were new to the units and to residential care were more likely to display 'inappropriate' currencies and in fact lose position as a result. Social currencies, like Bourdieu's notion of strategies, appeared to be experientially learned rather than taught. There were however points in the daily routine of the units where certain social currencies regularly appeared. These included the use of verbal (and at times, physical) aggression at 'transition' times such as meal times, getting up times and bedtimes. Such demonstrations were not directed solely at young people but also toward the staff. Bedtimes were a point in the day when young people wanted to talk about home and families and therefore the currency of support and advice was prominent.

The values given to social currencies were therefore affected by a number of factors, from individual 'desire' to wider structural pressure. Crucially, the culture and practices of the residents

cannot be regarded without granting them a social context. Each individual brought with him/her his/her own internalised experience of behaviour in the form of his/her 'habitus'. Fellow residents, the staff culture and the wider social work system acted to modify such behaviour, acting as forces within the 'field'. Arguably, the perceptions held by the groups studied of the wider societal expectation of behaviour of young people in general, and young people in residential care more specifically, also held sway.

The Complexity of Social Currencies In Action

Social Currencies as Embodied Knowledge

Much of sociological and specifically ethnographic research rests on the notion of behaviour as an observable phenomenon. Bourdieu, however, recognises the 'unconscious' as playing a significant part in all human behaviour and sites it firmly within the realm of social research. Indeed he regards the dichotomy of the 'hidden' and the 'visible' elements of interaction as fundamental in any exploration of human behaviour: 'Social reality exists, so to speak, twice, in things and in minds, in fields and in habitus, outside and inside of agents' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 127).

During the initial months of analysis, as the concept of 'social currencies' was being developed, the emphasis was placed on the observable behaviours that appeared to have influence on the way in which fellow residents regarded individual young people. On further analysis however, it was recognised that young people did not always respond directly to the behaviour of others as some uninvolved entity but rather they were also aware of the embodied currencies that were in play. It became clear that there was an unspoken quality to group interaction, which, although resting on the

notion of social currencies, was not based on verbal exchanges. There appeared instead to be a collective consciousness concerning the individual use of currencies that became incorporated in not only individual but also group practices.

Such consciousness can be regarded in a similar light to that of Bourdieu's notion of 'habitus'. Bourdieu argues that habitus refers to the embodiment of individual history which in turn manifests itself in the way one talks, moves, makes sense of ones environment. Indeed he stresses that habitus is instilled as much by experience as by teaching (Calhoun 1995). With regard to this group living environment, knowledge of fellow residents' behaviours, responses and uses of social currencies became incorporated, through experience, into the individual member's habitus. As my own field work progressed I became increasingly aware of the shared knowledge that existed regarding young people's strengths and weaknesses in relation to their use of currencies and the ways in which the context triggered such 'unconscious' responses.

This notion of 'latent' currencies did not restrict the range of social currencies used by individual members. However it did provide a further dimension to the understanding of the ways in which they were applied. For example, as my stay at Strathmore extended, Bryony became increasingly repetitive in her reports of distress or crisis. Such repetition in turn affected the responses that were invoked so that by the end of my fieldwork her distress was more likely to be responded to with the currencies of aggression or humour rather than that of support and advice. In other words the group had collectively incorporated a knowledge of Bryony's behaviour which in turn influenced their response. As Neil explains:

She never shuts up. Its always the same bloody drama, drama....Thing is Ruth half the time I dinnae even believe her noo and like if she is getting into that much bother she's bringing it on herself. I mean she must be. Its all for attention I think. Ken, nae just fae us lot but fae the staff too....I used tae bother aboot it, ken speak to her and that but nae noo, noo I just tell her tae shut up or take the piss oot o her.

(Neil, Quiet Room, Strathmore, June 1997)

This collective consciousness also came into play when the habitus of the young person involved was such that the context or field was strongly affected. This was particularly the case in relation to the 'latent' use of the currency of aggression. By the way in which he walked, sat, looked at the group members, Fraser was able to demonstrate his response to the context by subtle yet equally powerful means. The young people developed a knowledge of, in this case Fraser, which, through experience, taught them that these latent demonstrations of a use of currency (in this case verbal and physical aggression) could become a more powerful display should his position, through the use of this currency, be challenged. Significantly Fraser most commonly demonstrated such behaviour toward the young women.

From closer analysis of the data it appeared that social currencies, although most frequently observable in nature, could also be used in a 'latent' way. This unspoken nature of group living is far more subtle and therefore requires a period of cohabitation to identify. New admissions, and I include myself in this, required a period of adjustment where this understanding could be shared by fellow residents or learned through experience. Often much of the initial conflict within the group experienced by new admissions was as a result of their failure quickly to gather this knowledge and identify that these subtle interactions were taking place. In many ways the development of this knowledge relates directly to Bourdieu's acknowledgement that individuals require to develop a 'feel for the game' as well as a knowledge of the game itself.

Social Currencies and the Wider Social World

The use of social currencies as a means of operating within the resident groups was apparent in both units studied. Interestingly, although young people in both units appeared to demonstrate the same currencies, the value placed on them varied. One reason for this variation relates to the differing relationship that the young people had with the 'outside world'. Young people who were involved in social or organised activities outwith the unit referred to the practices of the members of such groups in a similar way to that of the resident groups. In describing events they would illustrate the context in which the interactions took place and then go on to describe the responses of those involved. Often reference would be made as to how the 'actors' were regarded. Such regard appeared to be based on these individuals' responses to the situation. The following quote from Anna, describing an evening spent with friends from outwith the unit, was typical:

It was totally ignorant like ... we were at Dean's and she came in in an awffy [awful] state saying that Jason wasnae wanting to go wi her any more. Dean just started on her, ken saying stuff like 'leave him alone, what did you expect' ken all that, like it was her fault. Paula just telt him, ken to shut it...It's a shame for the lassie. She was o'er at her, gave her a bossie [cuddle] and that. She's a nice lassie, like, Paula.

(Anna, Living Room, Brunswick, July 1997)

In this report Anna remarks on the inappropriate behaviour of Dean in this social context and goes on to identify the appropriate currency, that of support and advice, that was used by Paula. The significance of Paula's behaviour reaches beyond her actions to extend to an appreciation of her position and respect as 'a nice lassie'.

This translation of social currencies to an exterior setting was more apparent within Brunswick than Strathmore. Indeed by using stories from the 'outside' young people at Brunswick were able to

reinforce their beliefs in 'appropriate' behaviour to other members of the resident group. This in turn influenced the values placed upon the currencies in operation within the unit. Such influence was rather more limited in the case of Strathmore. In many ways this unit was far more closed in nature than Brunswick. The young people at Strathmore had, during my fieldwork, limited contact with the 'outside world'. Indeed the majority of relationships, whether they were founded on the basis of friendship or 'dating', were established 'in house'. The reasons for this were multiple. However they were underpinned by the difficulties that the young people faced in accessing the social world beyond the unit. All the young people resident at Strathmore, with the exception of one, were originally from outwith the town in which the unit was located. Their reception into residential care had meant not only a loss of family but also of friends, peers, pets, clubs and community. Their sole link with their new community was therefore the unit itself.

This marginalised position resulted in the resident group being the most powerful source of peer support and identification for young people at Strathmore. During my fieldwork the majority of young people were involved in the transition from school to work and therefore spent a great deal of their time in the unit. Although staff encouraged daily visits to the job centre this was regularly ignored or was time spent outwith the unit but in the company of fellow residents. Those of school age had more varied experiences. None of these residents attended mainstream education. One attended a residential school that was 45 miles away from the unit, boarding there during the week and returning to the unit at weekends. The two other school aged residents were arguably also in a period of transition whilst the social work department attempted to access appropriate educational settings.

One of the direct results of this was that those in residence at Strathmore had few relationships with other young people outwith the unit. They spent the majority of their time with each other and, despite the opportunity to spend this time in the town, they remained within the confines of the unit. The young people identified a number of reasons for this behaviour. These ranged from the perception that there was nothing to do and nowhere to go in the town itself to the belief that they would be assaulted or bullied if they chose to try to access the other young people or resources in the community. The 'outside world' to these young people was perceived as a threatening place where they would be stigmatised and misunderstood.

As a result of the insular nature of this resident group, the might of the group culture and the social currencies that were in play became magnified. The power to ostracise members and equally to include them rested with the 'group'. As such the members had no choice but to participate and therefore the power that the group held was maintained. A further dimension to this was the perpetuation of the notion that they would not be accepted by the outside world. This anxiety was passed on as 'truth' to new admissions and served to reinforce their dependence on the group itself. It became apparent that new admissions with a care history that included residential care more easily acquired the skills in interaction that were founded on social currencies than those who had had no experience of group living. Indeed it may be argued that such insight was gained, through experience, real or observed, of the consequences of rejecting the group culture. Without an 'outside world' in which to participate and draw strength from the resident group became the all-powerful source of belonging, acceptance and social identity.

Conclusions

This chapter has attempted to illustrate the development of social currencies as a means of illustrating the ways in which the young people gained status within their groups. It has been argued that young people operate within a culture where certain skills or competencies, if used in the appropriate social context, are granted value and the individual displaying such competencies is granted status. The development and use of social currencies is affected not only by individual agency, translated into desire or wants, but also by wider structures such as staff culture and the wider social work system.

By drawing on the work of Bourdieu a conceptual analysis was developed which allowed for the relationship between social context (or field) and behaviour that was so clearly apparent in the data. This framework also allowed for the temporal nature of interactions to be acknowledged as well as the part played by the unspoken or embodied knowledge that is shared by the groups' members. Bourdieu allows for the history and experience of the young person as well as the social context in which he/she is operating to have a direct influence on the development of status. He acknowledges the transitory nature of interaction and the fluidity of group processes. By developing the notions of habitus and strategies into the identification of social currencies, the themes emerging from the data were able to embrace the active part that these currencies were found to play. The behaviours and knowledge which were identified as themes acted to influence the ways in which young people were regarded and it is this 'bringing to life' of these elements which the work of Bourdieu has influenced in the course of this thesis.

In discussing the use of social currencies this chapter has demonstrated the variation between the two units and has argued that this had much to do with the external relationships maintained by the young people and the period of settled time which was afforded to the group. The aim of this chapter has been to recognise the complexity of group culture and to identify my attempts at moving beyond a rigid, structural explanation of group organisation. It has illustrated the journey that took place in developing the analysis and the various sources and theories that were considered in an attempt to make sense of the data. Social currencies were used as a method of ordering data and does not claim to be a newly developed theoretical explanation of group structure. Significantly the model of social currencies is one which the young people were able to recognise as representing their group experience. During my feedback sessions both groups identified with the currencies that were discussed. They agreed that there were no fixed patterns of position. Rather the way in which their fellow residents saw them had much to do with the specific context in which they were operating. As Allie explained on my second day in residence:

There's nae top dog here, mair like all of us are top dogs but all at different times. Sometimes like I ken stuff that will help someb'dy oot. Ab'dy is looking at me ken as the expert, ken its a good feeling like. It doesnae last long though cos see in here nothing does. All of a sudden we're on tae the next thing. Well I suppose its fairer ken, we all get the chance at ab'dy looking up tae us. I woudnae like tae be like a boss a the time ken and I'll tell you I woudnae hae ony'body being the boss o' me.....We're just like the staff, ab'dy is an expert some o' the time (laughs)

Chapter Six

The Routines and Rhythms of Residential Life

Ward (1993) in his framework for analysing residential and day care settings, states that routine 'consists of the whole patterns of arrangements for daily living, including both formal and informal activity' (Ward 1993:38). He argues that one way of understanding routine as it operates in practice, is to divide it into distinct elements. These he identifies as 'set-pieces', 'in-between times' and 'critical incidents'. It is useful, for the purpose of this chapter, to examine what behaviours or events occur within each of these elements and to consider the ways in which it might be an effective framework in which to present data regarding the routines in both Strathmore and Brunswick.

Ward argues that 'set pieces' consist of central and regularly occurring events. Such events are in the main designed to involve and include the residents but do also incorporate activities which involve staff members only, such as staff meetings or administrative tasks. The ways in which these events are scheduled and allocated time serves as the framework of the unit's routine as a whole.

'In between times', by contrast, are those periods which fall between the scheduled 'set pieces'.

Time here is less formally structured both for the residents and the staff. In 'good residential practice' Ward argues that the scheduling or controlling of these 'in between times' should be monitored and reviewed and, if necessary, filled with planned activities or interventions if the needs of the clients warrant it. Such intervention prevents the development of the 'empty hours' (Oswin 1973) during which residents are left unattended and unstimulated to pass 'great oceans of unplanned time'. Finally Ward presents the argument that within residential life not all events can be planned or expected. These he regards as 'critical incidents', critical in that they present to the worker unplanned situations where intervention and decision making are required.

Ward's framework is useful in that it presents to the reader the notion that residential life is multi-layered and that despite there being a formalised or planned 'routine' there are many different patterns of behaviours or events occurring. From a practitioner's perspective, this framework gives insight into the ways in which workers shape and define time to residents. The distinction made between planned and unplanned time is a useful one and one that the following chapter seeks to explore in relation to the two units studied.

The formal routines that were enacted in Strathmore and Brunswick ordered and shaped the day for the young people living in both the units studied. 'Routine' in this context suggests a systematic, planned control of time and relates to what Ward defines as 'set pieces'. It encompassed the regularly occurring events that gave understanding and set expectations of behaviour on the part of both the young people and the staff. Indeed, many of these 'key moments' were devised by the

adult members of residential living as a means of regularising and normalising young people's behaviour.

It is essential when examining the ways in which the staff controlled time to look also at the ways in which time was managed by the young people. There was no one patterning of time over which the residents had no control. Time was multi-layered and shaped by both residents and staff. Adams (1994) suggests that social scientists need to be cognisant of the various aspects of time and the ways in which they relate to one another. She argues that social scientists must look beyond 'clock time' to reflect on the complexity of times. Not only should the researcher be aware of the ways in which time controls our subjects but he/she should also develop an understanding of the ways in which our subjects shape and use time (Adam 1995, Hassard 1990).

Unlike Ward, I found that time was not divided into such distinct and separate segments as that of 'set pieces' and 'in between times'. Such rhythms differed from routines as they were unwritten and often unspoken patterns of behaviour that were, in the case of the young people, created by the young people themselves. As such they were more likely to be subject to change and evolution without requiring consultation through any formalised process. Many of the rhythms that existed did not stand as distinct from more formalised 'routines' but wove between or on top of the routine behaviours that were set up by staff. For example young people habitually left the dining table after a meal to smoke. The young people created such patterning of behaviour themselves. During my time at Strathmore the ways in which such a 'rhythm' was enacted varied. There was a period of time when young people would leave the table immediately after eating their food. By contrast there was also a period of time where young people would linger after the meal was finished to chat

with each other and staff. The ordering and timing of the smoking event was therefore shaped by the young people's actions and desire rather than imposed by staff members. The habitual activities displayed by young people did however have to take account of the formal routines that existed within the units. As a result such behaviours occurred around the control of time as laid down by the institutions.

The routines and rhythms of residential life set the stage for the organisation of the young people's resident group. It was within these patterns of time that group positioning was negotiated and which afforded the context in which social currencies could be activated. The 'work' which these currencies did, in terms of group positioning, is discussed in later chapters, but it is useful in providing a back drop to present in more detail the routines and rhythms that were in place in both Brunswick and Strathmore.

24 Hours at Strathmore

The following section sets out to present the routines and rhythms that existed at Strathmore. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, routines may be defined as those regularised events or expectations of behaviour that were enforced to control and create order in the unit. Such routines were designed and often implemented by the staff group. By contrast, the rhythms of daily life were those behaviours of the young people that they themselves had set in place and which were more likely to be subject to change or offer opportunities to opt out. This section aims to present to the reader both the 'front and back stage' behaviours (Goffman 1959) of the young people. Front stage work is considered to be that which the young people did in public view of the adult staff whilst backstage work encompasses those behaviours and actions which were kept away from the

staff gaze. Both these front stage and back stage activities are examined in more detail in the following chapters. This chapter sets out to introduce the reader to the way in which time structuring affected the opportunity for the divide between front and back stage work.

Getting Up

Mornings at Strathmore began in direct and indirect ways for the young people. The house would begin to waken at 7a.m. with staff getting up and showered. Often the first sounds in the morning would be that of the fire doors opening and closing as the staff moved from their bedrooms to the shower room. The top floor of Strathmore was in an L shape with heavy fire doors dividing the L with similar doors at the top of each of the two flights of stairs leading to the ground floor (see Appendix 2a). My bedroom was in the middle of the shorter corridor and I shared this space with two young women, both of whom were in part-time education. This heavily influenced my experience of morning as those in the longer corridor often complained of the noise coming not only from the staff but also from one young person's bedroom. This young man had to get up very early every morning for work. Although he had an alarm clock he often relied on staff to wake him and this would normally take more than one attempt. Once awake, he would put on his radio and head for the bathroom.

Staff members wakened all the young people. The ways in which they were wakened depended on the young people themselves and the staff involved. Some of the young people chose to keep their bedroom doors locked at night and would therefore be woken by a knock on the door and a quiet 'good morning'. Others preferred staff to enter their rooms and "*talk them awake*" (Fraser). Whilst this waking was being undertaken the 'day staff' arrived. This included the cook, the cleaner, the

the kitchen and the office. Staff would pass on the events of the night to Vernon and Peter who would begin planning for the day.

Meanwhile upstairs, as more of the young people were wakened, the volume of music increased. Some young people required a number of calls by staff before they would get up. Each call would become louder and more forceful. Those young people who did not have to attend work or school found getting up most difficult and would lie in bed until they were sure that they had pushed staff patience to its limits. Those young people who had no clear objective would put clothes on but would remain unshowered until they had been downstairs (neither young people nor staff were allowed to go downstairs in their night clothes). On occasion, young people would put on a sweatshirt or jumper on top of their night clothes to prevent them from having to get dressed. They would then go downstairs for breakfast.

Breakfast at Strathmore was an unstructured meal time. Young people and staff would help themselves to toast or cereal at any point between 7a.m. and 9 a.m. and therefore it was rare to have more than two or three people eating breakfast at the same time. Staff and young people alike ate at the kitchen table and would spend time chatting to the cook or reading the paper. Some young people chose not to have breakfast but would go downstairs to 'show face' before retreating back upstairs.

The period between breakfast and 10.30 a.m. was a busy one for staff. 'Business' would be taken care of at that time and therefore phone calls were made and received and paper work tackled. Once those who had a school placement left the unit the staff tended to be concentrated around the

office or were out on errands or at meetings. Although there were always staff present in the building this was one point in the day when young people tended to be left to their own devices. After 'showing face' young people would return to their rooms and begin to prepare for the day. For some this meant going back to bed for a while without staff knowledge. Young people would go in and out of each other's bedrooms asking to borrow clothes or music to listen to. In the main those left behind in the unit were female. The one young person who was in employment was male, two of the three who attended residential school were male and two of the young men were part-time school attendees. This meant that more often than not on weekdays it was young women who were present during the day.

Morning Work and Breaks

After showering, getting dressed and drying their hair young people would descend downstairs in time for 'tea and toast'. 'Tea and toast' time was an 'official' break to the day when young people and staff alike would come together around the kitchen table. The cook, often assisted by the young people, would prepare two large pots of tea and several baskets of toast. Normally everyone who was in the building would gather at this point and therefore there could be as many as twelve people crammed around the kitchen table. This was a very relaxed point in the day where adults and young people would discuss events. Such events included gossip from the town, stories from families or news stories. These discussions were often light hearted and were dominated by adults, young people joining in but not seen as the focus of the discussion. The openness with which issues were discussed was interesting. This was an opportunity for young people to be made aware of the 'person' behind the worker and as such staff members would discuss their health, relationships and views on the world.

'Work' would begin again after about half an hour. There was an expectation that young people who were at home during the day would help out around the house. A list of 'chores' was prepared each morning and young people were expected to put their name beside whichever chore they wished to do. Much encouragement was needed for this to happen and even more to get the young people to undertake the chore. Such chores included cleaning the quiet room (smoking room), setting the table for lunch, cleaning the kitchen or dining room floor. None of these chores was particularly attractive to any of the young people and they would complain at length about having to do them. Despite this, it was often the cleaning of the quiet room that would be tackled with the greatest zeal. It was the young women in particular who would undertake this chore with gusto. The quiet room was regarded as the responsibility of the young people to keep clean and maintain. As a result when the staff regarded it as 'too dirty' it would remain locked until one of the young people agreed to clean it. The room itself had very little furniture, two tables and four chairs. The motivation to clean would come from the desire to smoke. Cleaning would be accompanied by complaints from the 'cleaner' about the 'state' of the room and allegations of which individual young people had made such a mess. It was never the 'cleaner' who had contributed to this mess.

Once the quiet room had been cleaned it became the main meeting point for the young people. They would spend the rest of the morning 'hanging out' in this room, smoking and chatting. Young people would drift in and out, making coffee in the kitchen and bringing it through or seeking out staff to chat to. Young people were encouraged to be downstairs and in view of the staff during the day. The quiet room offered the only space where young people could sit and chat away from the 'adults'. The living room was kept locked until after school time. During the day it was used for staff supervision and changeover meetings. The kitchen was accessible to young people. During

the day however it was a place of work for the cook and therefore her presence was continuous in this room and she had control over what went on. As the dining room was attached to the kitchen it had the same lack of 'privacy' from adult view.

Mornings could involve a variety of pastimes for the young people who remained in the unit. Those who had left school were encouraged to visit the job centre or look for jobs in the local paper. Often this would be avoided by spending a long time 'getting ready' or being 'busy' cleaning out the quiet room. On the occasions when they went unsupervised by staff to the job centre they would leave together and go into the town centre to 'hang about' or visit ex residents in their flats. Few of the young people regarded 'getting a job' as part of their immediate agenda. Instead, this was seen as an instruction from staff, a routine that had been forced on them and which they resisted. As a result they would go out of their way to avoid this task. Before leaving, young people would discuss their strategy for the morning, where they would go and what they would do to kill time before having to return to the unit. Those who were of school age were not allowed to leave the building during school hours unless in the company of staff. They would be encouraged to undertake tasks in the house and then to settle to read and study. Again great attempts were made to avoid this. These would follow similar rhythms of spending time 'getting ready'. These young people tended to spend time with the cook, chatting or helping her prepare food. If the company of other young people was available however, time would be passed in the quiet room.

Lunchtime and Afternoon

During the week, lunch was prepared by the cook and was served around 12.15 p.m. Young people would wander in and out of the kitchen throughout the morning and would often be involved in

calling everyone through for lunch. Like 'tea and toast' all the people in the building would come together for lunch. This was a more formal affair than breakfast and therefore was conducted in the dining room. The food itself was left out on the kitchen table or on the stove and staff and young people would help themselves before sitting at one of the two dining room tables. Seating at lunchtimes was segregated in an unspoken way. The cook, cleaner and normally at least two members of staff would sit at one table whilst everyone else sat at the other table. These 'formal' mealtimes were often quite erratic. Young people would eat very quickly or eat nothing at all and then would leave the table. Staff would sit on, chatting, and young people would drift back in and out.

Normally at least two conversations would be occurring during lunch times, one at either table. Young people would be asked what they had been doing during the morning or how the visit to the job centre or attendance at school had gone. Young people would in turn ask who was due to come on shift next and when the current staff were working again.

After young people had eaten they would normally congregate back in the quiet room to smoke. Due to the common shortage of cigarettes this movement would include the majority of young people. Their presence in the quiet room would, they hoped, result in them being rewarded with a 'drag' of a cigarette. Once the supply of cigarettes had dried up or the opportunity had been lost to smoke, young people would drift back to the dining room and chat to the staff. Those young people who had 'volunteered' to clean up the dining room would then be called to do their 'job'. As soon as this task was seen to be underway staff would congregate in the office to write up the young people's daily logs which were required for change over. This often meant that the cook was left to

supervise the 'work' of the young people, something that she reported not being comfortable with. Young people were aware of this and therefore would leave the job unfinished or badly done, knowing that they were unlikely to be reprimanded.

Young people prepared for the new shift in a variety of ways. Some of the young women would do their hair or apply make up or change their clothes. They were always anxious to find out who was coming on shift and once this information was granted to them by the staff they would discuss the likely shift ahead in terms of these new staff members. If new admissions were present they would explain the nuances of the oncoming staff members' behaviours and attitudes. They would also comment on the practice of the previous shift. This might be with regard to how much the staff members were liked or, if there had been conflict during the shift, how glad they were that these staff were due to leave. Normally this type of discussion was held in the quiet room with the door closed. However on occasion young people would shout for the staff member to come through. This might be to request a cuddle or to tell the member of staff that they were glad that they were leaving. There was a notable edge of excitement around this time, a feeling that the shift was over that extended beyond the staff to include the young people. As a result it may be argued that this view of starting afresh was why young people chose this time of day to change their 'look'

As previously mentioned, staff members spent the time between lunch time and the changeover meeting preparing for the new shift's arrival. One of the rituals involved in this preparation was the making up of a tea tray for the next shift. As the new workers arrived the tray would be taken through to the living room. Young people would comment on this prepared tray stating that they hadn't been made tea and that they did not have access to biscuits, that it 'wasn't fair'. They would

welcome new staff into the building, sometimes hanging around the back door or kitchen awaiting their arrival. The young women would often ask to be cuddled and would follow the staff member into the house and even into the living room. Being in the living room at this time was to be with many staff at one time. I only ever saw young women do this. They would refuse to leave the room preventing the start of the change-over meeting. Much hilarity would follow as the young person would tease and be teased back before, as often was the case, being physically chased out of the room.

The importance of the change-over meeting, in the eyes of the young people, varied depending on the events of the shift. If they regarded it as having been a quiet shift they would spend this time chatting with each other, smoking, playing cards in the quiet room, or doing school work. This was also a time when young people could be guaranteed a greater level of 'privacy' than was afforded to them at other points in the day. Some spent time upstairs, listening to music, studying or swapping clothes. On one occasion two of the young people who were 'dating' went upstairs to be alone together. At such times when change-over meetings were considered as more serious or when young people thought that they might be being discussed at length they would attempt to listen in to the meeting. This could be done in a number of ways. One of the most 'risky' was to lie outside the living room door. Not only was this risky in terms of being caught by the cook or the cleaner it was also risky as the living room door had a long glass panel in its centre. Young people therefore had to lie down and wriggle along until they were under the glass panel. Less risky was the practice of hanging around outside. The back door was at right angles to the living room windows therefore young people could stand under the windows or at their side to listen. The practice of listening in was rare and was indeed criticised by some young people who felt that their privacy was being

affected. There was not a core group of dissenters, rather this related to who was interested at any one time about what might be said by staff members during the course of these meetings.

After the quiet room was changed into a small sitting room, change-over became a crucial time for 'indoors' smoking. Young people would smoke out of their bedroom windows or out of the shower window. Again this was risky practice as the cook and cleaner were not involved in the change-over meeting and were therefore 'free' to roam around the building.

After the change-over young people who were free of school work would spend time chatting to the new shift and would say their goodbyes to those members of staff who were leaving. The new shift often began by taking the tray back to the kitchen and making another cup of tea which the young people could join them in. This was a particularly popular activity if there were biscuits left over. If the young people had become involved in conversation or a good game of cards whilst the change-over meeting was occurring the new staff would go in and chat to them in the quiet room. Late afternoon often provided opportunity for work to be done with young people and their families. As a result individual young people would leave with a worker for a period of time. Quite soon after change-over the new shift would begin organising the evening meal. Those who had been at school or work would begin to return and would chat to the young people and staff about their day. As school was over the living room door was unlocked and therefore young people could spend time watching T.V.

Tea Time and Evening

By tea time, both the cook and the cleaner had left and the house began to take on a more homely feel rather than the 'business' feel that it had during the day. The phone had stopped ringing and 'adult' visitors had stopped calling. Tea was held in the dining room and had a similar routine to that of lunch. The food, which had been prepared during the day, was laid out on the kitchen table or on the stove, along with plates and serving utensils. Young people and adults were then called through to eat. Staff and young people queued around the table, helping themselves to the food that they wanted. After they had collected their food they made their way to the dining room. During this meal there were often enough seats around one table and therefore staff and young people would sit together³². Conversation usually centred on the young people and ranged from the events of the day to plans for the evening to favourite music or T.V. programmes. This was, like all meals at Strathmore, a relaxed affair although quite daunting for new admissions. The sheer number of people eating together was experienced by many new admissions as intimidating.

Young people ate their food quickly, often complaining about the type of food that was prepared. A number of the young women ate very little and despite encouragement would not add more to their plates. Despite the preparation of a substantial amount of food it was not uncommon to see young women with two boiled potatoes on their plate or asking only for a cheese sandwich. The young men appeared less concerned with the type of food that was prepared although they would on occasion join in with the criticism of the food. Young people tended to leave the table as soon as possible. Like lunchtime this appeared to be about their desire to smoke and once they had done so

³² A fuller discussion of the ways in which seating arrangements were used to gain position in the group is presented in the section entitled 'who's been sitting in my chair' in Chapter Eight.

they would drift back to the table to rejoin the staff or they would go to the living room to watch T.V.

All young people had to do a 'chore' in the evening. Like daytime chores these were household tasks such as setting the table for tea or washing up the pots. These chores were avoided as much as possible and throughout my six months of living in the unit I did not witness a young person volunteering to do a chore. Staff were required to seek out the young people to encourage and cajole them into undertaking these tasks. Young people 'coped' with chores using two distinct strategies. Avoidance strategies were used in attempts not to undertake the task that had been allocated to them. Unlike familial groups, young people were not afforded the opportunity to cajole or 'bully' young siblings into doing this work for them (Punch 1999). Staff would not tolerate the chore being undertaken by anyone other than the appointed young person. On occasion young people would ask for permission to 'swap' chores. This was rarely entertained as it was regarded as 'tougher' young people trying to get 'weaker' young people to do a harder job. As Beth (staff) explains:

Everyone has different jobs to do here, staff and young people. They don't like having to do it. Just like any kids ... the thing is we can't bend the rules because the bigger ones would just bully the wee ones into doing all the hard work while they got the easy jobs ... not that I think any of them are particularly hard. We're hardly getting them to chop logs.

(Beth, Kitchen, Strathmore, December 1996)

It was therefore an individual 'problem' to be dealt with by individual young people and, as such, strategies for avoiding the task often relied on physical responses. These included leaving the building to visit family or friends during chore time or pretending to start the chore and then leaving

as soon as the staff's gaze was averted.³³ Young people would pretend not to have heard the request to undertake the task and would dash off before this request could be repeated. Occasionally young people would refuse outright to do what they were being asked. Staff would advise them of the consequences of their actions and often attempt to use humour to cajole them into changing their minds. It was rare for the issue of chores to be allowed to escalate into a major incident. It was argued by the staff that it was easy to get into a power based discussion where one of the parties had to be seen to 'win' and that this was not 'good practice'. Rather the young people had to learn that there were expectations of behaviour and responsibility to the unit.

The request to undertake chores was however seen by the young people as a source of conflict. They felt that staff 'harassed' them into undertaking work at the time that staff decreed rather than allowing the young people the freedom to choose when the work would be undertaken. The following extract from fieldnotes demonstrates this:

There was real tension after tea tonight. Neil and I were chatting in the quiet room when Ian came in and asked Neil to do his chore (clean kitchen floor). Neil replied that he would go and do it after he had finished his conversation with me. Moments later Fiona came in and asked Neil to do his chore. He replied that he would be "through in a minute". We returned to our conversation and no sooner had we commenced when Vernon asked Neil to go to the kitchen. Neil responded angrily saying that he was on his way. Vernon looked surprised and advised him to calm down. As he left the room Neil stated that he was sick of being harassed and that he was going to go and do it now. As he stood up Ian came into the room and said 'Neil, I've told you already, come on and get your chore done'. At this Neil started shouting, saying that everyone was 'on his back' and that he was coming to do it now. He stormed out of the room. Ian looked puzzled and commented that it was 'unlike Neil to over react'. I asked him if he had known that both Fiona and Vernon had also asked Neil to do his chore. Ian said he hadn't known and that he would go and apologise.

(Fieldnotes, Strathmore, October 1997)

³³ This was mentioned in the discussion of lunch time chores and the supervision by the cook.

Young people also relied on coping strategies to deal with the responsibility and monotony of undertaking household tasks. One of the most commonly used coping strategies was the expression of dissatisfaction at having to undertake this work. Such expressions centred around the position of the young people as 'looked after' and would include statements such as the following:

It's not fair. What do we have a cleaner for? She doesnae do nothing that woman ... we have to do it all. It should be her washing the kitchen floor nae me. See the staff here, they do my head in. It's them that gets paid to look after us no the other way aboot.

(Sharon, Quiet Room, Strathmore, July 1997)

Its hellish that ... Bloody Dave he thinks he's it. I hate (washing) the pots. See that ... I never had to dae stuff like that at hame. I dinnae ken onybody that has tae dae all this sort of work at hame. Their mams do it for them.

(Fraser, Kitchen, Strathmore, March 1997)

A further strategy could arise out of such outburst. By complaining or shouting enough young people attempted to get other young people or staff members to help them with their chore. They would argue with staff that this was a 'compromise' or would promise other young people that they would help them with their chore. During the period of fieldwork I found that staff were more likely to assist young people than their fellow residents were. Young people were more likely to support each other by providing company and therefore entertainment whilst the job was being done. This in itself was a coping strategy, it made the task less monotonous and prevented the young people from feeling that they were 'missing out' on the activities of the resident group. A final coping strategy used was to get the job done as quickly as possible. If the young people were sure that they had no choice but to do their chore and that no compromise or entertainment was available then getting it over with as soon as possible was the only option left to them. There was a variation in how the staff dealt with this and the young people were soon made aware (by other young people)

which staff would recall them to undertake the job 'properly' and those staff who placed value simply on young people's participation rather than a standard of achievement.

Once chores were done and the kitchen had been cleaned up staff spent the rest of their time in the company of the young people. This ranged from accompanying them out to visit family or on outings or watching T.V. and chatting. The evenings also allowed for focused one-to-one work to be undertaken. This happened both within and outwith the unit. The young people had mixed views on this work. For some it allowed them the opportunity to talk about the issues concerning them; for others such intervention was 'boring' or 'horrible'. It was interesting that all the young people talked about enjoying the chance it gave them to spend time alone with staff members or to get out of the building. Also it seemed that most of the young people spoke positively about the 'work' at some point during my fieldwork.

Young people held regular evening discussions about whether on not they would go out for the evening. Going out was rare at Strathmore, particularly during the week. Despite this plans would be made and often, young people would get ready to go out, getting changed and putting on make up. Once this was done however, they would decide to stay in. Few watched T.V. but would ask for a film to rent. If there were no 'planned' activities with staff or a video rented, they would spend their time away from the staff, in the quiet room playing cards, chatting and smoking.

Young people also used the evenings to telephone friends and families. Conflict could again arise as a result of this. Staff would discourage overly long calls and often would have difficulty getting young people to terminate their calls. Other young people would also be hostile to those who

received a number of calls or towards those whom they perceived to '*always be on the phone*'.

Equally however, young people were supportive and encouraging to their fellow residents after calls, particularly those to or from family members. They would enquire as to the health and well being of family members and would offer support to young people who had become distressed or 'home sick' after calls. Often young people would demonstrate or voice their distress to their fellow residents before involving staff.

Young people were offered supper at around 9 p.m. Although the kitchen remained unlocked during the evening there was limited access to food¹⁴. Instead there were allocated times in which to eat. Some of the residents chose to spend pocket money or wages on sweets and crisps, which they bought from the local garage shop. One young man in particular made almost nightly visits to the garage and would share out his sweets with other young people. 'Official' supper consisted of toast or fruit. Like 'tea and toast' this was held at the kitchen table and was normally a light hearted affair. There was an expectation that each young person clean up his or her own crockery. However many would rush off back to the quiet room, leaving staff to do this. Attendance was not compulsory at any of the meals at Strathmore, although there was an expectation that young people attend lunch and tea.

Supper was the least predictable of the meals at Strathmore. It could range from having a very low attendance and a short life span to a gathering that included all the young people and the staff on duty and one which could last for over an hour. There appeared to be no set pattern to this but the

¹⁴ This changed during the course of my fieldwork however. As a result of the numbers of people living and working in the unit the majority of food could not be stored in the kitchen and was instead kept in the food store. Young people had access to 'basics' for example fruit, bread, milk, juice.

'variables' which contributed to these long suppers included a quiet, undisrupted evening, mixed gender staff on duty and a contentious topic of conversation. Like all gatherings at Strathmore young people would come in and out of conversations, leaving the room, often to smoke, and then returning to join in. On nights when supper became less about food and more about social intimacy the extent and depth of conversation appeared limitless. On one occasion discussion continued with one member of staff and three young people right up until bedtime. Kitchen table conversations in general seemed to have a feel of their own, distinct from other gatherings of staff and young people. The focus of these discussions was rarely individual young people's situations, rather there were wide topics of conversation which would begin by casual observations of life and expand into heated philosophical debate.

After supper, young people would return to the quiet room or to the living room to watch T.V. This was often a quiet period as staff prepared young people to head off to bed. There were, in general terms, two types of evening. Those that involved movement and activity and those that were quiet and subdued. In the case of the latter, young people would have spent the evening watching T.V. or chatting or playing cards in the quiet room. The evening would begin to wind down after supper was finished. Conversation would quieten and there would be little movement around the building. Young people would be concentrated in either the living room or the quiet room. Those evenings that involved movement and activity were usually marked by an event, for example a new admission, difficult family contact, or problems in relationships. It was interesting that although these issues would only directly affect an individual young person there was an indirect effect on the unit as a whole. Such a finding is consistent with Redl and Winemann's notion of the residential unit as being a life space in which one part of the system has impact on the wider system

and subsystems (Keenan 1992). Indeed they argue that such events throw up memories or feelings for other young people related to that which is occurring. Certainly during such events the majority of young people would be unsettled. They would move from room to room, there would be an increased volume of noise, both in terms of voices and music, and conversation would become animated and at times aggressive. The 'cause' of such disturbances was not always identified or indeed identifiable. There was a general increase in activity and noise and a sense of tension. The following extract from my field notes illustrates this:

Neil and Tony are in the Glass House (porch) talking. It looks pretty serious - they're both sitting facing each other, leaning forward and facially they appear very serious. I have no idea what they are discussing. Sharon and Hilary keep moving from the quiet room to the kitchen but not settling in either room. They are walking arm in arm laughing loudly and screaming. Not sure if this is because they want to keep walking past the glass house and get their attention. Fraser is in the living room. I can hear him shouting at Peter. Bryony had gone upstairs but she too has come downstairs again and is wandering around. As for me I don't know what is going on. I'm not sure that anyone does. There is a horrible atmosphere that I can't put my finger on and despite the time (10.30pm) the T.V. is on loud, there is music in the quiet room and the radio is on in the kitchen.

(Fieldnotes, Strathmore April 1997)

Bedtimes and Through the Night

The ways in which bedtime was 'managed' by the staff team was very much dependent on the evening which proceeded it. On quiet evenings young people and staff would have spent relaxed time together. On such evenings some young people would go off to bed themselves, without any encouragement from staff. The times for bed were dependent on age. This did at times cause problems, especially when an older cohort dominated the composition of the group. It was therefore difficult for staff to get the group to wind down together. For example at one point the majority of young people went to bed at 10.30 p.m. but as a result of age one young man had to go to bed at 9.45 p.m. This was one of the few times when traditional 'sibling' behaviour would be

demonstrated. The older group would align themselves with staff, cajoling the younger person to go off to bed.

In general, smoking finished off the evening for many of the residents. Staff would remind young people that it was nearing their time for bed and this served as a trigger to congregate in the quiet room to smoke the last cigarette of the day. Staff were often encouraged to join on this last thing at night discussion that accompanied the smoking. This arguably had two motivations, the first was to end the evening on a secure note. The sharing of discussion served to cement relationships before the night ahead. Secondly the involvement of staff at this point often meant that bedtime was extended. Staff became less conscious of time, relaxing in the conversations that took place. Young people would encourage the active participation of the staff, would seek their opinion and attitudes. In so doing they ensured that staff members were active members of the group and therefore had investment in the debate taking place.

Once young people were upstairs staff would busy themselves making their own beds or chatting to young people. Their presence ensured that young people remained in their rooms and settled down to sleep. When this was not possible or staff chose not to follow the young people upstairs they would go in and out of each other's rooms, chatting and borrowing music or clothes for the next day. Such stalling tactics could also involve staff members. Young people would choose this time to inform staff that they had no toothpaste, had forgotten to do something for school or that someone had borrowed an item of clothing that they needed for the next day.

Night time was one of the few times when young people were completely alone. All young people had their own bedrooms and therefore once in bed they were alone. This was managed in a number of ways. Some young people relished this opportunity and would close and lock their bedroom doors. This however was the exception rather than the rule. The majority left their doors slightly ajar and would play music until they drifted off to sleep. Few of the young people had small bedside lamps and were reliant on the main overhead light. There were some young people who could not sleep with the lights off. I was aware of only one young woman who read before she went to sleep. During my time in the unit I was aware that some of the young people were read a bedtime story. After the young people had had a period to settle staff would go in and say goodnight and switch off their lights and ask them to turn down their music. It was rare for the house to be settled to this point much before 11.30pm.

There were three occasions during my year long fieldwork on which I was aware that young people were moving around during the night. Two of these incidents were preplanned and I was invited to join them in one of the young people's bedrooms. I chose to refuse this offer due to concerns of safety and protection. However the young people volunteered to tape one of the 'meetings'. From the information recorded this meeting involved lots of whispered conversation and giggles. Young people would try to make the others laugh, and therefore be caught by the staff on duty. Conversation ranged from boyfriends/girlfriends to music and pop stars and the staff on duty. I was informed of one occasion when two of the young people had allegedly had sexual intercourse during the night. Other young people gave this information to me, not those involved, and I am left uncertain as to whether or not this took place.

A Day in the Life of Brunswick

Daily life at Brunswick was shaped by similarly staff-designed routines as those in existence at Strathmore. Like those in Strathmore, the young people operated their own patterns or rhythms of behaviour, which flowed alongside and in between those structures that the staff group enforced. However the young people at Brunswick appeared to have more direct influence from 'outside' forces which served to pattern and shape their day. Key to this was the role of education. During the period of my fieldwork, all the young people who were in residence at Brunswick were in full-time education or employment. As a result the majority of their day was shaped by structures other than the unit itself. A further dimension to the force of the 'outside' was that the majority of young people had a friendship network that existed externally. This meant that 'spare' time was often structured around this friendship group rather than by the staff or fellow residents. A 'day in the life' of Brunswick is outlined to illustrate those differences.

Getting Up and Getting Out

Like Strathmore, the first movement around Brunswick was that of the staff on duty getting up and going to shower. The level of noise and the impact this had on individual residents was however somewhat lessened by the overall size and design of the unit. Brunswick had two main floors (the attic was unused) both of which contained bedrooms (See Appendix 2b). Upstairs there were three bedrooms plus a staff office/sleep-in room and a shower room. The bathroom was situated on a landing, half way up the flight of stairs. Downstairs there were two bedrooms. However two corridors and a large cupboard divided them. Part of the redecoration of Brunswick had included the fitting of a thick, soft carpet in the hall, stairs and landing. All of these 'design' points

influenced the experience of morning for the young people. Staff could move around with little disturbance to the young people.

Young people were wakened by staff in a similar manner to those at Strathmore. Staff would knock and enter, softly greeting the young people and telling them the time. Two of the young people had their own alarm clocks and although awake would often wait until staff had 'wakened' them before they would get up. All of the young people in residence had to leave the unit by 8.30 a.m. to be in time for school or work and therefore there was a race for the shower and bathroom. The young women were often 'winners' being much quicker to rise and begin preparing for the day. One of the young men in particular would require a number of reminders before he was able to get out of bed.

Breakfast was set out on the table by the staff on duty and would include cereal and toast as well as a large pot of tea. Young people would often come downstairs to find the staff seated at the table, awaiting their arrival. Brunswick did not have a cook although did employ a part-time cleaner who would arrive at the unit at 8 a.m. She would, on occasion, join the group for tea. Breakfast was often a hurried affair. Young people would be rushing around getting their bags packed for school or work and normally at least one young person would be furiously trying to locate a missing book or item of clothing. Part of the work reportedly done by the staff to encourage young people to attend school had been to help them prepare their school clothes and to walk them or drive them to school. By the point my fieldwork began, however, young people were predominately undertaking this work themselves. The two young women who smoked would hurriedly leave the table to have a cigarette before leaving and were often joined by the staff on duty. By 8.30 a.m. young people

would begin leaving the unit or their friends would begin calling for them to walk with them to school.

The rest of the morning was usually spent by staff in the absence of young people. As all the young people were in full-time education (three in mainstream school, one at residential school) or employment, staff spent the morning doing household chores, attending meetings or doing paperwork. Brunswick and Strathmore also offered support to young people who had left residential care to live 'independently'. This meant that staff would leave the unit to visit them or in turn these young people would visit the unit, often bringing their children or partners with them. Indeed this was far more common at Strathmore than at Brunswick. Despite the absence of 'residents', the unit continued to be a busy place of work for the staff employed.

Lunchtime, Hometime and the Afternoon

Those young people who attended mainstream school would usually elect to return to the unit during their lunchtime. Like breakfast this was a period of high activity. Lunch would be prepared by the unit staff and be ready for the young people returning from school. Occasionally young people would return with friends who would wait outside on the street or at the back door whilst lunch was eaten. Staff and young people would eat together and talk about the events of the morning. This allowed an opportunity for staff to advise and support the young people in any problems that they might have experienced during the morning. It also provided an opportunity to praise their attendance or to discuss with the young people any feedback which had been received from school. One of the young men in particular found school attendance more challenging than the other

residents. He appeared to have difficulty with the rigid structure of the school day and with relationships with his school peers. Coming home at lunchtime allowed him to have time away from school and time to 'let off steam' about how his day was shaping up.

Once the meal was over young people would head back to school, watch T.V. or chat to staff until it was time to leave. As they were in full-time education there was no expectation that they undertook any chores around the unit during school hours. Occasionally they were asked to give staff members a hand with carrying through the used plates and cutlery and stacking the dish washer although this was not a 'compulsory' requirement.

Like Strathmore, the remainder of the shift would be spent by staff writing up the daily log sheets in preparation for the new shift's arrival. Changeover followed a similar pattern to that at Strathmore although was less likely to be disturbed by young people, either directly or indirectly, as they were outwith the unit. Following changeover, staff would congregate downstairs preparing for the return of the young people. This included practices such as planning responses to individual behaviours or incidents, structuring the evening, smoking and drinking tea.

'Hometime' once again signalled a period of activity. Young people and staff would congregate around the dining room table chatting and drinking tea. The events of the day and plans for the evening would be discussed. Most frequently the young women would leave the table to watch T.V., smoke or get ready to go out. The young men would chat to the staff or would play computer games. Once 'activities' were decided by the young people, the house would settle whilst the evening meal was prepared by the staff.

Tea Time and Evening

Young people would begin to drift toward the dining room before 5 o'clock and chat to staff whilst they were preparing the meal. Occasionally they would become engrossed in a T.V. programme and would have to be called for by their fellow residents or the staff. This was particularly the case for the young women who enjoyed watching the chat shows shown on Channel 4 each evening. Indeed these chat shows often provided at least part of the discussion for the meal time. One young woman in particular tended to dominate meal time debate. She would shout at staff and young people alike and would criticise the majority of those present at the table. The following extract is typical:

I walked into a storm today. I arrived at 5 pm as everyone was just sitting down to tea. Anna was screaming about the food that had been prepared ("this food is shite. I fucking wouldnae gie it to my fucking dog"). She was advised by staff to calm down. Anna then turned her attention on the two boys ("you pair of fat bastards you fucking eat that much that nae'bdy else gets anything in this home. Look at the fucking way that you eat too ... fucking disgusting") Jack (y.p.) tried to change the subject but was met by a further tirade of abuse. Tom (y.p.) appeared to sink lower and lower in his seat. Angela (y.p.) by contrast appeared to cope with this by silently eating her meal. She sat up straight as if nothing strange was happening around her.

(Fieldnotes, Brunswick, 2nd July 1997)

As a result of these outbursts, meal times and tea times in particular were often quite stressful events. Often Anna would be the first to leave the table so that she could go to the back door to smoke. Although still able to join in the conversation from that vantage point her input would lessen and others at the table would be afforded the opportunity to converse. Tea time, as at Strathmore, was completed in many stages which the young people would opt in or out of. Firstly the food would be prepared, normally with only staff involvement, then the food would be eaten, usually a group task. Once the food had been eaten there then followed a further stage where tea or coffee

would be made and conversation beyond the events of the day or evening ahead would be held.

Young people left and rejoined these discussions throughout the time they were held. Leaving the conversation took a number of formats including not listening, singing and physically moving away from the table or out of the room.

Young people were expected to help clear up after the meal and used similar strategies to the young people at Strathmore to avoid doing so. A favourite of the young women was to 'promise' to undertake the task after the end of 'Neighbours' or 'Home and Away' two of the most regularly used T.V. excuses. These women would then dash upstairs to begin getting ready and remain there until their friends arrived to collect them. Indeed the young women spent the majority of evenings outwith the unit, teasing the young men for 'staying in'. One of the young men in particular had a friendship network although this was not always encouraged by staff who viewed his friends as a 'negative' influence. As a result he would use the other young man as an accomplice stating that they were going off out together and then later meet up with his friends.

Evenings at Brunswick therefore varied immensely depending on the population of the unit. There were evenings where all the young people would be out with friends whilst others were spent watching T.V., playing computer games or chatting to staff. There appeared to be a much clearer gender divide in Brunswick than at Strathmore. The young women regarded themselves as older and more mature than the young men and spent little 'free' time in their company. The time that they spent together was predominately 'front stage' in the company of adults. Both the young men and the young women spent time privately with their respective gender. The young women used this time to talk about relationships or future plans. Such discussions were held in bedrooms.

Young men by contrast spent time in the 'games room' playing with the computer, toy fighting or simply 'mucking about'.

Bedtime and Through the Night

As stated above, the young women in residence at Brunswick regarded themselves as more 'grown up' than the young men. One way in which this translated itself into daily life was the way that bedtime was managed. Young women were more likely to spend time with staff chatting and smoking before announcing that they were off to bed. They regarded having to be told or chased off to bed as 'babyish' and would therefore remove themselves before such instruction was required. The young men, by contrast, would have to be told to go to bed and would wind up rather than wind down as this began to happen. Rarely did they go into their bedrooms and remain there. Instead they would, after a high level of staff intervention, go into their rooms and then later reappear to ask for a drink or to say that they had just remembered that they had homework. The level of toy fighting would also increase just before bedtime.

As far as I am aware there was only one incident of 'movement' during the night. This occurred during the short-term admission of a young woman. At an early point in her stay the young woman absconded from the unit and was reported missing to the police. She returned in the early hours of the morning and instructed one of the young men (whose room was on the ground floor) to open the door for her. After she had entered she sat in the young man's room chatting about the events of the day. They were later discovered by staff. In general however the unit was quiet and settled by 11.30 p.m.

Conclusions

Routines in both Brunswick and Strathmore served to structure time and manage residents' daily lives. The staff groups in both units had developed routines which had, at their core, temporal divides and these served to order and shape both the staff and the young people's behaviour. Central to these routines were notions of 'care' and 'protection'. There appeared to be an underlying belief, held by the staff group, in the benefit of regular, habitual activity; indeed the point was made that routine 'was good for the young people'. Such a discourse has at its foundation the belief that children's and young people's lives need to be given order by 'caring' adults and that without such controls young people's lives would spiral into chaos. As such, meal times were created to provide regular access both to food and to social contact with staff and other young people. Times allocated to wake up and to go to sleep ensured that young people had enough rest to maintain physical and emotional health. Times to return to the unit made certain that young people were in the unit and 'safe'. An underlying principle to all of these routines was the belief that by placing such boundaries and expectations on young people they were provided with an opportunity to form trusting relationships and to manage responsibility.

The existence of temporal controls did not go unchallenged by the young people. That there were set times for meals was the least controversial. Young people appeared to accept the need for food and for social contact and the majority reported such moments in their day as being enjoyable. Far more contentious was the control of movement such as bedtimes and times to come in. When these issues were not raw i.e. when young people did not want to stay up late or return home late such 'routines' were seen to be as a demonstration of care and trust on the part of the staff. However, on

occasions when these restraints were in play young people argued that they existed for the benefit of staff. The following example highlights this:

I hate it having to come in at 10pm. It's totally embarrassing. All my pals are out til 11pm. The staff here are just lazy. They want their beds so they have to have all of us home.

(Allie, Quiet Room, Strathmore, February 1997)

The rhythms of residential life (the patterning of time constructed by the young people) were much harder to identify and establish. It initially appeared that there was no pattern to the behaviours of the young people aside from the routine events that were set up by the staff. As the fieldwork progressed however it became apparent that young people did structure and habitualise their own behaviour both away from and in front of the staff. This was much more apparent at Strathmore. As previously stated, time for those at Brunswick was more heavily influenced by the 'outside'. Young people spent little time, beyond that dictated by the routines, in the building. Often they were out with friends or each other or were attending school or work. The result of this appeared to be that young people established patterns of behaviour which overlapped that of the routines. They created their own timetable and expectations of behaviour that stood alongside that of the staff.

The social environment within Strathmore however allowed for longer periods when the young people spent time together as a group. Like Brunswick there was diversity in how this time was spent although, in the main, any behaviours or events occurred within the building itself. The rhythms of daily life at Strathmore centred around this notion of group belonging, the importance of collective time and 'filling time' (Roy 1960, Cohen and Taylor 1972). Many of the young people in both units established patterns of behaviour which incorporated such rituals as smoking and

challenging staff-established routines. There was habitual smoking behaviour occurring pre and post staff-defined events such as meal times, chore times and bedtimes. These key moments created a sense of structure to daily life, particularly at Strathmore, and were solely devised by the young people themselves. This 'counter' behaviour extended to the challenge towards staff routine and would include avoidance of chores, staying up late or sleeping in. Young people devised strategies to deal with such events which became habitualised and patterned in similar ways to the routines that they sought to counteract.

The separation of front and back stage behaviour (Goffman 1959) was far more apparent at Strathmore than at Brunswick. Not only were young people at Strathmore more likely to spend the majority of their time within the unit, they had been allocated a room which was set aside for their use and control. The number of young people in residence and the ever changing population created a stronger sense of a cohesive group which had functions separate from that of the staff group. This sense of solidarity was enhanced by the awareness of young people around notions of safety and protection from other young people both within and outwith the unit¹⁵. It was interesting to observe that this sense of group identity was far stronger in what had been identified as a short-stay unit. It appeared that those at Brunswick identified with the unit and the staff team, they regarded it as home. Although this sense of 'home' was mentioned by young people at Strathmore it was with the group that they particularly identified, with a sense of 'we're all in it together'. Individual back stage activities did occur in both units and were centred around physical preparation of bodies and 'image'. Young people in both units spent long periods of time 'getting ready' and would often repeat this activity at numerous points in the day.

¹⁵ This point is discussed at greater length in the following three chapters.

This chapter has aimed to provide the reader with an account of the daily life of the resident groups in both the units involved in the study. It has separated out the routines enforced by staff and the ritualised or habitual patterning of behaviour by the young people. It is against this back drop that the negotiation of group positioning occurred. Like daily life itself, this was a diverse and sometimes apparently chaotic experience but one which took place amidst the expectations and controls of behaviour created both by staff and by young people themselves.

Chapter Seven

Currencies of Knowledge

Hilary and Sharon: Knowledge in Action

Sharon, Hilary and I are sitting at the kitchen table in Strathmore. It is a Monday morning and the cook has gone out with a member of staff to do some shopping, leaving the kitchen an 'adult free zone'. Hilary makes Sharon and me a cup of coffee. As she sits down at the table to join us, she informs Sharon and me that she knows who the new admission, that the staff had informed us was arriving, is.

Sharon: Ochit, its no her that's coming is it?

Hilary: Aye, she's coming in later on the day. She's got a hearing but they're putting her here 'til the meeting comes.

Ruth: How do you know her?

Sharon and Hilary look at each other, Hilary raises her eyebrows. They both turn to look at me.

Sharon: She was at the same foster parents as me

*Hilary: Aye, that's the same as how I ken her. But she's from ***** (town), ken the same as me, far I'm fae.*

Sharon: She was a little bitch when I kent her

Sharon and Hilary stop looking at me and resume talking to each other

*Hilary: She's fae ***** (town) and like, a little mink*

Sharon: She'll likely hae tae bide here after her meeting

Hilary: She's a slapper like, she shags ony'body

Sharon: Well she'll no get awa wi it here. They'll just ground her

Hilary: And then she'll shag all the loons fae here

During the course of the above discussion, Hilary and Sharon demonstrate a wide range of 'knowledge' both in preparation for the admission of the young woman in question as well as in

order to subtly establish who has most 'knowledge' about her. This exchange of information continued until Sharon was able to give illustrative examples of the new admission's background and behaviour whilst in foster care. This clinches this set of negotiations and later that day Sharon is given the lead role in informing other young people about the new admission.

This example illustrates the types of knowledge that was valued by the young people living in both Strathmore and Brunswick. Within the boundaries of Sharon and Hilary's conversation, demonstration is given of knowledge of a social network. This begins with a network established through the social work system to a wider 'public' network in the shape of attitudes of the town from where both Hilary and Tina, the new admission, originate. Sharon and Hilary discuss the new admission in terms of the formal process that exists to facilitate young people's admission to residential care i.e. the children's hearing system. In so doing they are able to articulate a wider knowledge of the social work system as a whole. The ways in which this is then translated to the internal workings of the unit, the inside knowledge, is illustrated in comments pertaining to staff reaction to behaviour as well as young people's (or at least the young men's) likely responses. Sharon and Hilary pinpoint specific behaviour to which they relate this 'system', namely Tina's expected sexual behaviour. Indeed it is predominantly her reputation as sexually active which appears to cause them the greatest alarm.

The following extract is from a conversation held between Sharon and Tina two days after Tina's admission. It is conducted in the quiet room. Both young women are smoking. Neil, another young person, joins them. The young women are reminiscing about the time that they spent together in foster care.

*Sharon: I've kent her since she was 13 actually ... It was a joke. I used to tell her that
I was training to be a nun.*

Tina: I believed her

*Sharon: We only had one fight, mind that? We both ended up bursting oot laughing
and made up*

*It appears that despite the concerns held by Sharon prior to Tina's admission she is able to establish
a more 'positive' relationship with her than would have been envisaged. Indeed, I would argue that
the information passed between Hilary and Sharon was motivated more by the process of sharing
information, and the resulting sense of position and power that was granted to Sharon as the person
with the greatest knowledge, than by any real interest or feeling for Tina.*

Introduction

This chapter contributes to the central issues of this thesis by exploring the negotiations, which centred on the sharing or demonstration of knowledge, that were held within the two resident groups. From the data, there appeared to be four broad categories of knowledge which were shared by the young people and which resulted in the holder of knowledge being granted at least momentary influence. Due to the relationship between the 'ownership' of these categories of knowledge and the award of status that this knowledge afforded the young people these categories have been labelled 'currencies'. This chapter illustrates and provides examples of the four broad categories of knowledge. It illustrates and evidences the ways in which such knowledge influenced status and will consider why it was that the young people valued these categories of knowledge. Finally this chapter considers the changing nature of knowledge within the resident groups and the ways in which this altered during the course of the fieldwork. As the preceding example illustrates young people use 'knowledge' to negotiate influence or power. In simple terms those who do not have such knowledge want it, meaning that those who have it gain momentary control. Central to this relationship between knowledge and status is desire. It rests on the premise that young people want the knowledge that has currency.

This point was borne out by the data. It was discovered that there was information shared among young people which did not fit into the four broad categories discussed here and which appeared to have no bearing on credibility being granted to the 'owner'. One example of this was Bryony and her working knowledge of illegal drug taking. The resident group did not regard this as 'valuable' information, indeed they viewed her behaviour as dangerous and 'silly'. This is counter to external and media assumptions about the way in which young people regard illicit drug use. Thus on

occasions when Bryony discussed drugs or drug taking young people would make clear the lack of value they afforded to such information. This was demonstrated in a number of ways which included ignoring Bryony, changing the subject, directly telling her to stop ("shut up") or physically leaving the room.

First, this chapter explores the external network known by the young people. Knowledge of key figures in the community and relationships with family members was shared and respected. Secondly, the knowledge that young people had of the 'inside' workings of the units is discussed. This extends from the memories of shared group experiences to the nuances of staff practices. The third category or currency of knowledge examined is that which pertains to sexual activity and dating relationships. The final currency surrounds the knowledge that is held about the wider social work and legal system. A demonstration of each of these currencies served to provide young people with momentary status or respect from their fellow residents. This point is highlighted throughout the chapter.

External Network as a Social Currency

The social network that young people had outwith the units studied had an impact on how their fellow residents regarded them. During the course of my fieldwork it was discovered that not only was having a social network highly desirable but that often a knowledge of key external figures was paramount. This section explores and describes the type of external network that existed and how this and knowledge of individuals affected group position.

Friendship Networks at Brunswick

Several studies have explored the disruption of networks to young people on their admission to residential care (Berridge and Brodie 1998, Cliffe and Berridge 1991, Phillips and Davies 1990). Indeed Ward (1993:49) argues that admission is the most fully researched area of group care practice. An acknowledged part of this process is the impact admission has on an individual's relationship with his/her peer and familial group (Millham et al. 1986, Rowe et al. 1989, Baldwin 1990). Residential care has historically served to undermine and make difficult external relationships, often because of the nature of the institutions themselves as well as the geographical distances that are at times involved. What is less well known and what this study seeks to explore are the ways in which young people articulate and experience external networks whilst in residential care and the ways in which this impacts on their relationships with fellow residents.

A fundamental difference existed between the two units with regard to the ways in which external networks were experienced and valued. As previously mentioned, nearly all the young people living at Brunswick were from the town in which the unit was located whereas at Strathmore this was the case for only two young people. Consequently the young people who came to be 'looked after' at Brunswick were able to continue their attendance at the same schools and clubs and maintain regular contact with their friends and family. The majority of residents at Strathmore however, had had to give up school, friends, clubs and families at the time of admission. On entering their new schools they were unknown and had only Strathmore as their link to the new community (see also Stein and Carey 1986).

As a result of such disparity the young people at Brunswick tended to have networks unconnected to the unit whilst the group at Strathmore had limited social networks beyond that of ex-residents or others that they had met whilst in the care system. Young people at Brunswick were, however, aware of the ambiguity of feeling that this created. They all stated that they were pleased not to have had to move away from the familiar but equally, they argued that they found remaining in the same location had caused difficulties, particularly in relation to separating from a 'negative' peer group. As Anna explains:

It's good that I dinnae have to change schools and that and that I'm near my family but it's just the folk that I hung aboot wi, you know coming round for me and stuff. I ken if I had started going aboot wi them again I would have got back into drugs and stuff.

(Anna, Bedroom, Brunswick, November 1996)

This concern at having to re-negotiate relationships was felt by a number of young people living in Brunswick. They argued that their time in the unit had 'changed' them, particularly with reference to the way in which they wished to be perceived by the community. Re-negotiation of friendships often involved attaining new friends, and this in itself was something that these young people regarded as important. The emphasis was on establishing friendships and networks that they felt they would be 'safe' amongst, avoiding the risk of 'getting into trouble' and consequently avoiding what they regarded as a continuation down the career path of care.

The young people used such networks in a variety of ways, for example individual young people would return from evenings out to share stories of events and people with whom they had spent time. This was particularly important to those who involved themselves in the wider status positioning that occurred within school. These young people wished it to be known that they had

been with the 'in crowd' and had established friendships with those highly regarded in this context.

The way in which this was perceived by fellow residents had much to do with the fact that they all attended the local mainstream secondary school and were of similar ages. These stories from 'outside' therefore had relevance to the young people within, not merely in terms of events or experiences but more importantly with whom these events were shared. Credibility from the outside could therefore influence credibility on the inside by such sharing of knowledge regarding external networks.

External Friendship Networks at Strathmore

Having contact or friendship with people outwith the unit who were well known in the community as being 'tough' or as having large contact groups themselves was highly regarded, especially by those who had limited access to alternative networks. Young people at Strathmore were quickly educated by their fellow residents in identifying the individuals or families who had 'power' within the external community. The following extract comes from a conversation held in the quiet room between Hilary and a new admission, Christine. Christine has mentioned to Hilary that she had been told by friends from her home town about a family that lives near Strathmore:

Aye, but they're a into drugs. The loon that's aboot our age he's got a da like but they dinnae speak. His dad'll kill him if he gets a hud o him because him and his brother was at the house when he we wasn't there and his brother took all the money and trashed the place and the pigs were up here. His aunty like, she's so fine. She telt me just to come whenever. When I was up the last time she was cuddling and kissing me and everything (laughs) ... (Pause) Her laddie took an overdose ... died.

(Hilary, Quiet Room, Strathmore, March 1997)

Often such networks were made up of those who had similarly marginalised positions. Stories, like the example above, would therefore centre on violence, disputes, drugs or 'screwing the system'. These external people were respected in much the same way as Polsky's (1962) young men

respected their group leaders. They were feared, yet the status that had been accorded them as a result of their behaviour was envied. Often the extent of relationships with these individuals was wildly exaggerated in an attempt to gain status by association. Like the more 'positive' external networks, it was hoped that the status allocation that existed in the outside community would translate into the position granted within the unit (see also Bortner and Williams 1997). This was only feasible if fellow residents regarded this external stratification as significant. During my fieldwork I found that the more 'negative' networks were not as highly respected, and were therefore less influential, than the more 'positive' social groupings. The following statement was made by Tony in response to an invitation to go into town to meet up with some of Bryony's friends:

I'm nae going oot ... I'm nae going wi her anyway ... she hings about the drunks and junkies doon at the cross. Ab'dy she kens is much alder ... minks like. I'll just watch telly.

(Tony, Quiet Room, Strathmore, April 1997)

Despite demonstrating a knowledge of external networks, young people at Strathmore, were reluctant to involve themselves in the world outwith the unit. The following conversation between Hilary and myself illustrates possible reasons why this occurs:

Ruth: No one seems to go out much here ... why?

Hilary: Don't know. Everyone just stays together in here. Like we're nae at school so we'll no meet anyone or we're not at work.

Ruth: Did you have mates at home?

Hilary: Yeah. I went through to *** (town of origin) a couple of times .
I never really went again. It's too hard to explain to folk and it's too far to travel. I haven't spoken to any of them in ages.

(Hilary, Kitchen, Strathmore November 1996)

Trying to maintain relationships despite geographical distance was difficult. However coupled with the perceived stigma of residential care it became almost impossible. The attitudes towards children's homes that residents believed their previous social network held, could not be quashed

through a 'real' experience of the unit because of its geographical distance. At Brunswick, by contrast, friends could come and visit and see what the units were really like. This option was limited, if not impossible, for the friends of the Strathmore residents. The sheer numbers of residents at Strathmore made this situation worse. This unit catered for eight young people whilst at Brunswick this number was halved. There was, as a result, less encouragement of young people to maintain contact, logistical problems concerning care and control preventing staff from encouraging young people to invite their friends to visit. Furthermore, the young people at Brunswick had an awareness of the friends that their fellow residents had because they all attended the same school. This was not the case at Strathmore. The anxiety felt by individual young people when inviting his or her 'outside' friends was therefore greater. This served as yet another obstacle in maintaining relationships.

One result of this was an involvement in networks that were made up of those who had an understanding of the young people's situation i.e. those involved in the care system. As Bryony explains:

You dinnae hae to explain all the time aboot it. They ken what it's like ... ken, haeing to be in at certain times and that, not being allowed to stay at pals overnight without police checks. They know the rules and how it all works.

(Bryony, My Bedroom, Strathmore, May 1997)

Arguably such a network was also easier to penetrate. Not only was there a shared understanding but the external world came to the unit, as opposed to young people having to go out into the community. Ex-residents would visit regularly and spend time with the resident group. The way in which the staff and young people perceived this often depended on the visitor involved. Due to their behaviour (e.g. drug taking, criminal behaviour) some ex-residents were deemed to be a negative

influence and residents were encouraged to limit their contact with them. Other group members had a 'protective' relationship with older ex-residents who provided a source of support and understanding. That they were in care or had been in care was viewed as a reason to 'stick together' against the stigmatisation of the outside world. Residents and ex-residents would encourage new admissions to involve themselves in this external network by stressing this shared understanding of being 'looked after'.

To penetrate 'non-care' networks in the community was viewed as problematic. The residents regarded themselves as stigmatised by those outwith the unit and were reluctant, despite staff attempts, to join clubs etc. If the young people were not attending some form of education, because of age or behaviour, meeting other people became even more difficult. What resulted at Strathmore was a very tight-knit group who regarded themselves as self-sufficient. This was particularly true in the initial stages of fieldwork when the young people in residence were all of similar age and of mixed gender. In many ways they had no need to access the outside world. They had young people around them to make friends with and to 'date' and, like young people more generally, they had each other for entertainment. In the following extract Neil acknowledges this sense of self-sufficiency:

I see my chums noo and again but nae as much as afore ... nane o us see friends as much ... we get attatched to each other in here so we don't need anyone else ... I still do see folk ... well likes o' ***** (ex resident) but I wouldnae go there myself, nae if he's been on drugs or that.

(Neil, Quiet Room, Strathmore, June 1997)

Admission Time

The network currency was most strikingly used, in both units, at the time of each new admission.

Firstly the group would check amongst its members if the new admission was known and if so in what way could they be described. As this example from Sharon illustrates:

I kent her from when I was in foster care. She's a stirring bitch like.
(Sharon, Quiet Room, Strathmore, April 1997)

If the description, as above, was negative then young people would initially be hostile and would 'test' out the alleged negative behaviour. The young person mentioned above was kept on the margins of the group during the initial stages of her admission whilst her behaviour was monitored. The young people felt it vital to test out whether she would, as alleged, be a destructive element in the group. Alternatively if the new admission was known and regarded as 'good' then the group would more readily accept him/her as was the case with Tony:

I've kent him for years. I used to go out with his brother. He's a fine
loon, a great laugh.
(Katriona, Living Room, Strathmore, April 1997)

The result of this 'positive' previous history was an ease of access into the group. Established residents would start on the premise that the new admission was not a threat to any individual or to the group itself. It would be expected that, as the person was seen to be 'alright' that they would find the group to be the same. There was an ever present sense that the outside world regarded residential care and those who lived in it in a negative way. Young people wanted to be reassured that the person being admitted to the unit would have an understanding of their position as young people being 'looked after'. In other words, the notion of acceptance was relevant both in terms of

the young person being accepted by the group and equally of that young person being accepting of the group.

Once the young person was admitted, the group would test out his/her network knowledge. They would check knowledge of key families or individuals and, if this knowledge existed, they would in turn try to gauge the strength of the relationship. In so doing, they were able to establish the potential impact and degree of influence that the resident group could have on that young person.

For example, at the time of Katriona's admission she made clear that she wished to maintain her external network and have limited contact with the resident group. Because her network consisted of a number of well known 'violent' and 'attractive' figures the group accepted her behaviour and she gained credibility as a result. Indeed her knowledge and degree of relationship with these external figures served to grant her higher position at times when these figures were discussed. On her return from an evening out she would tell stories involving these characters, often stressing her relationship with them. The other young people, who regarded these people with 'respect', allowed her external influence to be momentarily translated to her status within the group.

Using the External Network

The external network as a social currency had high value at times when external figures were discussed. Individuals would spar for position using their knowledge of the relevant individual or family and therefore it would appear that the more information that was held or the stronger the relationship with the individual under discussion the higher the position achieved. The following extract is taken from a conversation between Bryony and Fraser. It is held in the quiet room and

Hilary, Tony and Neil are also present. They remain silent during the discussion but are listening.

The topic of debate concerns a young woman from the town whom Fraser has stated he 'fancies':

I've kent her for years, since I was a baby. She used to live next door
to me wi her ma. We've been pals since we were little. I even kent her brother
that was killed on the boats. I've kent her longer than all youse put together.

(Bryony, Quiet Room, Strathmore April 1997)

By stating this long standing 'relationship' with the individual in question Bryony is able to place herself in a position where the other young people rely on her as their source of information. There is, added to this, the awareness by the group that Fraser, because of his stated 'attraction', has a vested interest in any knowledge that Bryony can impart. As a result of this desire for knowledge Bryony is afforded momentary status and respect by the group that is present.

Networks could also, however, serve to distance young people from the group. Having a friendship with someone who was regarded negatively by the group acted to reduce the status of the individual concerned. Such young people were derided for their choice of friend and were made to feel that they had to end the friendship or relationship in order to maintain group acceptance. Often such external figures were seen as diminishing the group, by association, in the eyes of the outside community. To be seen to spending time with someone who was ridiculed or viewed negatively by the community brought further stigma to the residents which they were unwilling to tolerate. External networks therefore had to be vetted for appropriateness and much of this was based on a wider sense of acceptability.

Anna provides an interesting example of how this message could be extended to young people who were bringing 'shame' to the unit and by association to the other young people in residence. This extract arose from a discussion that Anna and I had early on in the fieldwork about coming into the unit. It took place in Anna's bedroom.

Anna: See some o the folk that come in here. Its like they think that they hae to be hard or something. So the first thing they'll do is start hanging around with a the mental folk at school, folk that havenae even been in here. Sometimes, if its lassies, they'll pal aboot wi a the slappers at the school. Well I dinnae think that's right. Its bad enough what folk think aboot us that's in here wi'out all that.

Ruth: So what can you do about it?

Anna: Well I just tell them. ... No just me the loons and that say it and a'. Just tell them that they dinnae hae tae hing aboot folk like that, ken that they'll get themselves in even mair trouble. You want tae start off being nice ken ...then well if they dinnae stop I just dinnae bother myself speaking to them. Especially like if you meet them doon the toon or something. I dinnae want my pals kenning that I bide wi someone like that.

(Anna, Bedroom, Brunswick, November 1996)

Anna makes clear that the experience of being admitted into residential care can be a difficult one. This experience is made worse by the attitudes held by the wider community about residential care and the young people who require it. There is an implicit understanding that young people may initially gravitate towards more negative networks as a means of (falsely) protecting them or granting them credibility from the resident group. Anna is clear that it is part of her and her fellow residents role to warn new admissions of the 'dangers' of being friends with this 'negative' peer group and that it is not necessary. It is only later, when such warnings have failed, that a further motivation for such behaviour is revealed. Anna is clear that the behaviour or network of residents has an effect on all those living in the unit and that she would wish to distance herself from that.

This response was common. However it became more complex when the 'negative' external networks consisted of individuals who were known and feared. It was for this reason that initially the strength of relationship was tested and established before any 'advice' was given. If the relationship was seen to be strong, and therefore the young people could be placing themselves at risk if they spoke negatively of these individuals, then they would withhold judgement. They would however limit social contact with the new residents, especially outwith the unit.

Families as Networks

Arguably family members could be regarded as a further form of external network. These relationships had a more complex impact on the dynamics of the resident group. Generally this impact rested on the treatment of the young person by their family and, in turn, how young people treated family members. Family difficulties were an accepted aspect of residential life. However certain forms of dysfunction were more readily accepted than others. Those young people who had an open history of physical or sexual abuse were expected to view their family in more negative terms, especially the perpetrators of the abuse. In such a context, concern for siblings was paramount. Young people would expect a degree of concern and encourage it. The following extract concerns a discussion between Martina and Christine. They have both been recently admitted to Strathmore. Martina has had long-standing contact with the social work department. Christine is talking about her relationship with her family.

Martina: I dinnae understand that then, they took you awa but they let your wee sister bide?

Christine: Aye, but she wasnae in bother like me so she didnae hae tae.

Martina: Aye, but they kent aboot your step dad and what he done to you and your mam.

Christine: Aye, but well my mam wanted her tae bide. She was wanting me taken awa.

Martina: Fucks sake. What aboot yer sister though. That's hellish. Are you no dead worried aboot her, ken wi him still in the hoose?

Christine: Aye...I phone her and that.

Martina: Just as well...god sake.

During the course of the above conversation it is clear that, although it is Christine's family who is the topic of the debate it is Martina who is the stronger participant in the discussion. It is she who is guiding the discussion and making clear how Christine should be reacting and behaving. This sense of responsibility for siblings, particularly younger siblings, was a key expectation of behaviour. 'It was not differentiated by gender. Boys had equal if not greater expectations to act as a means of support or rescue for their family members than young women.

Equally, members of the group challenged the ill-treatment of parents or siblings by a young person. This was particularly the case with young men who had demonstrated violence or inappropriate sexual behaviour toward family members. Not only did this relate back to perceptions held by the wider community and anxiety regarding how this would affect the view of the resident group, it also related to real concern about how these young people would treat their fellow residents. During my fieldwork there was a tacit understanding that extreme violence or unwelcome sexual behaviour would not be tolerated. However, it was generally expected that young people would talk about their family to some extent and would demonstrate a degree of loyalty, if not to their parental figures, then certainly to their siblings. As a result fellow residents viewed those who did not demonstrate loyalty with suspicion.

The Currency of Insider Knowledge

To become fully part of any group or organisation one has to have an awareness of its rules, its history and the more subtle aspects of its maintenance and order (Douglas 1983). On entering a new group or organisation one is initially informed of the 'official' roles and tasks allocated to its members and the rules and expectations which bind and guide them. It is only after a period of admission that the complexity of the composition of the new group becomes apparent (Bortner and Williams 1997). The 'insider knowledge' currency incorporates both these issues and this section aims to illustrate how these points are translated into the daily lives of the young people in both units studied.

Sharing Memories

A prominent feature of group living which emerged from the data was the sharing of collective histories³⁶. Young people would spend time recounting events or experiences that had been common to other members of the resident group. They would discuss staff and young people who had left the units and illustrate their memories of them with stories of collective experiences. The following extract from a conversation between Sharon and Fraser illustrates this:

Fraser: We used to run away a lot.

Sharon: Mind that time Douglas was phoning from the B and B?

Both Laugh

Fraser: We're all staying at this B and B then Douglas decides to phone the home to say we're al'right.

³⁶ The young people did present individual stories to each other. The impact that this had on their status was dictated by the content of the story and the ways in which it demonstrated skills or knowledge.

Sharon: Did 1471

Fraser: They (Staff) dialled 1471 and the police was up at us in five minutes

Both Laugh

(Fraser and Sharon, Quiet Room, Strathmore, March 1997)

These 'in-house' collective memories served as a means of locating individual young people within the resident group. They signalled to those new to the unit the importance of togetherness and sharing and reinforced the notion that the group was one of the main sources of 'friendship'. At such times the position of those involved in the telling of the story was heightened as was that of the 'actors'. As a result such collective remembering served also as a means of marginalising or excluding young people. Histories were recounted leaving out the part played by individuals or magnifying their perceived 'negative' behaviour. As a reinforcement of 'acceptable' behaviour, insider knowledge was a powerful resource. Indeed the telling of stories and more importantly of being included in such stories was a vital sign of acceptance and acceptability.

Ex-residents who returned to Strathmore to visit would behave in a similar way, reminiscing about past events and the part they had played in them. When recounting these tales to the current group the narrators would often emphasise the delinquent aspect of the story and stress their part in it. Ex-residents therefore took on a 'staff' or pedagogic role illustrating that they had 'learned from their mistakes'. This represented not only a distancing from their 'childhood' experience of being looked after, highlighting that they had 'moved on', but also contained a teaching component, encouraging others not to behave in the way that they now viewed as unfavourable. Ex-residents talked of their collective histories as being an essential part of their 'growing up' and of the realisation that they had put emotional roots down in the unit to which, essentially, they could return.

Interestingly, the stories told by both residents and ex-residents normally centred on other residents (as opposed to the staff) and what they had done as a group. Collective histories were often marked by significant events e.g. an argument, an 'adventure', birthdays or celebrations. Such stories quickly became 'legends', passed down from resident group to resident group without the requirement of any of those that had been active in the stories to be present. Often they were used as precedents to clarify more formal rules or expectations and were seen to be an integral part of both young people and staff practices. Both residents and staff would use these stories from the past as a means of advising young people, of warning them or to illustrate the meaning and/or justification behind house rules or expected conduct. The following extract occurred as a response to a new resident's tale of illegal drug use. The new resident states that she is aware that Fraser has used drugs in the past:

Fraser doesnae. He used to a lot. He didnae do any big ones like but speed and gas and that but he was fucking scarey. They (staff) dinnae believe that I dinnae dae it. Fraser does but I've never even tried it. I've smoked hash but I've never done gas. Gads. Wouldnae need to, you should have seen him standing there drooling, shaking. Douglas was pulling me off him. I thought he was going to die or something, what a state. He kept shouting for Douglas. He slowed doon and slowed doon and then he was a'right and then when we came hame they [the staff] were like 'Hilary, you look a bit funny. Have you been taking anything?'

(Hilary, Quiet Room, Strathmore, April 1997)

This extract demonstrates the ways in which Hilary maintains a sense of credibility by being clear that she has a working knowledge of drugs, she is not 'scared' or 'innocent'. As a result she is able to talk to the new resident about the unacceptability of drug use, without losing status. Initially she does this from the premise that it is unattractive and dangerous to use drugs and then she talks in terms of the repercussions in relation to staff. Indeed she is able to demonstrate that even involving oneself as an 'onlooker' may result in accusations from staff.

My first experience of being included in a collective history was after an outward bound trip. Andrew, whilst talking to a new admission about the events of that trip included the part that I had played in the weekend within his account. He described the play, which we had written and acted in, and the dance routines that the young women and I had practised. I felt that not only would I be remembered by the current members of the resident group but would also be discussed long after my departure with future residents whom I would never meet. More importantly I felt that I had been accepted by the other young people and was in some way connected to them by this shared experience.

Secret Strategies

A further element to this currency was the less public 'insider knowledge' that was shared and discussed amongst the young people. This knowledge could be described as the illicit strategies that governed the group itself. Those who had experience of residential care prior to coming to the unit were normally equipped with a relevant 'basic' knowledge of the strategies and expectations which would influence their acceptance and treatment by their fellow residents, not least because they had some idea of what constituted residential care. Those new to the system were quickly educated in the expectations placed on group members as their acceptance into the group rested in many ways on the attainment of such knowledge.

One of the most widely accepted insider rules was that of not 'grassing'. This term covered a wide range of behaviours rooted in the premise that young people should not tell adults or, on occasion, other residents about conversations or behaviours. By abiding by this requirement young people were automatically granted inclusion because they had been shown to be trustworthy and therefore

valuable allies. To fail to live up to this expectation would demonstrate to the others that the individual concerned had no allegiance to the group and would therefore pose a threat to its existence. This, in turn, would result in his/her exclusion from any secret words or deeds. Duncan gave me the following piece of advice regarding acceptance by the resident group:

Well if you want to be trusted in this place you dinnae grass folk up ... Anna tells me loads of stuff ken, what she gets up to and that and I dinnae tell nae'bdy. She doesnae even tell the others as she kens that they'll grass.

(Duncan, Bedroom, Brunswick, November 1996)

During the course of the analysis it became clear that grassing and other informal expectations of behaviour and reactions to them was a somewhat moveable feast. There appeared to be a recognition of the existence of, for example, grassing as a social phenomenon and hypothetically it was much derided. Responses to grassing at times when it was demonstrated however, appeared to vary. In this sense it appeared that such responses, although patterned, were not so established as to deserve the term 'rules'. The notion of strategies, by contrast, allows for the flexible way in which expectations are enforced and includes the methods used by individuals to negotiate their social world. Bourdieu argues that there are no clearly acceptable or unacceptable behaviours: rather 'rules' are enforced in a multitude of ways and are experienced and incorporated into an individual's behaviour in a number of ways (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992).

In terms of grassing, occasionally the expectation to hold counsel provided young people with a dilemma that even those deemed to be trustworthy found problematic. Occasionally, individuals confided in fellow residents, telling them of situations of danger or harm. In such circumstances the ability to contain such secrets became problematic. Those regarded as trustworthy at that moment

in time would confide in a similarly regarded individual in order to decide what action should be taken. In so doing, the responsibility was shared and the potential for allegations of grassing was limited. Such a situation occurred when one of the young women was sexually assaulted whilst on her way back to the unit. She initially confided in another resident who in turn discussed it with another 'trustworthy' group member. They then collectively approached a staff member and then, to further counter allegations of grassing, they spoke to the young woman concerned, confessing their actions. Within this example the trustworthy resident was granted status by handling the situation by appropriately using the inside knowledge currency. Not only did she act to protect her fellow resident she did so in a manner that acknowledged and avoided grassing. She was able to use the collective moral weight of the group to act 'responsibly' to supersede her action of grassing.

In the course of the fieldwork the young people did not directly explain why grassing was regarded as such a serious offence. Perhaps to grass was to betray loyalty to the group or to place group members at risk of sanction or harm. Group acceptance could be gained by the use of this insider knowledge currency and therefore a young person was not granted inclusion until he/she had proved his/her ability to keep secret information or behaviour. A further explanation for the perceived value of not grassing may be found in the young people's biographies. Some of the young people talked of the attitude toward authority figures that they had experienced prior to entering the care system. Their socialisation in this respect had consisted of a clear message not to trust such figures. Police, social workers, teachers etc. were regarded as not belonging to the same social world and were to be treated with caution, or in more extreme cases, open derision and as such were not to be told certain pieces of information. This type of belief system relates to the notion of habitus and the background, attitudes and expectations that individual young people brought to the resident group.

As such they were not empty vessels which were filled and shaped by the unit or by their fellow residents. In other words they as much influenced group culture, as it was an influence on them. The following example highlights this management of past and present expectations and belief systems. It is taken from a discussion between Neil and Tony. Tony has expressed concerns about his friend and has turned to Neil for advice.

That is a hard one right enough. See my dad was the same ken. He was always saying tae me, dinnae trust the pigs son, ken all that. telling me stories o the things the pigs dae to you in the cells and that. You shouldnae grass him like, no way ... but then if you dinnae he'll get caught anyway will he? Matter o time like. (pause) Ken this, fit I would dae is tae speak tae him, ken. Just say tae him that he's no on that he'll get himself in right bother. Fuck sake, look at the pair o us. Tell him he'll end up in here ... that'll stop him (laughs)

(Neil and Tony Quiet Room, Strathmore, May 1997)

In the above example Neil is able to acknowledge the messages he has been given from his family about, in this case, the police. Despite this he is able to see that Tony is concerned for his friend and that he needs to act. Neil uses the knowledge that he has of the outside world as well as that which he has gained from the unit to advise against grassing but to intervene. Indeed he recommends that Strathmore is used as a threat in order to prevent the behaviour from re-occurring.

Grassing was not the only action that the group resisted. There were other behaviours that would not be tolerated, such as stealing from other residents, being sexually 'inappropriate', being overly confident or 'pushy' and being threatening toward young people or staff. The degree to which such expectations were enforced or adhered to often relied on the context and positions of the individuals concerned. For example in situations where a member of the resident group had been ostracised for breaking such expectations of behaviour, for example being sexually inappropriate, this appeared to free the other residents from their own code of conduct. It became more acceptable to steal from

this person or to behave in a threatening manner. There was a sense that they deserved it. They had to be taught a lesson, they had to be educated in 'inside knowledge'.

Insider knowledge also extended to attitudes toward staff members and the boundaries that they were able to enforce. The young people knew which staff members they could disregard or alternatively in whom they could confide. They also had knowledge of ways to deceive staff members in order to, for example, get more money or increased access to the telephone. Such knowledge was used to gain status within the group and could manifest itself in advising individuals of methods of 'tricking' staff or by the young person undertaking the behaviour him/herself. It is important to note that knowledge continually changed and therefore to gain or maintain status using this currency one had to keep up to date with knowledge which could be used within the group. Neil provides one example:

I telt them to leave her alone like. Its nae right to give her a hard time.
Did you no ken Ruth? Aye, Fiona's (staff member) granny died. Shame eh? I've telt the rest of them to, ken, go easy on her.

(Neil, Kitchen, Strathmore, March 1997)

Duncan provides a further illustration of this knowledge in relation to staff practices. Here he is telling me about staff responses to drinking and the degree of knowledge regarding this issue that is held by two of his fellow residents.

I dinnae ken if they see me as different fae them cause we all do the same things it's just that I'm no so worried aboot being caught like the rest cause like Jack, he's a pal but he's so paranoid, you cannae believe. Like we went oot for a drink one night and he was like 'can you smell it on my breath?' I was like 'Jesus, shut up'. Even if they smell it the staff all ken that ab'dy ... Anna like she goes oot every Friday, she gets pissed guaranteed she comes in rat arsed every Friday and all the staff ken that but they still let her ging oot ken and yet other kids in this place they dinnae ken that the staff ken that you dae it and they dinnae mind. Well they dae mind like but they canne really stop you fae daing it. They dinnae ken

when we're about tae dae it so they cannae exactly keep us in all the time ... Thing is as long as you dinnae look it or smell o it, ken you're no stotting off walls, well yer alright.

(Duncan, Living Room, November 1996)

Open Rules

The currency of insider knowledge also extended to the rules and practices that existed openly in both units studied. At Strathmore and Brunswick the young people were, on admission, given a booklet that outlined the rules of the house, the routines etc. All the young people had formulated a clear understanding of who made the house rules although these ranged from '*everyone here, the staff and kids*', '*Vernon*' (the O.I.C.) to '*the social work department*'. Its use, as a method of influencing group positioning, was linked more closely to knowledge pertaining to the ways in which the rules were enforced, the way individual staff members interpreted the rules and which rules had been deemed unacceptable by the group.

Young people could demonstrate their knowledge in relation to this in such contexts as when another resident viewed him/herself as 'in trouble' or was trying to find ways of breaking the rules. Acting in an 'advisory' capacity whilst using this currency of knowledge resulted in the 'advisor' being granted temporary status. Like other currencies this rested on the premise that they had something, in this case knowledge, which was of value. The following extract is from a conversation between Hilary and Sharon. Sharon is desperate to buy cigarettes but has no money. Hilary tells her that she is going to try to 'forge' her clothing allowance to get extra money for cigarettes and that Sharon could do the same:

Right. I'm just going to say that I never got a receipt. Fraser did that and he wasn't even doing it, like he really dinnae get a receipt and they were o.k. about it, made an exception. Anyway you just say get trainers that are on sale but you dinnae tell the staff that. You say you dinnae get a receipt or you lost it but the price is on the box and that should be the right price so that way you'll hae money

to yersel. I'm daing it like...mind you if I dae it you cannae really cos that looks bad, ken both o us dacing it. But I'll gie you fags anyway.

(Hilary, Sharon's Bedroom, Strathmore, July 1997)

Young people could, themselves, enforce the rules of the house on other residents, safe in the knowledge that the staff team would support them. These were shared rules, accessible to both the staff and the young people, but like their own strategies often applied in a multitude of ways. Despite having access to the information book at Strathmore residents remained confused about some of the rules, particularly those that were rarely relevant and therefore rarely enforced. At such times the long-standing residents would quote precedents that had been set by previous residents or situations. By demonstrating such knowledge status was granted not just as a result of sharing a knowledge that the young people had been unaware of but often also knowledge, in the case of rarely used rules, the staff demonstrated uncertainty. There were general rules of which all were aware i.e. coming in times, bedtimes, smoking etc. As a result of this widespread knowledge only having knowledge of how to break or bend such rules could be used by the young people to gain status.

Knowing Your Group

Insider knowledge concerning other residents was a valuable asset. Residents felt justified in having a degree of knowledge of each other especially with regard to the reasons why fellow group members had been admitted. They were aware of the range of reasons why young people might require residential care and wanted to be clear how each admission might affect them and in turn the group. The need for reassurance of personal safety was one which was often sought from fellow residents. Young people were aware of the limitations placed on staff with regard to the sharing of information concerning other young people. On the whole they respected this code of

confidentiality but were then left to turn to each other as sources of information. In a discussion, held with me, concerning the unit as a whole, Allie explains possible reasons for admission to Strathmore:

Well it's like people come here for lots of things. Maybe they were badly treated by their parents or they couldn't look after them or they've done something bad sometimes really bad. It's that you've to look out for.

(Allie, Bedroom, Strathmore, November 1996)

Information regarding such wrong doings was difficult for the young people to access. Staff members would not discuss why individuals were admitted, therefore the group had to rely on their external network or the individual him/herself for this information. Although suspicions were raised on a number of occasions I was not aware that the group knew of the background of the two young people who were in residence and who had been alleged to have sexually abused younger children. The staff felt strongly that these residents were inappropriately placed in the units yet they were unable to prevent their admission. However no outward demonstrations or signals were made by the staff to hint at their concerns. Young people were therefore left to surmise or accept that the new admission was telling the truth about his/her reason for admission. To be concerned at the point of each new admission was common. However to maintain this concern without any foundation would serve to undermine the group. It is interesting to note that when individual young people raised concerns he/she voiced them to a select number of the young people and then to staff members. Rarely were they voiced to the group in its entirety.

Information about residents could extend beyond histories to incorporate current relevant behaviour. I was quickly advised who was a grass, who was a 'stirrer', who was trustworthy etc. Despite this

no one ever identified him/herself as being any of the above nor did these labels appear to be attached to any one individual. At some point nearly all of the young people in residence had been referred to by one of these labels. Once such labels were given, young people had to work hard at disproving their designated role to regain credibility. Many of these labels appeared to be attached for other reasons stretching from information passed on from external networks to apparent 'jealousy' over attention provided by staff. None of these labels appeared to be fixed and during my fieldwork all of the residents referred to one another in these terms.

Insider knowledge as a currency covers a wide range of behaviours and information. Found to be significant were the variations in knowledge that occurred during my fieldwork. There appeared to be no over-riding 'truths' rather there were set areas of knowledge whose content changed rapidly. To gain status by the use of the insider knowledge currency was dependent not just on what an individual knew and the social context in which the knowledge could be demonstrated but also how able they were to keep up to date with new knowledge.

Sexual Knowledge/Relationships

This theme or currency has been quite problematic to name as it incorporates the knowledge young people had of sexual activity and of relationships. Critically the term 'relationship' within this context is limited to 'dating' couples rather than friendships or familial relationships. It should be noted that none of the young people discussed sexual orientation in my presence and therefore this section is written from a position of assumed heterosexuality. The following section aims to give the reader some insight into the types of sexual knowledge that were valued, the ways in which such

knowledge was shared and contextualised and finally the ways in which the demonstration of this currency impacted on the group.

The Importance of Relationships

There were a number of relationships occurring within Strathmore during the time of my fieldwork (significantly there were none of which I was aware within Brunswick). The majority of these relationships were sustained over a number of weeks and, in some cases, months. Staff members were aware of their existence although often did not gain this knowledge until the relationships were well established. This type of relationship was highly regarded by the resident group, as relationships, rather than one-off dates, were what young people endeavoured to achieve. As a result the young people made a clear distinction between a relationship and a 'date' as Hilary's statement explains:

Well, (laughs) ... Its like getting off wi' somebody that's a one-off, like kissing (laughs) and stuff but going wi' somebody well that's like you're going out together, steady, like a proper relationship.

(Hilary, Bedroom, Strathmore, October 1997)

Relationships were viewed by young people as significant aspects of an acceptable or 'normal' adolescent 'identity' and establishing a relationship was actively encouraged in others (Wight 1996).

At times when an individual was not 'going wi' somebody the group would encourage him/her to find a partner. Often the 'non-dating' individuals would then respond by identifying someone with whom he/she would like to go out or would make statements giving clear reason why he/she was 'single'. Sharon's statement is typical. It arose from a discussion held in the quiet room between Sharon , Hilary, Martina and Neil.

No, I'm just biding single for the rest of my life. They're all a bunch of dicks ... Treat you like shite.

(Sharon, Quiet Room, April 1997)

Being in or striving for a relationship was far more complex than I had first assumed. If 'single', young people had to have clear reasons why they were not in a relationship or had to be seen to be actively seeking a partner. It was vital not to be regarded as unwanted. To be unwanted affected not only the individual young person but also the group itself. Everybody wished themselves to be desirable and attractive to others, not least those on the 'outside'. Indeed a rejection of a group member was interpreted as a rejection of the group itself. In turn, unattractive or unwanted residents brought a sense of further alienation and stigmatisation to the whole group. One example of this arose during a conversation with Jack about the arrival of a new admission to the unit. Although in this case the admission was regarded as 'attractive' it goes some way to evidence the above-mentioned point.

Jack: Have you seen her? Aye, she's bonnie like.

Ruth: What does that matter like?

Jack: Well we dinnae want ugly quinnes in here.

Ruth: Why not?

Jack: Well.. I dinnae ken...its like good if folk at school can say 'oh does she bide wi you?' ken it makes us feel good ken?

Ruth: I suppose so.

Jack: Well like ab'dy at school they've got girlfriends and that and like it's bad enough biding in here. Folk thinking yer mental and a'thing but well if the quinnes are bonnie then folk can be a bitty jealous. It doesnae make it so bad.

Ruth: And if they're ugly?

Jack: Well then they laugh at you even more, think this place is even worse.

(Conversation with Jack, Dining Room, Brunswick, November 1997)

This stress on relationships was further manifested in the way that young people talked about staff members. They, especially the young women, were always joking about which member of staff was having a relationship with other staff members and appeared to want to extend this element of unit self-sufficiency to the staff. Very few references were made about young people's attractions to adult staff members, rather the emphasis was on the perceived attractions or relationships within the staff team. Young people appeared fascinated by staff members' lives outwith the unit. This fascination was concentrated on relationship issues, from partners to children to family life. Much could be made of this in terms of a desire for a family life of their own. It could also be argued however that young people regarded staff through their own frame of reference in which relationships, attractiveness and being wanted were prized. The residents frequently discussed staff in these terms and would vie for position through knowledge of their 'private lives'. Like other knowledge this was often assumed or pieced together and sold on as 'truth'.

Unacceptable Relationships

Relationships were not totally restricted to within the unit and during my fieldwork young people were 'romantically' involved with young people in the wider community. At Brunswick this was the 'norm', both the young women having boyfriends from the local town. At Strathmore these external relationships were less common, the majority of relationships occurring between residents. Only one young woman had a number of boyfriends from outwith this unit. The resident group viewed these boyfriends with suspicion. They were concerned about the 'type' of young men that this resident dated, viewing many of her boyfriends as demonstrating behaviour which suggested that they were 'using' the young woman for sex or status within their own networks. Alternatively

they in turn felt that she was 'using' some of the young men for the attainment of material goods or as a means of gaining inclusion to the wider community.

The number of boyfriends that this young woman had and how the external community viewed this further concerned the group. Fellow residents repeatedly warned her that her behaviour would result in her being 'labelled' as sexually promiscuous. These concerns were also expressed in terms of the impact on the group itself who regarded her behaviour as bringing disrepute upon the unit and in turn upon individual young people. As a result, frequent comments were made to and about this young woman, ranging from concern to derision.

The young woman involved had her own understanding of the treatment she received from the other residents. She believed that her behaviour threatened the organisation of the group which, she argued, was based around the notion of male dominance, particularly by one male. In a conversation with me she outlined her understanding of the group's reaction:

I went oot wi' him and the loons didnae like that because I was one of theirs, I belonged to them ... if a quinna comes in, like Fraser would ging oot wi' her and it was like nothing had happened but if we did ...we're their property kind of thing, there isn't that with the boys, they do what they like.

(Bryony, Quiet Room, Strathmore, February 1997)

This view that the young women were 'owned' by the young men in the unit was mirrored in the behaviour demonstrated, certainly in the initial stages of fieldwork. Fraser appeared to use relationships and sexual knowledge to gain status within the male group and to maintain tension and fragmentation within the female group. All the young women living in the unit in the first two months of my fieldwork had had a relationship with Fraser and all stated that they believed he would

go on to have relationships with any new female admissions. They described him as being distant to new female admissions, arousing their curiosity. He then would be charming and supportive, acknowledging the difficulties in coming into the unit. After establishing himself as a sympathetic ear he would then '*get off wi her*' and after this decide whether he would prolong the 'relationship' or 'free' her for the other male residents.

I observed Fraser taking a new admission out for the evening whilst he was in a relationship with another female resident. They both returned drunk and it was felt by both the staff and the young people that as a result of their appearance (both were very muddy) that they had had some kind of sexual contact. Certainly this young man did use his sexuality to influence his position within the group and for the initial months of the fieldwork he dominated the content of the discussions that I had with the young women. They all were aware of how he used this currency of sexual knowledge to achieve influence yet all continued to want to be in a relationship with him. The following extract is taken from a conversation between Allie and me. It was conducted in her bedroom and concerned the process of admission to the unit. This discussion occurred at an early point in my fieldwork when I was still negotiating my way into the group:

Ruth: So, what advice would you give someone if they were moving in here?

Allie: What age are they?

Ruth: Say they were 14

Allie: Probably say dinnae go out wi Fraser

Ruth: Why?

Allie: He's a little tart

Ruth: He is?

Allie: Ruth, he's been through every lassie in this home

Ruth: Has he?

Allie: Yep

Ruth: How does he manage that then?

Allie: Just his charms, the way he talks to them

Ruth: Is he usually the first one of the boys to go out with them?

Allie: The first? Aboot the only one. Well you wouldnae go oot wi the rest. He's the bonniest. He kens that when lassies move in here they're scared and that and they just want someone tae be nice. That's what he does. Charms them.

(Conversation with Allie, Bedroom, Strathmore, December 1996)

Allie describes the ways in which Fraser used his sexuality and his knowledge of relationships as

'charms'. She identifies the reason why young women would establish a relationship with Fraser.

This was not only because of his perceived level of attractiveness, but also because of the feelings

experienced by young people moving into care, their sense of vulnerability and their need for

friendship and 'belonging'. Allie makes clear that she is aware that it is at this point that Fraser

understands his 'charms' to be at their most potent and that this point of admission is the time when

the use of this sexual knowledge currency will be at its most effective.

Telling Stories

The sharing of sexual and relationship knowledge or information was a powerful means of gaining

momentary position. The young people would spend time talking about experiences of and attitudes

towards behaviour. This was often in the form of 'sexual storytelling' which was told in great

detail. Young people would recount incidents where sexual behaviour had been central to events.

For the young women, these stories would normally incorporate the topic of 'love' or of caring

between partners. They appeared careful to contextualise their sexual behaviour within a discourse

of 'love'. During these female discussions, young women who were able to define and describe the loving relationship that they were involved in and more importantly the ways in which this love had been demonstrated by their partners were accorded influence by those young women unable to do so (Holloway 1984). Martina, in a discussion with Bryony and Sharon, provides an example of this descriptive story telling:

Aye, he said 'I hope we'll still be together at Christmas. He bought me flowers and had them out on the bed when I went in. With a card 'to my darling Martina'. It was so bonnie. I put them in water. We were chatting and then I fell asleep and I couldnae keep my eyes open. He went oot and got me chips.

(Martina, Quiet Room, Strathmore, May 1997)

The young men, by comparison, were keen to stress their part in a recounted incident and the way in which the young women involved had regarded them. Their focus appeared to be on sexual 'action' rather than emotion. Such a finding is concurrent with Wight's (1996:152) identification of a 'predatory discourse' amongst working class males. Similarly this finding supports the argument put forward by Holland et al. that sexual pleasure-seeking for young men is secondary to the opinion of their male peers in relation to sexual activity (Holland et al. 1993). It was seen to be important however that the young men in this study were able to demonstrate that the young women involved had displayed emotion or feelings toward them. Interestingly the young women appeared to share sexual stories in public far more frequently than the young men who, in general, would wait until asked specific questions, often only within the company of other young men. The following extract from a conversation between Malcolm and Jordan illustrates the point well. This discussion took place at the back of the building. The two young men had gone out there to smoke. I was with Hilary and at her instruction was leaning out of her bedroom window above. The young men were unaware that we were listening to them.

Malcolm: Did you shag her?

Jordan: No, but I got her bra off. It was really hard. Two clips like but
I done it

Malcolm: Nice one

Jordan: Yeah she's in to me like

Malcolm: Ken , when I seen youse I thought you were shagging

Jordan: Na, just snogging

(Malcolm and Jordan, Back Step, Strathmore, June 1997)

Young women appeared to talk more of sexual 'repercussions' than the young men (Kitzinger 1995,

Holland et al. 1994). They would discuss pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases and would

use examples of people whom they had known who had experienced these to illustrate their point.

Through the telling of such stories they would warn fellow residents of potential 'dangers'.

Furthermore by talking about their own experiences in order to demonstrate behaviour which they,

with hindsight, regarded as 'risky' or inappropriate they made clear that they had gained a

knowledge of sexual activity and the elements of an 'appropriate' relationship. The following extract

gives an example of this:

Sharon: Fraser was having us all run aboot daft after him. Treating us
like shite. You don't notice it when you're wi' him, you think it's your
fault and that he loves you really but he does that to all the quinnes ... I
wasnae careful either like

Bryony: You had sex wi' him aboot 30 times and you never got
pregnant and you never used anything. All these folk that do it once and
then that's it. There must be something a dae wi' you

Sharon: I did use something

Bryony: Aye, after aboot 30 times

Sharon: Ken, stupid eh. I'm never going to fall pregnant, not until I'm
about 20.

(Bryony and Sharon, Kitchen, Strathmore, February 1997)

The young men, by contrast, appeared to view such incidents as occurring by fault of the women involved (Wight 1994). On encountering such tales they would respond by referring to the female participants as 'sluts' or 'slappers'. The male partner was rarely at fault as they viewed the responsibility for protection against sexually transmitted diseases or pregnancy as belonging to the woman (see also Lees 1993).

Young women did not, however, take responsibility for all aspects of relationships. They were able to place blame firmly at the feet of their male partners particularly at times when males were seen to have behaved inappropriately. Much of this concerned the young women's belief that young men often pursued them purely for sexual gratification and that this was a motivation that should be guarded against. During such discussion young women were seen to come together in support of one another. This support did not however occur until certain 'facts' were established. Facts concerning the young women's behaviour were central; crucially did she behave inappropriately? The following extract is from a conversation between Sharon and Christine. Sharon has just returned from an overnight visit to her friend in the next town. Her friend had arranged a 'blind date':

Sharon: I went through to meet him right but he was just being an arse, that's it. Because I was sleeping and he was trying to crack on to me and I telt him tae go... I telt him. Like when we were out he just came up to me and got off with me and then walked awa.

Christine: Why did he get off wi you?

Sharon: Fit dae you mean? He just walked up tae me and started snogging me and I was just standing there ken thinking what? And then he just walked away and then later on it was like he just wouldnae take no for an answer ken?

Christine: Aye, but see when he was snogging you, did you kiss him back?

Sharon: No way. I telt you . I just was standing there

Christine: Did you tell anybody that you liked him or that?

Sharon: No, I telt Janet (Friend) that he was creepy

Christine: That's bang oot o order that. Hellish. You better tell that Janet
nae tae set you up like that again. She shouldnae be hinging
about wi loons like that.

(Sharon and Christine, Quiet Room, Strathmore, May 1997)

The Changing Value of Sexual Knowledge

The impact that sexual knowledge had on the group changed over time. At some points during my fieldwork, to be sexually active and to be open about it was given high value whilst at others this was viewed negatively. It seemed as if the young people, especially young women, were expected to be sexually knowledgeable but not to be overly experienced. This currency was used by young women as a way of 'teaching' others, of illustrating alignment to 'normal' female behaviour and in order to talk of loving and of being loved. It was the young men who achieved status through the explicit use of this currency, particularly Fraser. Because he was 'desired' by the young women they argued that he was able to use this 'desirability' to gain an element of control over them. Interestingly, despite not appearing to want to be with them, he would only allow them to move away from him so far before seeking out their attention and affection. He would make obvious his dislike of the young women having external relationships by isolating them from the group. It appeared that in many ways Bryony was correct in her assumption that Fraser considered himself as 'owning' the female residents.

Fraser was, however, removed from the group by dealing badly in this currency. He went beyond the boundaries of 'appropriate' behaviour that he himself had done so much to establish. Firstly he

left one young woman to walk home alone (he was dating her at the time) during which she was sexually assaulted. The group 'forgave' his part in this but, by being placed momentarily on the outside of the group, it shook his image of a 'caring' 'protective' young man. Secondly, he had the aforementioned date with the new admission whilst being involved in a relationship with another female resident. Finally, not long after incident number two, it was revealed that he had been having a long-standing affair with an ex-resident who was pregnant. These three sexually based incidents marginalised him from the group. The ramifications of what were essentially sexually orientated behaviours affected not only his ability to use the currency of sexual knowledge and relationships effectively but also resulted in his being considered untrustworthy and dangerous.

There were clear gender differences with regard to the ways in which this currency could be applied. For young men having sexual experience and being able to talk specifically about it was valued, not only by other young men but also young women. For young women however such behaviour had a negative effect. Both young men and young women expected female residents to talk in terms of love, to be desirable but not 'easy' and to be innocent yet protect both parties from sexual harm. The impact of this currency, unlike the others, was significantly influenced by gender. There were notable differences in expectations of young men and young women in relation to their use of this currency. Indeed young women could lose status by appearing too knowledgeable or having had too many sexual experiences. One young man did discuss his feelings of love for his then girlfriend. Whilst he did not gain status as a result of this 'female' use of this currency he did not lose it either. The other young people reacted affectionately toward him, teasing him about his feelings.

System Knowledge

Children's homes and their functions are located very firmly in a legal and bureaucratic framework.

This framework reaches beyond local authority control to legal and social policy constraints. Many of the decisions concerning young people and their care are made by people outwith the individual unit (e.g. by the Children's hearing System, Social Work Inspectorate). As a result of the power that these external forces have, it was seen to be important, by the group, for young people to have knowledge of the wider 'system', especially that which influenced decisions concerning their care. Such knowledge was highly valued by the resident group and if the context allowed could influence the position of individuals. As such it should, within this work, be regarded as a social currency, specific to this social situation.

The Place of Staff

The rules that operated within the units have already been discussed in this chapter' but there were a further set of 'rules' and wider bureaucratic implications which were created outwith the institution. The resident groups rarely had an exact knowledge of these rules or of how they were formulated, but they did have a degree of knowledge that could subsequently be used to influence status. The following extract from a conversation between Hilary and Bryony illustrates this point. The discussion had begun with Hilary informing Bryony of a possible new admission to the unit. They go on to talk about which bedroom the young person will sleep in:

Bryony: They should put her in with Katriona. She's only in two nights.

Hilary: They cannae hae shared rooms any more.

Bryony: They did when I came in. I had to share.

Hilary: It's changed noo.

Bryony: Well you ken bloody mair than I do.

Hilary: It was ages ago Vernon telt us. What if they were nicking stuff
or that you were upset or something?

(Bryony and Hilary, Hilary's Bedroom, Strathmore, May 1997)

From this extract it can be seen that both girls are certain that the decision to have single rooms was taken by 'someone' outwith the unit. The staff members are referred to as 'they' and Hilary makes clear that an external force has restricted the staff's decision to use shared rooms. Although unclear as to what specific guidance had created this situation (in this case the Skinner Report 1992), Hilary goes on to demonstrate her knowledge by referring to the direct source of her information (the O.I.C.) as well as going some way to exploring the reasoning behind it.

The belief that staff members were not free to make decisions was commonly held. The young people were aware that the staff group were bound by a wider system and organisation and, as a result, had limited decision-making power. The young people would at times feel frustrated by this, arguing that staff should have more autonomy. This belief was often translated into anger at the staff and a sense of disappointment. It served further to fuel the belief that young people were not regarded as individuals but rather as a group in need of care. In such context this sense of group care expanded to include all young people being looked after. The young people felt powerless to change or have influence over their care against such a mighty and mysterious bureaucracy.

The notion of external systems was further translated to incorporate staff practices, qualifications and motivation to work within the unit. The over-riding quality valued by young people was the perception of staff being motivated by caring. In turn 'insight' regarding which staff members had this valued characteristic was regarded as 'knowledge'. There was a mixed response to what the

young people regarded as staff member motivation for working in the unit. Karen provides an example of the differing perspectives:

Fit I think is that they're just here to do their job. Some of the staff they are here for the kids, they do get attached to us but some of them are here to do their job and to get paid for it.

(Karen, Dining Room, Brunswick, November 1997)

There appeared to be general confusion surrounding the qualifications that staff members held. The young people identified certain staff as having social work qualifications whilst others they regarded as unqualified 'carers'. They would debate the issue at length within the group, although, in point of fact, they were often wrong in their identification of qualified and unqualified staff. Young people linked qualifications with individual staff member's knowledge, power and status. Such issues were seen as being important not so much in their direct care but in how their individual 'case' would be responded to by the wider system. The issue of qualification was further used to discuss staff practices, especially if such practices were not well received by the young people. They could be used as a means of challenging staff decisions or in an attempt to undermine staff confidence.

There were mixed feelings about staff undertaking outreach work with young people in the community. Some of the residents viewed this as negative, believing that staff time should be used exclusively for the unit whilst others regarded it as worthwhile. As Hilary explains:

They need space from watching us all the time ... they need to work with other folk, they are social workers.

(Hilary in conversation with Malcolm, Quiet Room, Strathmore, September 1997)

The above example is particularly interesting as it demonstrates Hilary's belief that the staff were not undertaking social work tasks in the unit. In other words social work, in her opinion, occurred outwith. Consequently Hilary is clear that staff members ought to be 'allowed' to see other families and young people in order to use the skills and knowledge, acquired in their training, to 'do' social work

There was a general sense that the young people felt that social work practice did not occur within the units. Rather it was something that came into play when talking to outside institutions like the police, schools or families. The young people rarely considered themselves to be 'social worked' and found, in general, that this type of intervention involved other professionals. In general the staff were viewed positively, as fair and as genuinely caring. This perception did however change as relationships and circumstances changed. When young people were being sanctioned or boundaries were being enforced then it was more likely that the staff were viewed in a negative way. During the initial discussion with the young people regarding my fieldwork Neil made the following point:

If you want to ken what it's like tae bide here ... hae tae come and bide ... If you ask folk some days they'll say it's great, other days they'll say it's total shite. Depends on like if they've had a fall oot wi staff or their pals or that.

(Neil, Strathmore Focus Group, November 1996)

Resources

The young people involved in this study appeared to be acutely aware of resources within the 'care' system. The majority had had experience of alternative resources prior to their admission, mostly in the form of foster care. They reported having experienced from two to 12 previous placements

and, as a result, the majority had some understanding of the care system and where, within this system, they themselves were located. Many described a continuum of care beginning with foster care and ending in being accommodated in a secure unit. Staff and young people in attempts to influence individual 'bad' behaviour used knowledge of this continuum. Duncan, in the following example explains his current position in light of this:

God, I've got a meeting on Tuesday about my behaviour at school and it's just after my review. I think I've got to start behaving myself cause if I dinnae I'll be going into secure so its a bit dodgy like. Well that's what ab'dy tells me anyway.

(Duncan, Bedroom, Brunswick, December 1996)

It is debatable whether resources, such as secure units, were used as a threat to residents or as a means of allowing young people to make an informed choice by explaining that admission to such units could be the result of their continued behaviour. The resident group viewed such staff approaches as being motivated by both reasons and would often join the staff in using this type of information to alter other group members' behaviour. Indeed the use of such knowledge as a currency was common. Young people would use their knowledge of the continuum of care when advising others or as a means of demonstrating knowledge of where in this continuum the unit was placed. At times of new admissions or of discharges such information was used to try to substantiate claims of expected behaviours. For example the expectation was widespread that young people admitted from secure units would regard themselves as tough and were expected to demonstrate this.

The resident groups experienced resources within the community at different levels. All the young people had designated field social workers although their contact with them was variable. Some

young people reported meeting with their social worker on a fortnightly basis whilst others said that they had only met a 'couple of times'. The understanding of the purpose of these meetings was equally varied. They ranged from "*to sort me out when I'm in trouble*" (Anna), "*to write reports on me for the panel*" (Malcolm) to "*just making sure I'm OK*" (Martine). Some residents, like Hilary, had contact with a range of other professionals:

Hilary: Got to see my psychologist, my educational psychologist.

Ruth: You've got heaps of folk to see.

Hilary: Ken, I've a psychiatrist and a' (laugh).

Ruth: Who do you go to?

Sharon: Just my social worker.

Hilary: I've to see my social worker, my psychiatrist, my psychologist, the educational social worker thingy, my tutor (laughs).

Ruth: Can you speak to them?

Hilary: No, I can really speak to my key worker here though.

(Hilary, Sharon, Neil and Fraser, Inveray Outdoor Centre, April 1997)

Like knowledge of the wider system, knowledge of local individualised services could be used as a way of gaining momentary status within the group. The roles, expectations and limitations of such services were regularly discussed and having first-hand experience was seen as providing added credibility. Young people were generally cynical about these services and would recount tales of trickery or power plays in which they had been involved. Such story telling served also to distance them from the services and the social meanings that were attached. Most often these tales related to psychiatric or psychological services. Much was made of stories that were told to these professionals to put them off and therefore to demonstrate the insignificance of these services to the young people. It was not the young person who was 'mad' but the professional for believing the story or for using the jargon.

Hearings and Reviews

All the young people had been placed in the units by the Children's Hearing System and were therefore subject to regular hearings and reviews. Despite their attendance few young people regarded such meetings as of benefit or as a positive experience. Rather they were considered to exist as a means of monitoring behaviour and as a forum in which 'adults' made decisions about future plans and resources. There was normally a period of anxiety for young people prior to such meetings, stemming from concerns regarding process, content and outcome. Young people expected those experiencing such anxieties to discuss these issues with the group. During these discussions they would evaluate the individual's behaviour since the previous meeting in order to try to anticipate the Hearing's decision.

The Children's Hearing System was regarded as having little to do with 'care' or 'protection' but instead was seen as a body to which the young person had to explain any misdemeanours. This perpetuated the residents' view that they were placed in the unit as a result of their 'bad' behaviour and were in effect 'doing time'. It was felt that these meetings concentrated on the challenging or troublesome aspects of their behaviour. Indeed I noted that the young people rarely talked of their parent's or the unit's part in these meetings and certainly not in terms of expectation of care and control. Blame was centred wholly on the young person. Young people, were able to utilise their knowledge of the system during the time prior to a hearing to advise other group members. The following extract from a conversation between Hilary and Bryony illustrates this:

Hilary: Vernon's not wanting me to go to my review. He's worried that I'll get embarrassed or upset cos I've got to speak about what happened. Anyway and I've to see that police wifie about it at the time my meetings on.

Bryony: Just tell Vernon 'I want to go to my review. I dinnae want to see the wifie'. He cannae stop you fae going. It's your right to go ... I wouldnae gie a shit if it was embarrassing or no. You've got rights Hilary.

(Hilary and Bryony, Quiet Room, Strathmore, May 1997)

The discussion of rights happened regularly. The term 'rights' embraced such issues as attendance at meetings, access to family, contact with social workers and, most often, with reference to rights of access to finance and clothing. Young people were constantly suspicious that others were being given more 'rights' than they were. They had an accurate idea of their entitlement to clothing etc. and were constantly requesting it. The following example is typical:

Vernon: You got all that money last week and you should have budgetedPete (staff) can't come in here and ask for a sub until he gets paid.

Sharon: You give Allie (ex resident) and that, money

Vernon: And its paid back straight away. You don't have to buy food or pay for a wee baby.

Sharon: We're young and we should be out enjoying ourselves though.

(Vernon and Sharon, Dining Room, Strathmore, June 1997)

Having a sound knowledge of entitlement to funds was one way in which young people felt they had control of the wider system. They felt that they had little impact on the hearing system or on meetings with social workers and were unclear about how these meetings were run. However they knew that they had a right to be given money for clothes and toiletries. To be able to benefit from extra material goods or finance resulted in an even greater sense of power; that they were beating the system.

Conclusions

This chapter has contributed to an exploration of some of the key themes of this thesis: young people's negotiation of position through the use of knowledge, the function of the group in monitoring young people's behaviour and the experience of living as part of a group. The general notion that knowledge could be used to encourage, support or distance young people from the group and could also create an individualised sense of power within the wider social work system and indeed social world gave currencies of knowledge a recognised value. It was found that knowledge was derived from a number of sources and was often accurate. However such knowledge did frequently rest on assumptions or on pieces of information gleaned from past residents or passed down through the resident groups. The ways in which knowledge, in its various forms, impacted on the groups appeared to be directly related to the relationship such knowledge, and indeed the young people, had with the outside world.

One aim of this chapter was to explore the range of knowledge that the young people regarded as important. This was identified as that which concerned sexual behaviour and relationships, the inside workings of the units and resident group, the social work system and social networks. Key to all of these identified themes was the desire to demonstrate and equally to know this information. Indeed it has been argued that this need to know allowed such information to become important and therefore the young person who had it to be respected and valued. The complexity of these negotiations was demonstrated, as was the very fluid nature of group interaction. Once information was shared it became less powerful. As a result the young people had to gamble on whether the time in which they shared their knowledge allowed for optimum impact regarding their status within the group. One means of managing this position was to disclose partial information or to hint at the

knowledge held. Such a finding supports the argument put forward by this thesis that credibility and position within both resident groups was transitory.

Chapter Eight

Currencies of Environment

Fraser Struts his Stuff

Neil, Bryony, Sharon and I are sitting round the table in the quiet room playing cards, smoking and chatting. It's Friday night and Neil has just returned home from work. The door opens and Fraser enters. He picks up the spare chair from the table and sits beside the window, away from the group. Despite attempts by all those present to involve him in conversation he sits silently staring out of the window. It is dark outside so we can see his reflection in the windowpane. The atmosphere in the room changes. Conversation amongst the card players becomes increasingly subdued as we all try to work out why Fraser is not talking. We glance repeatedly in Fraser's direction yet he remains silent. Without warning he gets up and stands behind Sharon, his hands on her shoulders, leaning over her.

Fraser: You lot are totally disgusting.

Sharon: What do you mean, like?

Fraser: Well, sitting there wi your fags, polluting the place. It maks me seek.

Neil: Nae'bdy says you have tae bide in here.

*Fraser: It's my room tae ... I dinnae like it ... why should I hae tae put up wi
it?*

Fraser's hands move to the back of Sharon's chair and he pulls it round so that Sharon is now sitting side on to the table, facing the door. She glances around at us all. He takes the cigarette out of her hand and stubs it out in the ashtray.

Sharon: Ocht, I'm off tae my room. Get some peace away fae you.

Sharon leaves the room, slamming the door behind her. Fraser sits in Sharon's vacated seat.

Bryony: See what you did ... There's nae need for that. There's plenty other rooms tae sit in if you dinnae like it.

Fraser: Youse are like sheep, cannae think for yerselfs.

During this exchange Fraser uses the social space of the room coupled with his own body movement to demonstrate a level of control over those present. By choosing a room that he knows staff will be unlikely to enter he is able to command the full attention of those present. Once he has ensured that he has been successful in placing himself at the centre of everyone's attention he is then able to

reinforce his position through the use of physical touch and the verbal derision of smoking behaviour.

The above extract illustrates the use that young people made of the physical environment as a means of gaining momentary credibility. Not only does it highlight how space can be used but also the ways in which young people can employ their own physical movement and non-verbal communication to achieve this sense of power. In the example Fraser uses his body; first to demonstrate his dislike of his fellow residents' behaviour and then, by touching Sharon and controlling her movement, as a means of intimidation.

Fraser is able to use his physical body as well as the space around him to create a sense of control. He further demonstrates that this control has been mastered by criticising the behaviour in which the other young people are involved. The result is at first a sense of general confusion as to why Fraser has physically removed himself from the group and then a sense of unease as a result of his silence. Fraser is able to take advantage of this by his use of touch and his criticisms of the others' behaviour. Overall he has constructed a social context (one of surprise, confusion and ultimately fear) within which his use of the environment results in his being granted momentary influence by those present.

Introduction

This chapter examines the data concerned with the social practices and negotiations relating to the environment of the children's homes. During the analysis it emerged that social space could be used by the young people as means of affecting how their fellow residents regarded them. This finding related not only to actual rooms and places in the units but also to individual young people's non-verbal communication and physical movement.

Currencies of the environment were therefore derived from skill, knowledge or competence that related to the physical building and how it was used as well as to the ways in which individual young people were able to use their bodies both in terms of movement and touch. As with other social currencies, currencies of the environment were only successful as a means of gaining position if the social context allowed. In this chapter these three broad categories of environment (social space, touch, movement) are outlined and illustrations of the ways in which such currencies were invoked to gain credibility are given.

The Meaning of Social Space

The spaces within both units held specific meanings for the young people and staff. A clear distinction was made between public and private rooms, although the degree of distinction could be placed on a continuum with few of the rooms being totally out of bounds for either party. Both sections of the residential population had their own identified social 'space'. However entry into such spaces was negotiable for both young people and for staff. As a result of the scope for negotiation the ways in which these spaces were used and assigned acted as a foundation for their

development into social currencies. Indeed the control over space and the skills required to gain this control were highly regarded by the resident group.

Bedroom Space

One of the main areas of 'owned' space for the young people was their bedrooms. Within research and practice in residential care the single bedroom has become 'the symbol of control which is made even more meaningful if it contains a person's possessions and if that person is encouraged to use the room as his or her personal base' (Peace et al. 1997: 48). The right of access to a place in the unit that belongs wholly to the resident is arguably one of the most significant moves made away from institutional practice and batch handling. Single rooms however are not an unequivocal indicator of 'good practice' or of a sense of autonomy or control.

For those in Strathmore and Brunswick these rooms were the only areas designated individually and to which young people were given keys. The motivation for providing such security was described by staff as serving to maintain personal safety, security of possessions and to establish and acknowledge boundaries of privacy (Skinner 1992). The young people, however, rarely locked their bedroom doors, many having lost or misplaced their keys. This appeared to be the case for both young men and young women. Rather they attempted to establish an unspoken agreement that personal bedroom space would be respected and that no one would enter without their permission. This respect extended to the cleaner who would Hoover and clean after permission was sought from the young people. Many of the residents in both units studied elected to maintain their bedrooms themselves.

Staff would not enter rooms without knocking and waiting for permission to enter. Such respect for privacy proved more problematic with fellow residents who would, although never admitting it, on occasion go into other bedrooms to borrow clothes or music or indeed to destroy or damage a young person's belongings. To be seen to be doing this resulted in immediate exclusion from the group. If, however, the context allowed, for example if the bedroom was owned by a young person who had been seen to have committed a worse 'crime', young people would actually gain momentary credibility for their invasion. The following example illustrates this point:

Hilary: Me and Bryony just got done for doing Malcolm's room

Ruth: What do you mean, doing Malcolm's room?

Hilary and Bryony both laugh and signal to me to gather closer to them.

Hilary: We pulled off his sheets, put toothpaste on his mirror and put bog roll roond the room.

Bryony: Aye, well he deserved it, little perv.

Ruth: What did he do like?

Hilary: He's been spying on us ... ken like when we get out the shower he's waiting for us in the hall ... pretends to be coming oot the lavvie ... aye and he comes in tae our rooms wi out asking.

Bryony: It's 'cos he thinks he'll get a look at us getting dressed... I hae tae lock my door noo and that's nae right ... never had tae dae that afore.

(Hilary, Bryony and Ruth, Kitchen Table, Strathmore, April 1997)

Despite breaking a public house rule by entering and indeed destroying Malcolm's bedroom without permission the other young people granted Hilary and Sharon a degree of influence because of their doing so. They regarded both girls' actions not only as brave but as altruistic. The girls had risked sanction for the good of the group and for the protection of the group's expectations of behaviour. Malcolm denied the allegations made against him. However the young women said that he had

ceased to 'spy' on them as a result of their actions. Young women appeared to be more conscious, or at least more vocal, about their right to privacy. It was of note that the younger boys appeared to have more difficulty in respecting this right of privacy than the older male residents.

Bedrooms were viewed and described by all the young people as their 'space'. The extent to which this conviction was held did however differ according to the 'commitment' to the units. Those young people who lived in the units full-time, with no prospect of returning to their families or to alternative care, were more protective of their bedroom space than those who regarded themselves as short-term admissions or those who were resident on a shared-care basis. As Karen describes:

I would say my bedroom is my favourite room ... if folk are arguing or that I just come up to my room. I get peace and quiet there.

(Karen, Dining Room, Brunswick, November 1996)

In contrast Katriona, a short-term, shared-care admission describes her bedroom as the following:

Aye, its ok. It's somewhere to go but it's no like my room at home. I dinnae really have my stuff here or that. Nae point really, I'm only here two nights.

(Katriona, Bedroom, Strathmore, June 1997)

This difference in attitude toward bedroom space had much to do with young people's identification with the unit as 'home'. For some this commitment was more readily made, with or without their belongings. Indeed many had not been allowed by their parents or carers to remove their personal belongings such as bedclothes, furniture, stereos etc. from home. Young people appeared to be aware of these restrictions placed on fellow residents by their families and would act to redress this. To allow the person a sense of ownership of their bedroom they would provide posters or pictures to

help decorate a bedroom space. The underlying assumption held by the young people was that if a 'space' was claimed then not only would a sense of belonging be established but also a sense of control. On admission the bedrooms would be relatively sparse. At Strathmore they contained a wash hand basin, a bed, a bedside table and a wardrobe. The bed would be made up with a member of staff and some attempt would be made to match the bed linen with the curtains. The walls were painted in neutral tones with a mirror being the only decoration of the wall space. Bedrooms were slightly more 'attractive' at Brunswick as they had been papered in patterned wall paper and contained pine furnishings. This had been the result of the recent refurbishment. Indeed the residents had picked out their choice of wall paper and carpets.

The group accepted that the majority of new admissions would remain in the unit for a significant length of time. Indeed it was often the other young people who grasped this long before the individual new admission him/herself. On occasion members of the resident group would use the claiming of bedroom space as a means of aiding young people with coming to terms with their admission or longer stay. Such behaviour was regarded positively by the group, especially if the new admission was liked. Using bedroom space in this symbolic way often resulted in the 'helper' being granted position not only by the new admission but by the group itself.

Did you see Sharon with Christine? ... She's a nice lassie like ... aye she helped her, ken put the stuff that she got fae her ma's up on the wall and that ... well I suppose it was the same for Sharon ... she thought she was just going to be here ken, for a couple of weeks well but then it didn't work oot like that ... her mum fucked off as soon as she was shot o her ... She thinks that Christine's'll dae the same ... Doubt her ma'll move quite as far though (laughs) ... anyway it was a good thing ken tae dae ..maks you feel better, kenning that you've got yer ane place.

(Neil, Quiet Room, Strathmore, June 1997)

The degree to which young people personalised their bedrooms varied. Some young people, within Strathmore, had painted their rooms whilst others had covered their walls with posters and photographs. Interestingly it was one of the male residents who had decorated his bedroom most. The desire to personalise space did not appear to be influenced by age or gender but was influenced by perceived length of stay. There appeared to be no credibility gained by doing so, but such behaviour was seen by the group to demonstrate a 'commitment' to the unit and therefore to the resident group.

The sharing of space was one way of including and excluding others and acted as a tacit reinforcer of group strategies and expectations. Time spent with an individual in his/her bedroom rested on a degree of trust having been established. This trust covered not only reassurance of personal safety but also that belongings would be respected and that the visitor's behaviour would be appropriate. Often credibility would result from an invitation to spend time in someone's bedroom. However more often than not this sharing of space gave a clear signal concerning the lack of power and position that an individual had:

She just kept pestering me to come up to my room ... its was only to speak about Fraser ... I just telt her, ken in front o ab'dy that she wasnae getting in. I just was wanting to hae a blether wi Sharon on my ane.

(Tina, my bedroom, Strathmore, April 1997)

The word appropriate has been used deliberately in the above section as it implies the fluid nature of acceptability. On occasion, acts, which were normally seen as 'inappropriate' for example shouting or destroying possessions, were regarded as acceptable. Such events usually happened in reaction to staff sanction or comment or as a display against fellow residents. Young people invited each other

into their bedrooms for a variety of reasons. The official house rule was that young men did not spend time in young women's bedrooms and vice versa and that no one went into bedrooms after bedtime. In general this rule was adhered to. Indeed it appeared that it was mainly young women who wanted to share their bedroom space with their fellow female residents. One of the most significant breaches of this rule that I witnessed occurred during a situation when three of the young people locked themselves into a bedroom. Their motivation for doing this was to protest against staff members. This protest concerned a decision that had been made to sanction one of the young people.

Young people were aware that staff had no right of access to their bedrooms unless invited. The only acceptable deviation from this was if it was felt that the behaviour of the young person warranted concern. In relation to the above example of protest the staff reacted initially by acknowledging the situation, that the young people had locked themselves into a bedroom, thereafter they informed the young people that they were being ignored (although staff monitored their behaviour throughout). This became more problematic as they began smoking in the bedroom and throwing various items out of the window. They were then warned that staff would be forced to enter. The young people compensated for this by barricading themselves in. The incident lasted for twenty minutes and ended when a member of staff informed the young people that she was putting the kettle on for a cup of tea and asked if they wished to join her. After a further five minutes the young people involved gathered in the kitchen, sat round the table and talked through their frustrations. Their views were listened to and debated and agreement was reached that all those involved would clear up the mess in the bedroom, apologise to the other young people and staff and

would voice their frustration at the staff decision against which they had protested at the next house meeting.

Interestingly such confrontational behaviour, although it occurred only three times during my year-long fieldwork, only ever occurred in bedrooms. It may be that young people felt that they had a greater claim on this space or that the social meaning of bedroom space and its links with sexuality had a more significant impact on staff reaction. Such behaviour may also have been as a consequence of the location of these rooms and the resultant problems in accessing them.

Sometimes we just dae it tae wind them up ... they think we're in here at it (having sex) or something ... in a way like you never get a room tae yerself, no properly... Like say you were wantin to sit up in the bedroom all night they (staff) would come in and go 'are you a'right? You a'right? Are you OK?' so you're no getting peace tae yersel. Mind you I think it's cos we dae sometimes come up here ken tae annoy them, we ken they hae tae dae something aboot it ... one easy way tae wind them up.

(Karen, Bedroom, Pilot Interview, Brunswick, November 1996)

Shared Space

Despite the 'common sense' assumption that public rooms, such as the lounge and kitchen, were shared space such sharing was found to be strongly related to time. There were points in the day when the 'ownership' of these rooms fell to staff members rather than young people. At such times access had to be negotiated with staff or at the very least supervised. During my initial visits I had assumed that the lounges in both units were perceived as being for adults and young people alike. In both units these rooms were beautifully decorated and always tidy. As my time in the units increased however, I discovered that during the day these rooms were used for meetings, staff supervision or, as was the case at Strathmore, kept locked. The justification for this decision was that young people should be at school or at work not at home watching TV. Therefore by keeping

this room out of bounds during the day the unit was not encouraging young people to stay away from their expected routine.

The fluidity of meanings attached to 'public' space related closely to the use of the buildings as places of business. This was more striking at Strathmore, the larger of the two units studied. Here the Officer-in-Charge, the Deputy, the cook, the cleaner and the secretary all worked 'day' shifts. At the time of their arrival the unit immediately became more focused on 'work' rather than 'home' tasks. This notion of 'work' ranged from domestic tasks, to staff supervision, to formally tackling young people about their behaviour. Most frequently these tasks took place in the public spaces of the kitchen and the lounge and in the staff space of the office.

The lounges therefore took on a more official function during the day, serving as a location to conduct meetings or to plan. This was true of both units although it felt more apparent at Strathmore where the lounge could be and was locked. The young people did not generally challenge this use of shared space viewing the staff group as having final say over its use. Little attempt was made to try to break this 'rule' and rarely did young people interrupt staff members 'working' in the lounge.

On occasion however young people would, in both units, attempt to listen in to discussions that took place in these rooms. This was particularly the case for the meetings held at the changeover of shift. At such times they would crouch outside the window or would lie across the bottom of the door. Again, like many of the behaviours within the unit, such behaviour was only acceptable in specific contexts, more regularly as a result of an unfair sanction or concern about future planning.

In general terms, young people in both units were aware of the private information that was shared at such meetings about the other young people and respected the privacy that this sharing required (Berridge and Brodie 1998). Credibility in this respect was granted to those who were willing to risk listening in to help a fellow resident or as a means of protecting the group. Again this practice appeared to be undertaken regardless of the age or gender of the resident, as the following example illustrates:

Couldnae believe he done that, ken ... thing is I'm totally shitting my panel ... I think they'll be sending me away this time ... It was bad last night like ... I came hame late and I was a bit cheeky, ken when they said tae me I was late and that ... well Ruth ... mental talking tae this tape thing ... thing is Jack he offered ken tae listen in tae changeover tae see what was being said aboot it see if I was in big trouble ... I said I was going tae make an effort like ... no much o a fucking effort though was it? ... anyway it turned oot fine 'cos they said that it was a one off and that I had been trying and that ... I owe Jack though, big time ... cannae believe he done it.

(Duncan, Diary, Brunswick, July 1997)

The lounges in both units took on a different spatial identity in the evenings where they would often become one of the central points of the unit. I was surprised at the amount of time the young people spent watching TV, finding it far less than I had imagined. Young people often shared evening TV time with staff members. However they seemed to be discerning viewers watching only the programmes that they wished to watch and leaving the room when the programme ended. Strathmore had regular video nights, which normally involved all the residents. On these occasions the couches would be pulled in nearer to the TV and the lights would be dimmed. Such nights were one of the few occasions, outside of set routine events (e.g. meal times) when all the young people would be gathered together as a group.

The kitchen at Strathmore had a similar changing focus, as during the day it became the cook's place of work. The cook however, welcomed company and there would always be someone (staff or young person) seated at the kitchen table. Although this was public, shared space during the day it was controlled by the cook and shaped by her work. The young people seemed aware of this and would therefore chat whilst the cook was chopping vegetables etc. at the table or would, if encouraged, help with the preparation of meals.

The kitchen was more often than not the focus of the unit (Berridge and Brodie 1998). The cook was able to advise where everyone was and what they were doing. She would also always have news of past residents or town gossip. The cook herself created much of this 'homely' feel. She had been born and had grown up in the town and spoke in the local dialect. She knew most of the members of the community and was in many ways someone that the young people could identify with in a different way from the staff. She wore her feelings on her sleeve and would cry when sad or happy and would voice her concerns and anxieties. As such she was often someone with whom the young people would talk about personal matters or ask advice. She was very much an integral part of the unit and was regarded by the staff and young people as such.

I like all the staff here ... I dae ... they never ever shout even when you've done something wrong ... they're nae soft like, just do it different ... its no like being at my mams anyway ... she would scream and roar and throw things and a'thing but no here ... you ken where you're at wi this lot. Mary (cook) she's my favourite though ... she maks me feel special ken, like she'll mak the things I like and she a'ways blethers on aboot this and that in the toon... she kens my folk like ... kens what they're like but she's never said anything ... in fact she always tells me ken tae be nice tae them and all that ... ken no let myself doon, two wrongs dinnae make a right, all that stuff, she says a that stuff ... she's a bit like a granny.

(Bryony, Quiet Room, Strathmore, September 1997)

In the evening the kitchen became a meeting place for staff and young people where they would chat and relax. Within Brunswick this type of behaviour occurred at the dining room table as, due to its size, Brunswick had a small, fitted kitchen. Often these round-the-table discussions would be long lasting with participants in the discussion coming back and forth. Most frequently they would begin by someone making a cup of tea then sitting at the table to drink it, they would be joined by someone else and so on. Such gatherings were not exclusive and involved staff members and young people. At Strathmore young people and staff would use the dining room to do art work or to play board games.

Staff Space

In both units the staff members had a designated office space, in Strathmore there were two. These rooms were kept locked unless a member of staff was present. Indeed young people had to request access to use the telephone or to talk to staff members. Residents would often deliberately seek out staff whilst they were in the office in order to have exclusive time with them. In one sense this was protected adult time as access could be refused to other young people and indeed to other staff members.

Berridge and Brodie (1998:90) argue that staff in their study were protective of their space and that young people resented this protection. As a result they would frequently attempt to get into the office. Similarly Millham et al. (1979) argue that it is the staff who use the office as a place of escape and sanctuary. The office becomes a means of escaping contact with the young people. Such 'avoidance' was not apparent at Strathmore or Brunswick. 'Escape' was seen as a genuine, recognised need by both young people and staff and could be met by running an errand outwith the

building or having a cigarette. It appeared to be the exclusive attention of staff that was the attraction of 'office time' by the young people and the sense of having this time in adult space. Credibility was therefore granted to young people who were able to negotiate their way into this 'staff space' and have exclusive time with staff members.

Within Strathmore, young people and staff could be guaranteed uninterrupted time if they sat in what was known as the 'glass house'. This room was in fact the front porch that had been given its name as a result of the glass wall connecting it to the rest of the building. Those inside that room were visible to others in the building and it was a general rule that they were not to be disturbed. I was repeatedly surprised at the respect that was given to this 'rule'. I witnessed frequent 'meetings' held between staff member and staff member, young person and young person and young person and staff member that were allowed total privacy and peace. As Allie explains:

You cannae go in there, they're speaking ... the glass hoose is where folk go for peace and quiet tae speak without getting interrupted ... they ken it's tea time and they'll come out when they're ready.

(Allie, conversation with Hilary, Kitchen Strathmore, November 1996)

Group Space

The young people had communal rooms that they perceived as their group space. Within Strathmore this was the smoking room whilst at Brunswick this was the games room. Although the staff had an accepted right of access they rarely spent time there. In the following quotation Bryony explains why the smoking room was her favourite room:

... cos you can go there and speak tae ab'dy and hae a fag and the staff dinnae really come in.

(Bryony, Quiet Room, Strathmore, February 1997)

The resident group perceived this group space as important as it was in this space alone that they could gather together as a group, free of interruption from adults. Near the end of my fieldwork at Strathmore all smoking was banned from the building and the smoking room was refurbished into a small sitting room and this appeared to have a significant impact on the group. Critically, they spent less time as a whole group, rather they divided into smaller sub groups and would spend time in their bedrooms or in the kitchen with staff. As a result of the change of purpose and furnishing of the room (as a small sitting room it could hold only 3 or 4 people) the residents lost their collective space. Previously it had been decorated with drawings of the staff and young people and had a poster on the door stating that the room belonged to the 'Strathers' the group's collective name. Interestingly when these decorations were taken down such collective referencing occurred less often.

The use of space, and in particular this collective space had to be negotiated with new admissions or visitors to the units. Strathmore seemed to be more accommodating of new members in terms of sharing group space than Brunswick. At Brunswick young people would regularly make comments such as 'this is my house' stating some claim of ownership that was less apparent at Strathmore. Culturally the rights of ownership were understood in quite different ways. This may be as a result of the long-stay nature and smaller size of Brunswick or in fact that its appearance was far more that of a family home. In both units however it was expected that 'incomers' negotiated space gradually. Both groups of young people remarked on their dislike of those who came in and tried to 'take over' the building as if it 'were theirs'. This related both to staff and to young people, and it was frequently remarked to staff that this was the young people's home and care should be taken to respect that. This knowledge of how to use space to stamp ownership without undermining others'

sense of belonging was highly regarded and seen as a skill. Significantly this knowledge was seen as being accessible to all young people, regardless of age or gender.

I'd tell them (new admission) to just take their time y'know? They have tae mind that even though they're just here for the night or whatever and they think this place is a shit hole and we're all nutters ... well it's still oor hoose ken, it's where we bide. They cannae just come in and rule the place ... cannae march about ... It takes a bit of time 'til we all get used to each other and that ... they need to do that, ken, take their time.

(Neil, Bedroom, Strathmore, February 1997)

As Neil explains, a young person who fails to recognise that space is already owned will immediately fail to gain position or respect by his/her fellow residents. Those young people who recognise that space has to be negotiated and who can conduct such negotiations skilfully will, by contrast, be highly regarded and accepted by the group. From the data it appeared that all young people at Strathmore recognised the need to share the space in the unit. Indeed they understood the unit to exist for all young people in need. Crucially, however it appeared that the unit was always 'owned' by those who had residence and it was the established residents with whom new admissions had to negotiate.

Who's Been Sitting in My Chair?

As with other studies of residential life (see for example Polsky 1962) the seating patterns within both units, particularly at meal times, were found to be ordered. A pattern was established prior to the commencement of my fieldwork although the patterns did alter as a result of young people being admitted and discharged. Normally the staff would sit at one side of the table whilst the young people sat at the other. This was found to be the case in both units studied. Although at Brunswick the table was square which meant that there was no 'top of the table' seating position, the staff and resident divide remained visible, with young people sitting nearest the door. By contrast Strathmore

had two oblong tables although generally only one was used. This divide of staff and young people may have resulted from young people being seated at the table first. The staff members were usually involved in preparing or presenting the food and therefore were seated last.

Throughout Fraser's involvement in my fieldwork he sat at the top of the table usually with two young women seated on either side. At times when he was absent from the table and after he was discharged, Neil or Sharon took this seat. Interestingly two months after Fraser had left the unit, Malcolm sat in this chair declaring:

Fraser said I could sit in his seat!

(Malcolm, Dining Room, Strathmore, May 1997)

It became increasingly clear that the young people who were seen to be in positions of power, or more significantly those who were keen to be perceived as having such power, had access to the seat at the top of the table. As a means of achieving influence through using space and seating as a social currency it was a powerful signal. Young people would regularly argue over the 'best seats' or declare ownership of seats that held significance, notably those furthest away from the staff. By having such a seat not only was a message of status articulated but also a sense of belonging. Such seating patterns are not solely linked to residential life; many families have set seating patterns which make statements about position within the family. The stereotypical head-of-the-table seat is often assumed by the father figure with the mother at the other end, usually nearest the exit to the kitchen. The young people were clear that the head-of-the-table seat held special meaning as the following conversation demonstrates:

Ruth: Do you always sit here?

Hilary: Aye.

Ruth: And do you always sit in that one?

Neil: Aye, I do. This is my king chair.

Ruth: I thought Fraser usually sat there?

Neil: I'll only sit here ...I winnae sit here if Fraser is here.

Hilary: Aye, Allie used to sit there all the time

Neil: She chores (stole) it. She was here every time a'fore me. She kept
on chores it so I couldnae get it. It's mine, the king's seat.

(Tea Time, Strathmore, February 1997)

In common with the other uses of space and movement, seating could be used to exclude young people from the group. By limiting access to seating, young people were able to signal their dislike or disregard for others. For example after Allie had been discharged from the unit she would regularly visit. Often these visits would include her staying for a meal. On one occasion the seating was structured in such a way that it gave a clear message to Allie that she was no longer part of the group and therefore had no claim to the space within the unit. The following illustrates how this message was put across:

Fraser: Keep my seat Sharon.

Allie: That's my seat.

Fraser: I dinnae think so.

Allie: It is.

Fraser: It is not.

Allie: It is .

Fraser: Shut up you, you dinnae even bide here anymore.

(Tea Time, Strathmore, March 1997)

Davison (1995) argues that food is a significant aspect of residential life. For 'damaged' young people food can be used as a demonstration of care, respect, welcome and belonging. Food for

some young people can be used as both a comfort and a control: 'It is not coincidental that some disturbed young people head for kitchens when they feel particularly upset' (Davison 1995: 93).

Young people, not only those in residential care, can view food as one aspect of daily life over which they have a sense of control (Fahlberg 1991). They can claim likes or dislikes, can heap praise and reward on the chef and equally can refuse to eat. In both units meal times were considered to be an important part of the day and attempts were made not only for the food to be attractive but also for the experience of sitting together during a meal to be enjoyable (Kahan 1994:83). Although staff were aware of the seating behaviours of the young people they appeared to see this as a sense of ownership and as a means of developing a security in the meal-time ritual.

Knowing that you had a seat at the table meant that you were going to be fed and for some young people this was a significant change from their family life.

Movement

Intimidation

Those conducting research into residential life have considered the impact of social and physical isolation. Most recognition of this has come from literature surrounding residential care for older people. This is not however directly transferable to institutions working with young people. The impact of the environment on isolation may stem from the physical frailty of older people and their dependence on staff to move them closer to people with whom they would wish to spend time. However the significance of being 'accepted' and being 'part of the group' may hold far greater significance for younger people. Perlman and Joshi (1989) suggest that young people attempt to disguise loneliness because it carries a stigma: feeling lonely suggests that one is some kind of social

failure. Identity is closely bound up with group belonging and therefore ostracism can be employed as a powerful method of social control (Cottrell 1996).

Physical movement acted as a medium through which messages were sent to other residents. The movement of the individual and his/her use of body language rather than touch or speech can be considered as 'habitus' (May 1996). Such movement was often used to intimidate or make uncomfortable specific young people. Fraser was a particular master of the use of this currency as the following example from my field notes illustrates:

Fraser wandered in and out of the kitchen. At no point did he remain stationary nor attempt to communicate verbally. Tina and Neil watched him in silence and began talking only when he had left the room. He came in a fourth time and walked round the room then headed toward the door. Neil and Tina stood up from their seats and also made their way to the door. As they reached it Fraser turned, walked toward the table and sat down. The others then followed.

(Fieldnotes, March 1997)

This use of movement coupled with a lack of verbal communication leaves Tina and Neil feeling uncertain what is occurring. It is this uncertainty which in turn creates a sense of discomfort. What is absent from the above description was the physical posturing which accompanies such behaviour. In this regard there were clear gender differences and arguably different messages sent as a result. Fraser for example would conduct his movements with a physically upright posture, watching closely what was occurring around him. His motivation for so doing appeared to be to intimidate those around him.

The type of movements demonstrated by the young women were, by contrast, as a consequence of being unsettled rather than as an attempt to unsettle others. In the kitchen, for example, they would

walk toward the kettle, then sit at the table, then go to the dining room, pick up the paper etc. with heads bowed and displaying constant body motion.

Like the movements themselves the young people were clear about the resultant communication.

They explained that Fraser's use of movement was to "let us know he's there" or "to see what we are doing". They felt that he used such movement to signal to them that he felt the need to monitor their behaviour and had therefore placed himself in a position whereby he considered that all young people's actions could be surveyed. Interestingly the group appeared unaware of the female use of movement and seemed not to derive any meaning from it. The youngest admission during my period of fieldwork, despite being male, displayed the 'female' movement patterns. Such an apparent use of this behaviour confirmed that it served as a means of signalling a sense of uncertainty.

Exclusion

Movement was further used to physically isolate or alienate a young person. This behaviour appeared to be more common amongst the young women: certainly they were more regular instigators of such practice (See also Cottrell 1996). The physical inclusion or exclusion of young people was a powerful medium in demonstrating the group's attitude toward behaviours. For example after Tina's 'date' with Hilary's boyfriend the group felt that she had behaved inappropriately, arguably by misusing the sexual knowledge currency. Consequently she was excluded from the group, on a physical level. On entering the quiet room the others ignored her. Sharon then suggested that the group watch, in the lounge, videos of residential weekends that Strathmore had conducted. She made clear that the invitation did not extend to Tina by inviting

people by name, omitting Tina's name from the list (See also Cottrell 1996). The rest of the group decamped to watch the videos and could be heard laughing and chatting. Tina was left alone in the other room. Sharon, by contrast, gained credibility from the group as a result of her management of the situation and her management of the situation as a means of 'punishing' Tina.

Such enforced isolation sent a powerful message to the young person experiencing it that the group had rejected him/her. It further acted to reinforce to other young people the strength of the group and its power to alienate and isolate. As such it served as another method in promoting expected behaviour. There did not appear to be any one young person who was subjected to this form of treatment more than others. Certainly the age and gender of the young person did not make him/her more likely to receive this treatment. It was the act, rather than the person, which created such a reaction from the others in the group. Although ostracism can be regarded as bullying behaviour it is the repeated ostracism of a targeted individual which warrants this definition rather than the process of ostracism itself (Lawson 1995). However it has been argued that it is the premeditation and intentionality of such acts which constitute 'peer abuse' rather than the regularity of the events (Ambert 1995).

On occasion physical isolation occurred by choice. Young people would elect to spend time alone, away from the company of others. However this was not accomplished easily. Residents would spend long periods of time in the bathroom as an acceptable means of 'rejecting' the others. Indeed the bathroom was the only physical space where this was possible. Although bedrooms could be locked to deny fellow residents access, such behaviour was regarded as a rejection and was therefore derided. This derision meant that in any solitary activity which required concentration

e.g. homework or reading was difficult to pursue. It seemed that young people were expected to be part of the group and therefore other tasks or time that involved solitary activity were only acceptable if none of the other residents required time or attention:

Christine: I'm away for a bath tae get peace

Ruth: Why don't you just go to your room?

Christine: Ocht, you'll soon learn. If you go to your room everyone starts asking if you're ok. The kids think you've fell oot wi them and the staff think there's something wrong... Its easier just tae go and hae a soak and listen to my music.

(Conversation with Christine, Quiet Room, Strathmore, December 1996)

The use of movement to marginalise an individual was extended to include staff members. Such behaviour occurred in much the same way as Tina's exclusion had been executed. Young people would physically leave the room or conversations would cease when the targeted adult entered. The staff group appeared to be more comfortable with challenging this rejection than young people and would sit in public rooms despite obvious hostility. A counter challenge could then be brought in the form of group movement to another room or, to have even greater impact, to a bedroom. Bedrooms were regarded as more significant as not only were they viewed as the young persons' space and were therefore much more difficult for staff to enter without permission but they also symbolised an open breach of the rules and provocation to the staff.

The knowledge and skill involved in managing these situations were closely linked to the use of movement as a social currency. Such skill concerned not only the execution of such behaviour but also the ability to negotiate its ending. In situations including staff members or other young people, the group would eventually end their protest and reintegrate the individual back into the group. The

point at which this was done and indeed which member instigated such a move was an opportunity for momentary credibility. It was important for no party to been seen to be the 'loser'. Rather the ideal was to achieve a state of almost seamless reintegration. Often this was done through the sharing of food or drink or in the case of the young people in the form of smoking together or borrowing cigarettes. The following example highlights this:

Ruth: So how did you and Tina start speaking again?

Sharon: Well she asked me for a drag ... she didnae hae any fags so I gave her een and then we just started speaking ... well I couldnae leave her wi' oot a fag ... I'm nae cruel.

(Sharon , Quiet Room, April 1997)

The above example illustrates the importance of being seen to be a 'decent' person, not overly 'cruel', yet at the same time waiting for the opportunity to end the period of exclusion as a result of an uninvolved action rather than as a result of a direct request to stop. In this case Tina asked for a 'drag' of a cigarette. This in itself was a reasonable request made to a fellow smoker who understood the need to smoke. Sharon was able to respond to the request on that basis, smoker to smoker. Therefore Tina created an opportunity for the 'war' to end and 'peace' to be resumed without either party 'losing face'.

Touch

Touch in the Context of Residential Care

Touch within residential care settings has historically been linked to control and more recently linked to 'abuse' (Barter 1997). The use of physical restraint, despite being unspecified by the Scottish Office, is an accepted part of a residential care worker's job (Skinner Report 1992). A lack

of clarity about its use has resulted in the regular manhandling of young people by some staff in the guise of safety but in reality founded on notions of power and control (Leadbetter 1993). Fundamental to a discussion of touch in residential care is an acknowledgement of the touch experiences that many of the young people who use such a service have previously encountered. A significant number of young people 'looked after' in residential care have a history of sexual and physical abuse. The meanings associated with touch in terms of sexuality and power may therefore be difficult for these young people.

Both units studied felt that an essential aspect of the care that they provided was the use of 'appropriate' and safe adult touch. Like Davison (1995) it was felt that the denial of opportunity to develop appropriate interpersonal skills, including appropriate touch, was a form of 'abuse' in itself. The denial of opportunity to be hugged or comforted was seen as detrimental to a young person's development and access to 'good' care. It appeared that such a belief was incorporated into day-to-day practice and it should be noted that I was not aware of any young people being physically restrained during my year-long fieldwork.

Touch was a powerful medium amongst staff and young people alike. Young people and staff would often embrace or be embraced as a greeting, a farewell, whilst they were distressed or in fun. There appeared to be key staff members who displayed the use of touch far more than the others, notably those in managerial positions. It is perhaps dangerous to assume that such use of touch was merely as a result of their status as managers. However there may be a correlation between their position and the degree of ease with which they displayed affection. As a result of investigations of sexual and physical abuse in children's homes across the country, residential staff have become

increasingly fearful of any type of physical contact with children and young people (Berridge and Brodie 1998). Arguably those in management may feel more protected by their positions or are more experienced in this type of work and therefore feel more able to undertake such demonstrations of affection.

The young people themselves used touch to give messages of comfort, support or affection to each other and to the staff. Staff were regularly approached, mainly by the young women or the older boys, and cuddled. This was particularly the case at the start or the end of a shift or at bedtime. Indeed it appeared that many of the staff left the young people to instigate physical contact allowing the pace of this to be controlled by them.

Sending A Message

Touch was used as a way of displaying to the population of the units the importance of one young person to another. To appear physically close signalled the exclusiveness of a relationship. The meanings attached to physical intimacy were not always shared and were the cause of some friction amongst the residents. For example after Fraser was discharged from the unit, Hilary and Sharon aligned themselves to each other and made a clear demonstration to those around that they were a united force. This demonstration consisted of walking around arm in arm, sitting or lying together, arms around each other and playing with one another's hair. Such a degree of physical intimacy created a reaction within the resident group, particularly from two of the boys who began calling them sexually offensive names. They viewed the girls' use of touch as attention seeking and 'disgusting' and appeared threatened by a level of intimacy so publicly displayed.

The use of touch amongst young people in general creates a sense of belonging and of acceptance (Cottrell 1996). Touch was a key element in 'claiming' young people after the admission to the unit, making clear to them that the unit was their 'home' for the time being and that it belonged to them (Davison 1995). The sense of belonging not only involved being cuddled or hugged but also the freedom to cuddle others.

Young people also drew together physically at times of threat or distress. The notion of safety in numbers coupled with a source of collective strength translated into physical manifestations of such beliefs. Similar behaviour would result when they felt 'attacked' by staff. They would huddle together on and around the couch or around the kitchen table. This provided them with clear internal messages of support as well as sending a signal of unity to the staff. Like many 'group' behaviours the instigators of the behaviour were highly regarded by their fellow residents.

There were five young people squashed together on the couch. Hilary had her legs over Neil and Sharon whilst Christine had her arm over the back of the couch, embracing them all. Their heads huddled together to talk. Conversation centred on Sharon's feelings of distress at her father's phone call. He had been abusive to Sharon and then when staff had intervened had been shouting and swearing at them. She told the young people that not only was she upset for herself but also that she feels guilty about the treatment of the staff. Their response was to fold in on her ... felt really on the outside and unsure of what to do.

(Fieldnotes, Strathmore, July 1997)

The young men in the study rarely displayed physical affection toward one another but did so to the young women and on occasion to staff members. This was particularly the case for the younger group of male residents. They embraced the young women when they were upset or as a sign of affection or in fun. Staff embraced young male residents although more often this was done in a jovial way with the staff being the instigators.

A more common use of touch amongst the boys of all ages was toy fighting. This would involve jumping on top of each other, punching, tickling and chasing (Cottrell 1996). The girls were not excluded from this but when females were involved it appeared to have a more distinctive sexual element. The girls would be chased by or chase the boys and when the other was caught would be tickled or restrained in some way. Whilst Fraser was in residence there were frequent attacks by or on Hilary and Sharon. After his discharge Andrew who encouraged the girls to chase and catch him used this method. An example from my field notes is typical:

Hilary came in and joined in the chase of Fraser. Hilary and Sharon ran after him, trying to pinch him. He occasionally turns and flicks them or nips them and then the chase would speed up. Sharon pursued Fraser out of the room and down the corridor.

(Fieldnotes, Strathmore, June 1997)

Such displays were not so typical in Brunswick. Tom and Jack would occasionally chase one another or one would push the other around but this rarely involved the young women. Significantly the sexual element was not present at Brunswick. Perhaps this was because there were no 'internal' relationships nor any prospect of any developing.

Physical touch amongst young people also included hair brushing, foot rubbing, sitting on knees or sitting closely together. Like many of the other social currencies touch was used as an almost unconscious method of gaining position. The primary motivation to use touch was as a response to support or comfort or to make someone laugh. The position that occurred by using touch in the right place at the right time was secondary.

Conclusions

Both physical isolation (Cotterell 1996) and physical touch (Davison 1995) have been identified as key methods of communication between young people in their friendship groups. Other uses of touch and space for example intimidation, ostracism and exclusion have been identified as 'bullying' behaviour amongst young people living in residential care (Kahan 1994). Less well researched are the 'positive' uses of physical touch and space as a means of communicating a sense of support and belonging.

From the data it emerged that both physical touch and the use of the spaces in the units had an impact on how members of the group were regarded by others in the group. Such currencies of the environment were used as a means of reinforcing the 'morals' and expectations of the group. Use of touch, body movement or physical space informed young people that the group would not tolerate their behaviour. Position could also be gained by using these mechanisms appropriately. Not only was this in regard to protecting the group but also with regard to the ways in which conflicts were resolved, residents were supported or, on occasion, intimidated and made uncomfortable.

This chapter has described young people's use of the environment around them by focusing on the ways in which this environment influenced how young people were regarded by their fellow residents. There appeared to be a range of practices that involved the environment that were used by all the young people. Others were more regularly used by young men or young women respectively. The use of these currencies was not exclusive to young people. Staff used physical touch as a means of communicating a sense of care and belonging and equally used the control of space to communicate expectations of behaviour and their own power. Equally young people used

the currencies of environment to register protest at staff decisions as well as to articulate feelings of affection or trust. It is however the ways in which young people used these mechanisms to affect their position amongst the resident group that is of most interest to this thesis. That the young people were able to influence the way others valued them through harnessing touch, movement and space was a key aspect of group organisation and experience.

Chapter Nine

Currencies of Communication

Bryony Runs Away

Sharon, Neil, Hilary and I are sitting in the quiet room. It's Wednesday night and Bryony hasn't been home since Friday. She went out to meet up with friends and hasn't been seen or heard from since. The staff have contacted the police and reported her missing.

Sharon: I wonder where Bryony is? I ken I dinnae really get on wi her but what if something really has happened to her? She shouldnae be doing this tae ab'dy. One or two nights ok but nae five.

Hilary: She phoned to say she was alive. She said she was coming up the road.

Sharon: Aye, but she didnae

Neil: Dinnae worry ... she kens enough folk, she'll be aright ... look here, hae a fag

Hilary: Thanks Neil ... I'm going tae speak to her when she gets back like ... she cannae keep on dae'in this. The staff are worried seek.

Sharon: Aye, and so are we

Bryony arrived back the next night. She had been staying at a new boyfriend's house. Sharon and Neil invite her for a cigarette in the quiet room.

Neil: You shouldnae hae done that Bryony ... you could have been dead for all we kent.

Bryony: Dinnae you start I've just had it fae the staff

Sharon: Hae a fag

Bryony: Ta ... I dinnae see what the big deal is. I'm 16 I can dae what I like

Neil: Aye, well maybe you can but you still should have spoke to the staff first

Bryony: Aye, right and they would have said 'no way, yer staying in'

Neil: Well, they hae tae mak sure yer safe

Bryony: I'm nae a bairn

Hilary enters the room at this point

Hilary: You fuckin selfish bitch

Bryony: Piss off Hilary

Hilary: No I winnae ... all for the sake o a shag ... we've been worried seek

Bryony: Well I'm back noo so drop it

Neil: Pack it in baith o you .. I hope you'll be worrying like this when I ging awa

Bryony: You'd never dae it ... too chicken.

*Neil: I'm going the morn ... got it all planned ... I'm getting picked up by ******

*(friend from home) and we're goin tae London ... You think five days is bad ... I'll no be
back at a' wait til I'm 17 and then join the army ... I'll no even send youse a postcard*

Hilary: Dinnae Neil, that's stupid you've a job and a' here

Neil: JOKE!!! Got ya! I just tolta you a lot of shite by the way. I woudnae dae that.

Right whose crash is it?

The above example demonstrates some of the ways that the young people used to communicate with each other. Some demonstrate support and caring for Bryony who has been missing and therefore has been 'at risk' from the wider world. They advise her not to undertake this behaviour again and possible ways around dealing with a similar situation in the future. Hilary by contrast swears and shouts at Bryony to make this same point.

Young people also communicate a sense of belonging and value to each other through other means. In this example cigarettes were used to construct a situation whereby group members could physically demonstrate their care for each other by offering cigarettes. Neil's use of humour at the end of the discussion serves to reinforce his concern at Bryony's behaviour but in a light-hearted way, directed at himself. At the same time by using humour he is able to facilitate a change in conversation and a removal of pressure from Bryony. Neil, by his use both of support, advice and humour is regarded highly by the young women as a result of this exchange. He manages the discussion, keeping it focused and deciding when it should end.

Introduction

The existence of physical or verbal aggression amongst the resident group has been a well documented aspect of residential care for young people (Morris et al. 1994, Stein 1994, Barter 1997). Interestingly, much of the empirical research that is quoted in relation to residential care has originated in the study of young offenders' institutions or indeed adult prisons (Kendrick 1997:207). Despite this such findings have been applied to children's homes. The support that young people offer and the humour that is displayed in their interactions have not been so readily addressed. In research and literature on adolescent friendships it has long been recognised that young people value the trust and intimacy offered by their friendship networks (Cotterell 1996). Rook (1987) argues that the support offered by young people may alleviate distress and return the person to an 'even keel'. Despite this, the support that young people who are looked after provide for each other has never been systematically researched. Indeed it has rarely been identified as existing.

The use of cigarettes by young people in residential care is a further under-researched topic. Whilst there is an awareness that a significant number of young people living in children's homes smoke, there has been no prevalence study undertaken nor has there been any consideration of the 'work' that cigarettes or smoking do for this group. Cigarettes, it is assumed, are used as physical currency to buy material goods or reward behaviour (Heffernan 1972). Again such a finding has its source in prison literature and has been applied to what is a quite different residential provision.

This chapter aims to discuss and illustrate the behaviours and practices used by the group, which centred on communication. By using these 'skills' or currencies young people were granted credibility and power by those other young people present. Currencies of communication

encompass those practices that involve supporting or advising fellow residents, the use of smoking, humour and verbal and physical aggression.

Support and Advice

The offering of support and advice to fellow members of the resident group by young people was a key feature of life within both units studied. The removal of, or resistance to, such provision was also a powerful characteristic. This section aims to illustrate the type of support given by and to young people and how this influenced individual positioning within the group.

The young people talked of the importance, to them as individuals, of receiving support from other members of the resident group. It was often the access to young people who had experienced similar difficulties that was the key resource of residential life:

You're never by yourself, you can always find someone that understands you, there's always someone you can trust, you know like one of the residents so that's nae so bad ...

(Anna, Bedroom, Brunswick, Pilot Interview, November 1996)

or as Sharon describes it:

It's good, it's a lot better than like if you have problems at home. Here everyone is in it together.

(Sharon, Quiet Room, Strathmore, September 1997)

On one level the belief that there will be a shared understanding or empathy was, to some degree, related to the age and biographies of the residents. There was an expectation created early in the young person's residential 'career' that there would be others who had had similar experiences or who would understand his/her history. After the initial admission, residential care came to be

understood as a resource catering for young people with a range of needs but with similar backgrounds and experiences. To quote Sharon again:

It's a fine place to be, better than being in foster care because there is more kids here your own age that have been through sort of the same thing
(Sharon, Kitchen, Strathmore, March 1997)

Possessions

The young people in both units studied demonstrated a range of ways in which they provided each other with support. One of the most notable was the support derived from the sharing of material possessions. Young people would swap or give away their clothes, CD's, posters, photographs, make-up and even shoes. It was not infrequent for such generosity to be motivated by an attempt to create a sense of belonging to or support from and in turn a sense of power and position within the group.

Possessions held significance for these young people for a number of reasons. At this point in the life course, namely 'adolescence', much importance is placed on identification with peers as opposed to family members or adult society (Pilcher 1995). Such identification may depend on sharing similar tastes in music or clothes (Cotterell 1996). By physically sharing such objects the peer group allows the young person to wear or own the symbols of belonging. Ownership of such items appeared to be particularly pertinent to the young people involved in this study. Their access to these representations was limited, not just financially but also in terms of being able to remove them from the family home. The majority of the young people who were admitted to the units during the course of my research brought few possessions. This appeared to be because they had been prevented from removing them from the family home by parents, or because they themselves

did not wish to remove them. A further explanation might be that some of these young people had very few belongings to take to the unit.

I'm no bringing my stuff in here .. I'm no staying ... I've got loads of stuff at home Kappa jackets, Nike trainers, the lot. My dad gets them for me ... I'm no getting to bring them in here ... My dad says that my stuff'll get pinched.

(Martina, Bedroom, Strathmore May 1997)

The sharing or swapping of possessions was often a mark of a relationship, a signal to others that certain individuals were in some way joined. This message was particularly powerful with regard to 'dating' relationships. During the run-up to the establishment of a relationship between Neil and Sharon, Sharon dressed entirely in Neil's clothes. It appeared that clothes swapping was part of the 'courting' process, a testing out of each other but perhaps more importantly of the group's reaction to the possibility of a relationship. The swapping of clothes displayed, not only the significance of the one to the other, but also a marking of each other as 'special'. As Neil said:

I wouldnae let just anybody wear my Cat T-shirt, ken but its different wi Sharon.

(Neil, Quiet Room, Strathmore, June 1997)

Possessions also featured strongly as a symbol of the end of a relationship. Both groups believed that at the end of a relationship all the goods and property belonging to either party should be returned. Without 'claim' on the partner established as a result of the relationship, there could be no 'claim' on his/her possessions. Like adult divorce or separation settlements young people saw the value of material goods and the ways in which property could be used to re-establish 'fairness' or to reek revenge. Those young people who had been badly treated, particularly those who had

been betrayed, were more likely to be encouraged by the group to strive to have their property returned and to make claim to that which belonged to their ex-partner.

During the time of the break up between Fraser and Hilary, staff were asked to become involved in the arranging for possessions to be returned. Hilary had become angry and frustrated when not all of her belongings were returned, arguing that until they were the relationship could not be seen as properly over. She stated that whilst Fraser was in possession of these items he was still involved in her life and would continue to have 'claim' on her. The group supported Hilary in this request, viewing her claim as reasonable. This support occurred primarily as a result of Fraser's betrayal of Hilary in his relationship with Tina, the new admission.

Sharing also demonstrated a situation of trust between parties. Property would only be given to those who, the young people believed, would take good care of it. This was perhaps magnified because of the importance attached by young people to the few belongings they possessed. It must also be stated, however, that a significant number of young people accumulated material goods as a result of their 'looked after' status. These young people had come from families with restricted incomes or from families where priority had been given to alcohol or drugs. After admission they were, like all young people who are 'looked after', given a clothing budget, regular pocket money and toiletry money. Possessions were therefore highly valued and protected. When property was taken without permission the group was united in their displeasure. Such behaviour symbolised a challenge to the 'act' of sharing and was derided by all.

None o' us are talking to Jack like ... he stole Tom's jacket and then he was trying to sell it ... He says he wisnae but its nae right ... He shouldnae hae been in his room in the first place and then none o this accusations would hae

started ... He just got it tae ... been saving up his clothing money fur it ... I'll tell you Jack'll no be dain' it again.

(Anna, Living Room, Brunswick, June 1997)

A further use of material goods was to counteract rejection from outwith the unit. Young people often felt that not only was the wider community against them but that, for some, their own families had forgotten them or no longer wanted them around. This supports the notion put forward by Millham et al. 1986 that young people can be 'lost' in the care system, forgotten by their families and by their social workers. Indeed for some there appeared to be no contact with families other than that undertaken by the young people themselves. Throughout my year of residence in the units all of the young people celebrated a birthday. A significant number received no acknowledgement of this event from family members or friends. On such occasions the other residents would buy or make gifts or cards not only to demonstrate their relationship with the individual but also to try in some way to counteract the feeling of alienation from family and friends.

Sharon is really upset ... she never got a card or nothing from her mam and dad. She hasnae had een since she was 12. She phoned them and they were being really horrible to her.

(Hilary, Quiet Room, Strathmore, March 1997)

Staff members would normally instigate the arrangements pertaining to the celebrations and would arrange the presents and cake gifted by the unit. Often they would enlist the help of other young people in decorating the dining room for the birthday tea or to provide ideas about gifts or outings. Staff members usually provided the young person whose birthday it was with breakfast in bed. It was normally at this point that gifts and cards were presented. Members of the resident groups would gain respect from their peers by remembering and organising birthday treats. Indeed the staff would also praise and encourage such behaviour. Whilst this was not a rigidly gendered phenomenon it was often the young women who undertook these arrangements. The age of the

residents did not prevent them from undertaking this behaviour. Rather it appeared that those who had spent the longest time in residence and who knew that such behaviour was acceptable, indeed encouraged, who took the lead.

Encouragement

Young people were able to demonstrate support through their use of verbal and physical encouragement, including encouragement in pursuing a job or school exams. Encouragement was one of the few aspects of a social currency in which the age of the residents appeared to hold sway. Older residents were able to reflect on their own experiences and use this reflection to persuade younger members not to make similar 'mistakes'. Such support extended to young people who were trying to do something different or to move on to the 'next stage' of the care process. The group viewed those who criticised such behaviour as destructive. When one of the young men was considering applying for a job the others asked him questions about the post and two of them stood next to him whilst he telephoned the company. When he returned from the interview and said that he had been offered the job everyone cheered, clapped and patted him on the back.

Such obvious displays of encouragement were less frequent than the more understated ones which occurred in conversation. A typical example is the following extract from a tea-time conversation between Bryony and Christine:

Bryony: Did you have an exam today?

Christine: Aye.

Bryony: I thought yours were finished?

Christine: It's just drama left.

Bryony: How did it go today then?

Christine: Nae bad aye.

Bryony: Sometimes I wish I had stayed on at the school. It's good that you are. You should stick in.

(Bryony and Christine, Dining Room, Strathmore, June 1997)

From this we can see that Bryony was encouraging Christine in the pursuit of gaining qualifications, not only by demonstrating an interest in her progress but also by her self-disclosure of regretting her own early exit from education. As a result of her encouragement and her use of self-disclosure Bryony was granted momentary credibility by those present. She was seen to be 'doing the right thing' and undertaking this task well. Education was seen by many of the older residents as their biggest regret. Few of these residents at Strathmore had stayed on to finish school while (see Borland et al. 1998). Young people living in Brunswick were more motivated to attend and the majority were attending school full-time. It should be noted however that during my involvement none of these young people was of an age where he/she could leave school whereas at Strathmore there were four older residents who were aged 16 and over.

Young people also offered encouragement in taking action with regard to family or boy/girlfriend relationships. This was often more than offering advice and involved verbally or physically encouraging some one's 'plan of action'. The following conversation illustrates the point. The young people involved are discussing Malcolm's difficulties with his mother:

Malcolm: There's nae point in going home to an overnight. My ma just goes out anyway.

Bryony: Dinnae go home. Just tell the staff you're no going.

Malcolm: I ken. I'm wanting to like if I go and she doesnae bide in it just makes it worse between us.

Bryony: Aye, dinnae go.

Malcolm: I'll haec to tell the staff I'm no going and that's it.

Bryony: I'll go wi you, talk to Vernon.

(Malcolm and Bryony, Quiet Room, Strathmore, July 1997)

Here Bryony acts as the corroborator. She acknowledges Malcolm's situation and agrees with his proposed refusal to attend home access. She increases her level of support by offering to accompany him when he discusses his position with the officer-in-charge.

Sticking Up For Each Other

Following on from this is a more general discourse which the young people described as 'sticking up for one another'. This phrase was one that was mentioned and demonstrated frequently within both resident groups. There was a sense of collective isolation from family and from society at large. As a result when a young person was challenged by a person or situation 'outwith' the unit the others would be united in their support of him/her. This perception of 'difference' was, I would argue, the main factor in group cohesion. There appeared to be a willingness to make clear to fellow residents that as a result of living together they would be loyal to one another and would 'protect' each other from what they viewed as a difficult 'outside' world. In this extract from a conversation between Hilary and Sharon we can see not only the demonstration of support through self-disclosure but also the young people's sense of exclusion from the outside world:

Sharon: I phoned my ma and da and he said what did you get?
(Sharon's Birthday) so I says that I got my breakfast in bed. I telt him what I got and they were like 'did ya?' and I says 'aye' and then I was telling them what I got and he says 'you told me that afore, here's your ma' He's starting that shit again.

Hilary: Aye, its only cos he's wanting you home.

PAUSE

Hilary: At least your ma and dad want you, mine don't.

Sharon: I can bide wi anyone but no them. I dinnae ken why. I was speaking to this woman at work and she was asking me about my birthday and that, she's really fine, ken we were just chatting and she says to me 'is it awkward when people say are you fae a home?' I says 'aye' and we were just speaking aboot it ken.

Hilary: But it's shit Sharon, they think that you're a bam if you say that you live in a home.

Sharon: I ken. That's what I said.

Hilary: They think that you smash windaes, get pissed, take cars, are mental.

Sharon: And some folk feel sorry for you and I dinnae like that.

Hilary: Naeb'dys done that to me, they just think I'm bad.

The boys also talked of this 'internal' support in terms of protection from external threat and misperception. They described the 'threat' from outside as being of a violent nature and spoke on a reliance of each other to survive the threat. Interestingly the young people did not regard this as a matter for staff to handle. Although they spoke to staff members about it, the expectation was that the responsibility for action be taken by the group rather than by the adults. This was particularly the case for boys, and more commonly the older boys. Often such threat centred around the beliefs held by the wider community concerning the functions of the unit and the reasons for admission.

Gregor's story is typical:

Aye there was this boy that was going to gie me a hiding cos he heard that I was in here so me, Neil and Fraser decided to gie him one, prove him right, we're all psychos. I was going oot to dae it myself but I got telt that they would help me, ken we'll help you because we're your friend. That's what pals do.

(Gregor, Living Room, Strathmore, November 1997)

This perception of friendship is perhaps not unfounded. Many of the young people felt that they had friends within the resident group. However the 'enemy' was also sometimes within. In such

situations where the threat was an internal one the group would unite against the individual or his/her behaviour. Here Bryony recounts her experience with a new male admission and the ways in which the other young people 'stuck up for her':

He's a little perv him. He pervs on all the quinnes. Well I came out the shower wi just a towel on me and goes into my room. Next thing he barges in. He must have been spying on me. Fraser gave him a row for it. I'd had enough. He's always saying 'I'm going to grab your arse' and stuff like that so I went and wrote 'I am a dick' on his door and Hilary and me put toilet roll and toothpaste all round his room. Me and Hilary done that and we got done for it too!

(Bryony, Quiet Room, Strathmore, April 1997)

By publicly holding this discussion not only was Bryony given status for acting to protect the expectations of the group she was also in a further position of power as she had undertaken this 'task' with the help of another young person. The group reaction to her behaviour was to support her and to make comment on the way she and Hilary had received 'punishment' from the staff for the good of the group.

There were certain behaviours that were not tolerated by the group and, when demonstrated, were quickly challenged. Many of these expectations were mirrored in or derived from staff expectation of behaviour, not only of the young people but of each other. Young people expected to feel safe in their home, neither to feel physical or sexual threat nor to be party to such behaviour when it was directed at other young people or staff. There was an expectation that members of the group support one another and encourage achievements. Significantly there appeared to be, in both units studied, an expectation that no one person be singled out for 'punishment' or bullying by group members. Indeed 'bullying' behaviour was not tolerated by the group.

Young people did however unite momentarily against young people whom they regarded as demonstrating behaviour that was threatening or damaging. The young people would also however unite against the staff, particularly if it were perceived that one of the group had been unfairly treated. This could involve a group decision not to talk to that member of staff or to become 'difficult' when that staff member was around or alternatively the young people would decide to formally discuss it at the weekly residents meeting. Often all three of these options were taken.

Withdrawing Support

The preceding discussion of the nature and degree of support shared among the young people goes some way to highlight the power of this theme as a currency. To prove skilful in offering advice, to be known as trustworthy and dependable were key competencies. However the demonstration of how valued and effective these methods were is most clearly illustrated in situations where this peer support was removed.

One way that this removal occurred was by the intervention of staff. Young people, particularly at times of acute distress, were often kept apart from the group. This happened at staff's instruction or as a result of long periods of time spent by staff with a young person. The other young people described this as something which was difficult to cope with and understood it to be a rejection of their skills or a dismissal of their experiences. This was most pertinent when the initial disclosure of an event or emotional state was made to another young person.

We are getting treated like shite by the staff ... just 'cos of what's happened to Hilary and nae'bdy kens because she will nae hand o'er what she's got tae hand o'er ... they dinnae ken if it's true. Fiona and Beth (staff) just treat us like shite. I went to see if Hilary was a'right yesterday, right, and when I come to the door I more or less got telt tae piss off awa fae the door and they say my

language is bad. So? Who does Fiona think she is? She came back right, and ok she's had good reason to be off but then she comes back and a'thing is a'right for a couple of days until something goes wrong wi Hilary and then we're treated like shite ... Beth does it and a'.

(Bryony, Quiet Room, April 1997)

One way of the group counteracting such restriction was by their use of inter-subjectivity. (By this I mean the interpretation and proposed outcome of a young person's situation without requiring his/her actual presence). The young people would discuss an individual, empathising with his/her predicament and suggesting possible consequences or methods of support. Such conversations would attempt to ascertain the extent of the problem and contain an assessment of the interventions that had taken place. Often this method of support was used at times when staff removed a young person from the group's supporting role. The group's involvement was restricted to the sidelines. The following example is taken from a discussion held in the quiet room. Sharon had been given a stereo from her ex-foster parents for her birthday. It later transpired that they had only contributed £30 and had arranged for Sharon to repay the rest of the outstanding balance monthly.

Hilary: I cannae believe that they did that ... It's hellish for her.

Fraser: Maybe they'd sorted that out though and she knew she had to pay it up?

Hilary: No way ... she said to me that she was going to put some money toward it but she never thought it was all the money.

Neil: Can she pay it back?

Fraser: I ken she doesnae get money for her volunteering work anyway ... she'll just have the money that she gets fae here.

Neil: Some birthday eh? Yer da shouting at you and then a massive bill for a stupid stereo ... she'll kill them

Hilary: I dinnae think she is angry ... mair like embarrassed ... she's been speaking aboot it for months.

Fraser: The staff should be phoning they folk and ge'ing them a row

Neil: I think they likely will.

Hilary: They winnae even let me in tae talk tae her ... and it was me
that telt them what was happening in the first place. They
think I'm jealous of her getting the stupid thing ... How could you be
jealous o that?

(Hilary, Neil and Fraser, Quiet Room, Strathmore, March 1997)

The removal of support was also used as a method of isolating or punishing a young person.

Despite an individual's distress or set of circumstances the other residents would physically isolate that person and make no attempt at offering support. Tina, after a secret date with Hilary's boyfriend Fraser, returned home drunk. The next day she was visibly distressed as a result of being punished and by her treatment by the young man involved. Despite this she was ignored by the young people and left alone. In so doing the group made clear that her behaviour had not been tolerated. This message was sent not only to the young woman involved but also served as a reminder of group expectations to all its members. Interestingly Fraser appeared, at this moment of time to receive a lesser 'punishment'. His behaviour was discussed with him, primarily with Neil. He did not suffer the extended period of isolation that Tina received. The assumption was that such behaviour was if not expected then certainly more acceptable from Fraser but that Tina should have 'known better'.

Humour

The staff in both units regarded humour as an essential method of intervention. In practice terms it served to develop relationships, to defuse difficult or aggressive situations and acted as a coping mechanism in relation to the stress of the work undertaken. Young people however also saw the value of this form of communication. Cotterell (1996) comments on the extent of laughter, joking and teasing that is present in adolescent friendship groups and certainly the young people in both units regularly displayed similar behaviour. More significantly, however, it emerged from the data

that, within both units, humour played a key role in group cohesion and hierarchical positioning. In studies of adult groups and teams humour has been identified as a key factor in developing a sense of belonging amongst individual members (Bloch and Crouch 1985, Foot and Chapman 1976). For this reason humour is as valid a currency as the others. In the following section humour or the use of humour will be discussed under three main themes - 'wind-ups', 'acting' and 'teasing'.

Wind-Ups

Wind-ups took a number of forms involving both the staff and the young people but all were dependent on getting a 'reaction'. Such scenarios comprised of a fictional tale that usually involved the recipient of the wind-up. The aim of the exercise was to see how an individual coped with being the focus of such attention. The ways in which he/she reacted was a crucial determinant in how the group would regard him/her. The following example is typical. In it two young people use wind-ups to test out Dave, a social work student:

Dave: Give me my keys back

Katriona: I haven't got your keys

Dave: Christine does

Chrsitine passes the keys under the table

Christine: I don't have them. Look!

She lifts up her hands.

Dave: Give me them back or we're not going out.

Both girls laugh, give Dave the keys and leave the room.

(Dave, Katriona and Christine, Kitchen, Strathmore, March 1997)

This example illustrates the use of wind-ups to test out the boundaries of behaviour. Unlike many of the children's homes in the study conducted by Berridge and Brodie (1998) the use of keys by the

staff in the two units was purely as a means to open doors. Berridge and Brodie (1998:88) by contrast found that keys were used to stamp authority. They observed staff putting keys on public display, often attaching them to their clothing or moving them around in their hands. In this example Dave, the student, had laid his keys on the table. This action allowed the young people to hide them. Perhaps due to his status as student Dave immediately became anxious as to this apparent loss of control of 'adult' symbols of power. The two young women, by contrast had no real desire to use the keys, apart from as a part of their wind-up.

Wind-ups were used against staff and young people alike. By watching responses, young people were able to gauge the limits that would be placed on their behaviour. They were able to monitor the range and speed of reactions to behaviour and, as they described it "whether they can take a joke" (i.e. the recipients). This idea of "taking a joke" was a vague term that appeared to incorporate the notion of boundary limits (i.e. how far can I push this) as well as the nature of relationship possible with the individual. To react in a humorous way or to appear disinterested was, to some degree, taken to mean that the individual trusted the "jokers" and could be relied upon. In this regard it was a test of strength of the relationship. The staff, perhaps motivated by the same reasons as the young people, also used wind-ups of this nature. The following extract from a conversation between Vernon, the O.I.C. and Sharon, a resident provides an example:

Sharon: Can I have my toiletries money?

Vernon: No, sorry

Sharon: What? How?

Vernon: Well XXX (Director of Social Work) was on the phone saying we had to cut back so I said easy, we'll stop toiletries money and all pocket money

Sharon: No way! Give me my money

(Sharon and Vernon, Dining Room, Strathmore, April 1997)

The conversation continued in a similar vein, both parties aware that the removal of funds was an untruth but enjoying the fantasy-based debate. Such discussions reinforced roles within the unit; "the adult", with monetary control and "the child" having to ask for what was regarded as rightly theirs. Wind-ups could be used to distinguish the young people's group from the staff group as the example with Vernon and Sharon demonstrates. At times they would involve whole groups of staff and young people. These situations were often marked by both parties being aware that they were fictional.

Momentary positions of power and influence were created within the resident group by similar means. For example Malcolm, the youngest member of the group, was regularly "wound up" about a variety of situations. Initially he reacted by becoming angry or alternatively would believe that the 'fantasy' story was in fact true. As he became more established within the group and became more skilled in "using" the currencies he would respond with a counter wind-up. He was able to demonstrate his ability to cope in such a social situation and respond to the other young people using the same currency, therefore gaining credibility and acceptance within the group.

The use of wind-ups in the admission process allowed the group to measure the new residents suitability for inclusion. It also allowed the young people to 'safely' demonstrate their own higher status position to the new resident without fear of reprisal from the staff group. Wind-ups were acceptable credibility-giving behaviour. As a result the telling of a fictional story, allowing other group members to watch and monitor the reactions of the 'victim' would publicly test behaviour. I, as a 'new admission', was subjected to a similar process. The young people informed me that a male member of staff was having an affair with another member of staff. They recounted the tale

of this romance in great detail: how they had found out, how long the couple had been together, the possible reaction of the woman's husband! I was unsure whether they were telling me the truth and listened attentively. They then asked me what I thought about the relationship to which I answered 'I don't really know ... I suppose it's bad for her poor husband' At this point they began laughing saying that it had only been a 'wind-up'. I realised after the event that it was my reaction to this aspect of the tale rather than the tale itself that had been of importance to the group.

Wind-ups provided two sources of influence or status. First, if involved in a wind-up, the ability to recognise it as such and to act appropriately, for example to laugh or to respond with a counter attack, allowed the other young people to regard the victim as "a'right". They had demonstrated through their behaviour that they could respond in an acceptable manner and were therefore granted respect by fellow residents. Like many of the social currencies so far outlined the significance of behaving appropriately was best demonstrated when it did not occur. At such times young people would react by criticising the person involved, accusing them of not being able to 'take a joke'. The group also became more wary and less trusting for that moment in time. Second, the ability to construct a wind-up situation was granted high value by the young people. To be seen to be able to 'spin a yarn' without causing hurt or embarrassment to those involved was a highly regarded skill. To conduct a wind-up that resulted in the 'victim' becoming overly distressed or upset had the reverse effect on the instigator; he/she lost status and respect.

Acting Up

The second type of humour that was used by the young people is described as 'acting up'. This form of humour involved the taking on of a role or behaviour that fellow residents and, on occasion,

staff viewed as humorous. Such behaviour included pretending to be zombies, being from London, being Italian, dressing up, pulling faces. Such behaviour was normally restricted to the young people although at times staff would join in.

Many of the young people talked about the responsibilities which they had held whilst living at home i.e. caring for younger siblings, a parent or living with violence. They were encouraged by staff to be free of such responsibilities at least for a short time. One way of being "childish" or more appropriately, "child-like" was to act or make believe (Fahlberg 1991). Indeed the staff stressed the importance of allowing the young people the opportunity for a 'childhood'. Interestingly however the staff quickly become irritated with such behaviour and would tell the young people to 'grow up'. Often they perceived and described such behaviour as immature or "childish".

The irritation of the staff group provided a second motivation for acting up. The opportunity to irritate the 'adults' was one worth seizing. Often, when told to cease, the young people would become more exaggerated in their behaviour until sanctions were threatened. Young people would seize this opportunity to gain respect from their fellow residents. In such situations this involved knowing when to maintain the 'act' as well as when to stop it. The skilled operator of this currency was attuned to both facets.

One period during my fieldwork when "acting" was tolerated and in some ways exaggerated was during a residential weekend in an outdoor centre. Everyone was accommodated in one bothy-style room. The building itself was geographically isolated. The residential weekend was a regular event for Strathmore residents, occurring at least twice every year. Staff regarded this trip as providing

an opportunity for the young people to experience something different and would therefore encourage them to go walking or mountain biking. It was also an opportunity for staff and resident roles to be suspended. All participants were expected to help out and organise the weekend. Whilst there, staff smoked in front of young people and there was a more tolerant attitude both toward noise and behaviour as well as language.

During this weekend there were frequent demonstrations of 'acting' behaviour, many involving staff members. On the last night the young people designed and, along with the adults, acted in a play. This involved dressing up and interestingly was based around a boy/girlfriend relationship, a fight and a happy ending. All the young people and the staff were involved in the play and it took an evening to video and perform. Less structured acting was also visible during this trip. Young people danced, sang along to songs and spoke in comedy voices. It appeared that the staff team had different expectations of the young people in terms of their behaviour within these surroundings.

Acting also gave an opportunity for group cohesion. For example, when all members of the group were acting as zombies the act became the central aspect of their behaviour and personalities. This behaviour allowed for a momentary collective identity that bound them for that period of time. This cohesion was increased if the behaviour resulted in a reaction from the staff. The young people would all be 'in trouble', rather than one person being singled out. They could therefore all complain about being picked on or all laugh together about their behaviour or indeed that of the staff. Acting was an opportunity for all the young people to become involved and for some allowed a moment of full inclusion not possible at other times.

Teasing

The final type of humour that was evident in the data was that of teasing. Within this context, teasing occurred in humorous situations and would more often than not result in a response of laughter or of teasing in return. Name-calling as abusive or bullying behaviour will be discussed in the section on verbal aggression. The use of teasing was a mechanism of humour that was often close to the line drawn between funny and hurtful. Indeed it was the ability to make this distinction that resulted in young people being respected by their fellow residents. Equally when teasing was mishandled the perpetrator was seen to be rejected by the group.

Teasing within this context was often as a response to the recipient's behaviour or comments. Often calling someone a name appeared to enforce or encourage a behaviour or characteristic and served to condone it. The result was an embellishment of the original behaviour. Names such as 'nutter' 'mad' or 'crazy' were common. The result of such name-calling was that the young person involved became more 'mad' or 'nutty' as a result. Young people would also call others 'sooks' if they were seen to be overly pleasant to staff in order to get something. This was not viewed as a derogatory term but as an acknowledgement that everyone knew why the young person was behaving in the way he/she was. By making such a statement the 'sook' would be informed that others were aware not only of his/her behaviour but also its motivation.

Name-calling signalled an acceptance within the group and could be regarded as a mark of respect. After one particular silly night Sharon mentioned in her diary tape that I had been 'crazy'. I took this almost as a compliment and as an acknowledgement that I had displayed characteristics that had allowed me to be accepted as part of the group:

Ruth needs her head read ... Ruth needs her head read. She's crazy ...
totally crazy. Did you understand that Ruth? (laughs)
(Sharon, Strathmore, Diary Tape, August 1997)

Names could also be used to illustrate to a young person how his/her behaviour was being viewed.

It allowed the young people to make clear to the person involved that he/she was bordering on behaving badly as well as behaving well. Anna gives a great example:

Ocht, shush you moaner.
(Anna, Dining Room, Brunswick, June 1997)

By calling Jack this name she is telling him that he is complaining for too long about something unimportant and should therefore stop. Because this is done in a light-hearted way Jack responds by laughing and talking about something else. Such light-hearted name-calling was also used by staff members and was similarly motivated. It usually met with the desired response from the young persons involved. They would cease their behaviour or be placed in a position where they could comfortably discuss it.

Like other uses of humour, name-calling also tested people's relationships and ability to cope with comments from others. It was important for young people to distinguish between name-calling as admonishment (like Anna's example) and as insult. The young people reacted strongly to those who retaliated against such a use of name-calling and would site their use of humour in their defence to staff.

Gregor: We get the message daftie

Douglas: Dinnae start

Gregor: I'm nae, I'm just saying

Douglas: You're fucking starting

Gregor: I'm no. God, can you no take a joke?

(Gregor and Douglas, Quiet Room, Strathmore, November 1996)

In this extract Gregor attempts to advise Douglas to stop talking about an issue but his attempt is viewed as antagonistic. Key to the discussion is Gregor's defence of his comments namely not one of attack but of using humour, 'a joke'. This type of humour allowed for communication on a different level from support or advice but often constituted the same thing. It was a quicker method, often safer to use than advice in situations where advice was not openly sought.

Humour was not therefore a meaningless aspect of social life. It served clear purposes for both the staff and the young people alike. It had powerful implications in terms of the way a young person was to be regarded and the position that he/she would be granted within the group. By using humour as a currency, young people were not only able to test out individuals and relationships but also gain position.

Verbal and Physical Aggression

This theme or currency is the one medium of negotiation that has been explored by other writers in the field of residential childcare (Kent 1997, Rowe et al. 1989, Berridge 1985). It has been suggested within the existing body of work that the resident group is constructed and maintained through the use of violence, verbal or physical, and that it is demonstrated by key individuals. Whilst this type of behaviour was an important feature of life in the two units studied it was only one mechanism through which group organisation and individual positioning was achieved. This section aims to provide the reader with examples of the nature of verbal and physical aggression

demonstrated by the young people, the reasoning behind such behaviour and its impact on the group as a whole.

Toy Fighting

During my fieldwork, acts of violence were most commonly disguised as 'toy' fighting which often took place outwith staff supervision. A boundary, albeit one which was crossed on a number of occasions, existed between toy fighting and assault. During such incidents a young person would become upset and angry and inform the other protagonists that they had been physically hurt (Davison 1995). This signalled to the attacker to cease for two reasons; first because actual harm had taken place and secondly because the boundary between toy fighting and violence had been crossed. This boundary crossing occurred most frequently when young men and women were toy fighting. What would initially begin as chasing and pushing resulted in the young women feeling that they had been harmed and that the boundary had been knowingly crossed. Sharon's description of an incident of toy fighting highlights this:

We were just mucking about, having a laugh but then,...he's a total bastard, Ruth. He grabbed Hilary and kicked her in the stomach and I told him to piss off and he started. I'm no joking I'm sick of it.

(Sharon, Outward Bound Centre, April 1997)

Here we see Sharon stressing the intentional nature of the young man's assault on Hilary and subsequently on herself and that, despite her protestations, the violence had continued.

Young men appeared to be less comfortable with requesting help or an end to the fighting, preferring a diversionary tactic, e.g. shouting or laughing, which would also serve to attract staff attention. During my fieldwork the young men did not complain of being physically hurt despite

violent 'games'. The young women appeared not to toy fight with one another, perhaps because of the perceived sexual element of such interactions, and instead fought with the young men. To give an example: on one occasion Katriona and Hilary pushed Andrew on to the couch, sat on him and proceeded to pull hairs out of his legs, bite him and pull his hair. Their behaviour became increasingly violent. Andrew, however, responded by laughing and screaming (as did the girls) and at no point did he request that the attack end. It did however end when staff members entered the room. Credibility was gained in such situations by firstly attracting the attention of the young women, enough to make them toy fight. Secondly it was gained by demonstrating resilience, despite obvious pain and discomfort.

Telling Tales

What was common in both units was the telling of violent stories. Young people would recount occasions when they had used violence as a means of settling an argument or of protecting themselves against physical danger. Stories were told by both young men and women to the group or in one-to-one situations. One feature of violent stories (and indeed all story telling observed) was the great detail in which incidents were described. Information such as time, setting and verbal statements were included as a means of validating the accounts. Interestingly it was observed that violent stories were incorporated into conversations rather than presented as subject matter in themselves. The following lengthy story by Neil is typical and gives the reader some insight into the style and format of such accounts as well as providing an example of the way in which conflicts were often resolved:

We was a' in here playing dares, ken wi cards. Douglas had two dares tae gie me so he dealt me. He says 'Go and ask Sharon oot.' So I gings and asks her. Oh aye, the second one was if she says 'no' then you have to beg. So I did it, gings and

asks her oot. She turns roond and says 'Am I going oot wi Fraser?' I says 'I dinnae ken' and I dinnae ken but then Fraser says to me 'What are you saying I'm going oot wi Hilary for?' and he walked awa' and called me a prick. I was sitting here wi' Hilary and Douglas and he went into the kitchen and comes back. I turned roond and says something and he says 'what did you call me?' and I says 'I called you a dick'. I stood up and we both went hay-wire like, chairs everywhere. I was just awa' tae throw a punch when Ian comes in and stops it ... Fraser hurt his hand and he had to go to the hospital and get it bandaged ... we never spoke to each other for about three days then he came in wi' some games, blue cards wi cars on them. Top trumps was the name of it and he says, 'Do you ken how to play this? 'and I says, 'aye'. And that was us, back friends.

(Neil, Quiet Room, Strathmore, December 1996).

Stories of violence, such as the above example, which occurred within the unit were not as common as those set outside. Such accounts were often of fights that had taken place prior to admission to the unit. One reason for the lack of actual physical violence within the units was the proximity of the staff whose intervention often occurred prior to actual violence taking place. Indeed it was clear to young people that violence would not be tolerated and was an aspect of behaviour that was addressed by staff. If violence was planned then it would occur outwith the unit or during times when staff were not so readily available (i.e. staff meetings, changeover). Despite observing the planning of violence there were no violent incidents in either of the units during my fieldwork.

One further reason for the lack of violence was as a result of the protection that violent stories brought their narrators. A young person would describe him/herself in situations of violence where he/she had retaliated or alternatively would make comments that indicated his/her fighting prowess. This information was then disseminated through the resident group who, equipped with such knowledge, would then decide the most appropriate means of ascertaining their position with the young person involved. If he/she had what was regarded as 'valid' violent histories then negotiations for position would not take place using violence as a currency. This example illustrates the point:

I goes, 'You wouldnae be able to batter him.' And he says 'Do you want a bet on that?' I didnae push it wi him ken, he took a knife to his ma. Dinnae say nothing

like. I'm not meant to say anything and I wouldnae like to get on the wrong side of him.

(Sharon, Quiet Room, Strathmore, April 1997)

In this extract Sharon recounts attempting to use the notion of violence as a currency, testing out how the young man could use violence to gain a higher position than she herself held. Her conclusion was that his behaviour, or threatened behaviour, matched the stories of violence, and that she would not gain greater credibility than he would through the use of this currency.

In many respects actual physical violence was not something that was held in high esteem by the groups. Violent biographies or violent acts might give individuals influence for short periods, but like all currencies their high value was only sustained for a limited period. Violence was not something that the young people aspired to and, as part of a currency, violence had limited high value. Violent stories were often cut short, interrupted or were concluded with statements of regret. Young people viewed violence and the skills involved as a necessity but something which should not be randomly used. Neil explains where and why he equipped himself with violent skills:

When I went to cadets (sighs) that's when I learnt to fight. There would be one o' me and eight o' them. I never liked fighting when I was little and I would always try to talk things out but you get folk who just winnae walk awa' and you have to learn about it. I still think it's the best thing to do like, to walk awa'.

(Neil, Quiet Room, Strathmore, May 1997)

Perhaps the awareness that the young people had of the reality and effects of violence allowed them to limit the extent to which it could be used to gain influence. They had to be able to demonstrate that they were 'tough' and able to cope if attacked but they appeared to gain little kudos from the group for actually using violence. From the information given to me by the young people (I did not read their files) a number had experienced violence within the family home either directed at them, their siblings or a parent figure. Violence and its consequences were for them very real.

Verbal Aggression

What was more common as a means of establishing position was the use of verbal aggression. This took a number of forms and again was used by both young men and young women. Duncan's account of Anna's behaviour illustrates the aggressive 'outburst':

I says, 'Do you want a fried egg?' She says, 'No I dinnae you fuckin' shit.' Ken Anna's like that, She'll just shout and swear for no reason at all. I hate that about her, the way she turns on you. You cannae shout back though, there's no point.

(Duncan, Bedroom, Brunswick, November 1996)

The other end of the spectrum was apparent when young people used verbal aggression to suggest threat of physical harm or to humiliate. The most striking example of this occurred during a residential weekend. Here Fraser used a number of currencies to assert his position in the group. In this extract Sharon is lying sleeping whilst the boys are playing cards. The staff were outside fixing the mountain bikes in preparation for the next day:

Fraser: You should fucking sleep at night then you wouldn't have to sleep during the day.

Sharon ignores him. Fraser gets up and walks over to her.

Fraser: (shouting) Wake up you stupid bitch!

He removes Sharon's blanket then rejoins the card game. Hilary replaces the blanket.

Fraser: Dinnae gie her it. She should have slept last night instead of fighting wi' Andrew

Fraser rejoins the game. After a short time he gets up and removes the blanket Again. He then and rejoins the game. Hilary picks up some sleeping bags and moves towards Sharon.

Fraser: You better not do that Hilary
Fraser stares at her and she drops the sleeping bags and sits by herself.

Hilary: Well she never kept me up.

Fraser: (laughs) She never kept me up either.

Fraser in his concluding statement plays his ace card. He has used the currency of verbal aggression to assert his position to those present in the group. Most significantly he makes clear that the subject which allowed this demonstration of influence was not one which was all that important to him thereby making it clear that he has used the situation merely to re-state his high status position. Interestingly it was Fraser's repeated use of such behaviour that resulted in his being ostracised from the group, a position he was not able to alter until after he had been discharged.

At Brunswick similar behaviour was evident, for example Anna's use of verbal aggression to negotiate her high position within the group. She demonstrated verbal aggression not only to the young people but also to the staff. Both groups appeared to find it difficult to counter this aggression which at times would go on for long periods. Anna appeared to be more verbally abusive to the young men in the unit. She felt justified in her treatment of these residents, claiming that they were immature and that from her perspective it was often the behaviour of the boys which had precipitated her verbal aggression.

As with physical violence, young people often recounted stories that featured verbal aggression. They would relate whole conversations and include the physical movements of those involved. Normally such stories gave a picture of an argument with responses and counter responses, although at times they would involve one or two lines of dialogue to illustrate a point. Often these tales were recounted with all the characters from the story present to demonstrate the 'stupidity' of their behaviour. In such cases the incident would allow the affirmation or the re-forming of friendship.

On other occasions they would be used to support an opinion or statement. In the following example Allie recounts an incident involving Douglas and Bryony:

She just telt him to fuck off and then that was the start of it. He was swearing at her, she was swearing at him. See she can give it out but she cannae take it back herself. She knows not to get into it with me because I can shout louder! Now it's like I say 'Pass the ashtray' and she does it. I suppose it's just a case of me saying and her complying, but other people see it as me using her.

(Allie, Kitchen table, Strathmore, November 1996)

Allie uses the example of Bryony's argument with Douglas to demonstrate that Bryony is not skilled in negotiating with this currency. To reinforce this she goes on to show that she does not require the use of such behaviour and can command status and respect merely by asking for it.

The fear and threat of physical or verbal aggression were features of residential life. As we have seen from previous examples the young people were readily made aware of skills in negotiating influence by using this currency. Threats were rarely made directly to the person. Instead they were disguised (as in Fraser's treatment of Sharon) or were made to a third party. This latter form of threat was closely linked to story telling and would rarely be acted upon. It was used to release tension or emotion or was done to reinforce images of 'toughness'. Hilary's example is indicative:

She's oot wi Fraser. I'll tell you if she gings wi' him I'll slap her, I'll slap him. I've never hit anyone in my life but I'd hit her.

(Hilary, Quiet Room, Strathmore, April 1997)

Here Hilary expresses the anger she is feeling as well as indicating that, if her concerns are proved right, she will retaliate using physical force. In this situation the group viewed Hilary's comments as understandable in the context and supported her feelings and plans. Notably however a number

of the young people suggested that she use alternative means of revenge to prevent herself 'getting into trouble'.

In the course of the individual interviews all the young people were asked about feelings of personal safety within the units. Without exception they stated that they felt safe but, in contrast to these feelings of safety, all mentioned times when they had experienced verbal or physical aggression and as a result had felt threatened and afraid. It may be suggested that, despite experiencing fear or threat, the young people's general sense of safety was never encroached on. Perhaps they did not equate personal safety with a lack of fear or threat.

Smoking

Within sociological research there exists the notion of cigarettes as 'currency' to gain status or favour in institutional settings (i.e. prisons, psychiatric hospitals) (Little, 1990, Heffernan 1972). In such literature cigarettes are regarded as a means of bartering or exchange most frequently for material goods. However in this study it appeared that cigarettes and the power and position that can result from access to them were applied more diversely within the groups studied. This section aims to demonstrate the use of cigarettes as currency, both in a physical and a symbolic sense, and the ways in which they were used to gain influence within the resident groups.

Earning a Drag

Cigarettes, or the possession of cigarettes, were an instant means of gaining momentary credibility and power, especially if fellow residents had no access to a supply of their own. The owner of cigarettes had immediate power over those who wished to borrow a cigarette and could therefore

use this moment to instruct fellow residents or to undertake tasks. Such situations were common, although any influence gained was lost once the cigarette was handed over. The value of this aspect of the cigarette currency was therefore dependent on others' desire to smoke. At Brunswick only the two female residents were smokers and therefore this aspect of the currency had little impact on the male residents. Conversely, all the residents at Strathmore smoked, with the exception of Fraser. Despite his non-smoking status Fraser would, on occasion, buy cigarettes to distribute amongst the resident group. This normally occurred at times when there was a general shortage of cigarettes and therefore had a more powerful impact on his position. Fraser's actions were viewed as a generous gesture by the group, demonstrating the extent of his affection for them. As Allie explains:

Fraser is a'right in his own way. I mean he buys fags when he's got money and no one else has. I mean he doesnae smoke himself. He just hands them out to other folk.

(Allie, Bedroom, Individual Interview, December 1996)

Neil was similarly altruistic but motivated by his own understanding, as a smoker, of how it felt to be without cigarettes:

Sharon: I was awa tae smoke a tabbie and when Neil seen me he geed me a whole fag. Mind the last time I was awa tae smoke a tabbie you were nae wanting me to smoke it?

Neil: Aye, I dinnae believe in folk smoking tabbies min I'll easy gie them a smoke

(Neil and Sharon, Quiet Room, Strathmore, June 1997)

From the data it emerged that Fraser would construct situations to remove access to cigarettes unless through him. In other words he would construct a shortage in order to achieve power and control over others. It appeared that he would only embark on such a move with young women. In such situations Fraser would 'steal' the girls' cigarettes and then ration them out. The young women would then have to ask for one of their own cigarettes back from him. During such interactions

Fraser would stress his dislike of smoking and would attempt to humiliate the girls further by suggestions that they were addicts or had begun smoking to 'show off' or to 'be like everyone else'.

In this way Fraser used the currency of cigarettes by controlling their supply. The following conversation between Fraser and Hilary illustrates this point:

Hilary: Fraser where have you put my fags?

Fraser: I never touched them.

Hilary: Just tell me would you?

Fraser: I never touched them right. You're always bloody accusing me of something.

Hilary: Just give me them.

Fraser: You can get one now and I'll gie you one in a couple of hours time.

Hilary: What?

Fraser: You heard. There's a fag and I'll gie you another one at 8pm.

Hilary: God Sake.

(Hilary and Fraser, Quiet Room, Strathmore, March 1997)

Social Cement or Social Exclusion?

Smoking was an activity that could be shared by the group and could, for a short time, create a sense of cohesion. One way of initially including a new admission, or of resolving an argument, was to invite the young person for a cigarette. Smoking, in this sense, acted as social cement, joining people together in a shared activity. Conversation could then be kept safe focusing on the behaviour taking place. Young people regarded shared smoking as a way of welcoming the young person to the unit. It also offered an opportunity to 'suss out' new admissions in a relaxed, non threatening way. Conversations would begin with a smoking related topic for example, 'How long

have you smoked? How old were you when you started' etc. It would then move on to focus on more personal information, for example, 'Where did you live before? How long are you in for?'

This type of smoking situation was also used as a means of supporting young people or providing them an opportunity to talk. Like new admissions group members would begin by commenting on smoking related information and then move on to ask how the person was or what was troubling them. Smoking, and the sharing of cigarettes, provided an opportunity to demonstrate friendship, trust and support.

Equally however smoking could act as a method of social exclusion. Cigarettes could be shared amongst allies and withheld from 'enemies' thus symbolising status and position. To further enforce low position, individuals were asked to complete menial tasks, their reward for so doing was the remains of the higher status individual's cigarette. Frequently such requests were made when there were others present, increasing the level of humiliation and allowing the group to witness the affirmation of the level of influence.

Smoking was used to show other group members that individuals had formed sub-groups or were involved in exclusive relationships. The invitation to accompany an individual for a cigarette would extend to those involved in the sub-group, making a clear statement to the others of the exclusivity of the relationship. For those smoking it provided private time to discuss 'secrets' or other members of the group. The act of smoking therefore could be used to include and at the same time to exclude individuals.

Going Underground

As previously mentioned during the initial stages of fieldwork the young people at Strathmore had a designated room in which to smoke. This was very much their territory and was rarely used by staff. Young people would spend much of their time there; chatting, playing cards and smoking. The room had been badly looked after, responsibility for its upkeep resting with the young people. It contained two tables and a selection of chairs, all of which were burned and written on. The room had no floor covering or curtains due to fire risk and was lit by a central light with no shade. The main activity for which the room was used was smoking and everything about the room appeared to centre on this activity. The young people would congregate and spend much of their time there.

In many ways for the young people, this room symbolised the resident group. It had a sign on the door with the group's collective nickname and had drawings of young people and staff on the walls. Perhaps because of its function the room created a somewhat false sense of group cohesion; as this was the only place that young people could smoke they were indirectly forced to spend time together. However, as previously mentioned, five months into my fieldwork it was decided by the staff group that smoking would be banned within the unit, forcing the smokers to go outside. This change marked a clear shift in the way that the group was organised and maintained. There was no longer a collective space, instead the young people had to go outside to smoke on their own or with one or two other residents. Because of the increasingly bad weather these trips outside served purely to smoke rather than as an opportunity to chat or play. What this did serve to encourage was an increase in small sub-groups within the larger resident group and, as previously mentioned, such sub groups could be used to exclude or marginalise others.

Smoking became increasingly 'underground' as young people attempted to find ways of regaining collective space and, more obviously, of keeping warm. For example, after the evening meal the group would inform the staff that they were going outside for a cigarette. Normally the staff were busy tidying up at this time so the young people were able to sit in the back porch smoking with the door open. To be caught risked sanction and therefore a look-out was often used. The nomination of a look-out would result in momentary high position for the nominator and a lower position for the nominee. Despite the importance of the lookout this remained a low status position as it often entailed limited access to the cigarettes being smoked. The choice of look-out rested on the perceived need of a young person to gain access to cigarettes. The look out would agree to take on this role if his/her reward for duty would be the remains of another resident's cigarette. Rarely were non smokers involved in this task.

Other illicit locations for smoking used by the young people included bedrooms and shower rooms. Both of these rooms could be locked and were where young people's privacy had to be respected by staff. If a staff member did knock on the door the young person could pretend to be changing etc. to allow time to destroy the evidence of smoking before the member of staff was allowed to enter the room. Again such practices were, at times, exclusive. Too many young people out of sight of staff would arouse staff suspicion and therefore was to be avoided. Thus such behaviour would only include one or two group members. A great deal of trust was required and young people expected reassurances of confidentiality from all those involved.

Within both units young people were allowed to smoke if they were over the age of sixteen. If under that age then parental permission had to be sought before smoking was condoned by the staff

team. In most cases this permission was granted, but, when it was not, the other young people would assist the individual in illicit smoking. This was done in a variety of ways and included buying cigarettes for him/her, holding cigarettes or, if caught, claiming that the cigarette was theirs rather than belonging to the banned smoker. It was expected that young people would support each other in this respect and the 'bravery' required to undertake such a task was rewarded with momentary credibility.

As previously mentioned only the two female residents at Brunswick smoked. Within this unit, staff and young people smoked together in the cloakroom at the back of the building. This allowed for residents to spend time with staff whilst enjoying a shared activity. Relationships between staff and young people were, for this short period, on a different level and it appeared to be something which both the staff and the young people enjoyed. The two male residents, both non-smokers, would often hover around the smoking group in an attempt to be included. The opportunity to spend time with staff, sharing an activity, created an environment different from that in the rest of the unit. For these moments in time it appeared that staff/resident roles were suspended replaced by the one role of smoker.

Keeping up the Supply

At Strathmore the buying of cigarettes was an important topic for discussion. To have no cigarettes due to financial constraints was understandable but to always be without was regarded as unacceptable. Young people in this situation were labelled as 'scroungers' and therefore sharing cigarettes with them was not encouraged. The expectation within the group was that if you had cigarettes you would share them. This was most apparent on a Friday evening after the residents

had received their pocket money. All would buy cigarettes and take turns in 'crashing' i.e. giving cigarettes to others in the group. Again a good reason was required for having no cigarettes at this time.

On occasions when there was no access to cigarettes or finance some individuals would resort to 'illegal' means of acquiring them. This included tricking staff into giving them money. Hilary provides an example:

Dave is so easy to get ... He took us down to the video shop and we said you just sit in the car and we'll get it. He gave us £3 but we got one of those crap ones for £1 and bought fags then told him it was £3. He fell for it too.

(Hilary, Quiet Room, Strathmore, April 1997)

Such scams would also involve getting fake receipts for clothes or toiletries or claims of lost receipts for similar purchases. Credibility was gained for not only having cigarettes but also for taking part in such risky behaviour. Influence was also gained through smoking expertise. Young people valued the ability to inhale properly, to do smoke tricks and to have a long established habit of smoking. The group would swap stories of smoking-related experiences to demonstrate these points i.e. descriptions of their first cigarette, getting caught etc.

During my fieldwork a number of the young people made attempts to stop smoking. They talked of concerns about their health, the smell left on their clothes and, most importantly for them, the expense. The group encouraged members in their quest to quit (but normally with a hint of cynicism) as did the staff team. The team would offer rewards for giving up for a set period (i.e. a new jacket, bike lights etc.) and would praise the individual for the days that he/she did manage

without a cigarette. None of the young people was successful in his/her attempts although all tried for periods to stop and equally tried to gain their reward. Like those residents who had not received parental permission, the group would cover for the individual who wanted to be seen by the staff as having quit. They were, however, only successful with such cover-ups for a short period as eventually the young person would admit defeat.

Cigarettes were a valuable currency within the resident group, in a physical and in a symbolic sense. Smoking practices proved to be a means of both including and excluding residents from the group and were often illicit in nature. If a young person utilised the cigarette currency he/she could achieve periods of high credibility within the resident group. Equally if a young person was not able to operate this currency in some way he/she was likely to be given a low position when such practices were undertaken.

Conclusions

The ways in which young people communicated with each other were not only diverse they also served as mechanisms through which credibility and position were negotiated. Although the data did demonstrate how physical violence and verbal aggression were used by young people living in the units studied it was found that the notion of the 'bullyboy' described in other literature on institutional living was not present. Instead there were subtle and complex uses of this type of currency.

Equally, and perhaps more powerfully, was the notion of support and advice as currency and the high value given to its use by the resident group. The term support is made up of a number of

different types of behaviours and a range of motivations that emerged from the data. There was evidence not only to suggest that support and advice was exchanged between group members but also that it has a powerful impact on group life

Cigarettes have been acknowledged in other studies of institutional life as a form of material goods that can be readily exchanged for goods and services. Whilst such findings were supported by this study it was further found that cigarettes had a symbolic meaning that had an equally powerful impact on how young people were regarded by the group. Friendships could be made exclusive, young people could be embraced or rejected, risks and gambles could be taken in relation to cigarettes, all illustrating the power of smoking as currency.

Young people and staff used humour as a means of 'surviving' daily life (Roy 1960). For both groups however humour also provided a mechanism by which they could comment on behaviour as a means of limiting or encouraging it. Humour also provided means to achieve group cohesion and belonging. Most significantly humour allowed young people and adults safely to test the boundaries of their relationships and to test the expectations and limits of their behaviour.

Currencies of communication therefore embraced those behaviours or practices which were rooted in a verbal or physical exchange and which, if the appropriate social context allowed, provided the young people with momentary credibility.

Conclusion

The Complexities of Group Living

A desk lid went up behind her and a muffled voice said distinctly, 'The Funny Guy. The Funny Guy. The Funny Guy *again*.' Helen lifted her desk cover and turned around to stick out her tongue at Clarence. This gave her a moments satisfaction. Then she felt for the familiar shape of her arithmetic book and the day's work began.

(Hogarth 1975: 17)

Central to the findings of this thesis was that the young people in both of the units studied had no fixed roles or social positions within their groups. The 'moments satisfaction' presented in Hogarth's story of a young girl's experience of being 'bullied' illustrates this point. During this novel Hogarth presents the story of a young girl who is consistently teased and regularly verbally and physically assaulted. During the telling of the story however the heroine has frequent moments when she is fleetingly accepted or granted credibility. Underpinning this tale is the acceptance of the young woman's social agency. She has a complex set of behaviours that challenge, albeit fleetingly, both her own position and that of the other children.

The complexity of interaction and negotiation within the social world of the resident group has been a central theme of this research. Rather than fixed, finite roles or status positions it was found that

the credibility or status granted to the young people was fluid and shaped by the social context in which the negotiation was taking place. It has further been demonstrated that the skills or 'social currencies' that the young people used to gain credibility were wide-ranging. Power was not granted through wholly 'negative' practices; rather there was a value placed on many 'positive' skills.

The experience of living alongside age mates and having care provided by a number of non-related adults is, in many ways, an unusual experience for children and young people. By studying these exceptional groups however this thesis has attempted to gain insight into the everyday world of young people and the ways in which they manage and construct their social groups.

It is therefore upon these two main findings or contributions to knowledge that this chapter focuses. The conceptual analysis that was developed as a means of illustrating the complex negotiations of credibility and position is discussed and reflected upon. Further the competencies or as I named them 'social currencies' that the young people used to negotiate these positions are debated within current thinking on childhood, youth and institutional care.

Engaging with Institutional Research

Despite an extensive and ever growing literature surrounding residential childcare little is known about the daily life of the young people 'looked after' in community children's homes and more importantly how they experience group living. Research has predominately highlighted the negative

aspects of residential care (for example Millham et al. 1986, Berridge 1985) and their impact on the outcomes for children. To some extent this position is derived from developmental discourses of childhood and assumptions about the need for consistent caregiving provided by fixed 'parental' figures. Residential care is an anathema to this view. Young people in residential settings are cared for by a variety of adults who are paid to provide this care. Not only that, but in such settings young people are 'forced' to live alongside a number of others of various ages who have a variety of backgrounds and needs (Berridge and Brodie 1998, Braxton 1995).

Much of the research concerning outcomes for children and young people who have experienced this type of provision has highlighted residential care as the key variable. It is often suggested, if not stated, that residential care has failed young people. To support such claims statistics relating to homelessness, unemployment, offending and truancy are provided (see for example Stein and Carey 1986, West 1995, Linehan 1992). Whilst residential provision cannot deny some responsibility for such outcomes, account must be taken of the social backgrounds and marginalisation experienced by these young people prior to admission. With a growth in the numbers of older admissions the expectations placed on institutions to 'turn round' behaviour must be acknowledged.

As a result of the belief in the value of the family as the resource to best care for children, residential provision has been relegated to a 'last resort' option (Kahan 1994, Fisher et al. 1986, Berry 1975). In practice terms this has led to residential care providing for children with a background of 'failed' foster placements and complex, often problematic, behaviour (Bebbington and Miles 1989). The information regarding background, provided by the young people in this study, supports such a finding. That residential care was not a 'first choice' resulted in admissions

being experienced as unplanned and in placements being of uncertain length. This aspect of residential care has been well researched (Ward 1993). What is less well known are the ways in which residents' experiences of being 'looked after' is influenced by this perception of their placement or the disruption to their group by the arrival of new admissions.

From the data it emerged that young people, in particular young men, were most likely to view their admission to residential care as being a consequence of their own 'bad' behaviour. Often they would target one action that had led directly to their admission rather than the culmination of causes which social work practitioners identify and report. It was found that with the notion of self-blame came the perception of residential care as 'punishment'. Not only did this influence the way in which young people viewed themselves it also influenced the way in which they viewed their 'looked after' status. Many of the young people, despite discussing their satisfaction with the placement, also mentioned the notion of 'sentencing' and thus of freedom. Although in no way rigorously researched it appeared that this in turn influenced the 'choice' of young people to remain 'looked after' once they reached the age of 16.

The continuum of care was a further aspect not lost on these young people. They were clear that the point on the continuum at which one entered as well as where one was headed was a mark of the extent of their difficulties or 'deviance'. Young people and staff alike utilised this care 'career' as a means of discouraging 'negative' behaviour and as a means of maintaining group stability and control.

There were further implications of the perceptions that young people had of residential care prior to their admission. Their association of children's homes with 'delinquency' and 'offending' was one that they brought from outwith the units and one that they maintained existed in the wider social world. From the data it appeared that residents were able to identify and tolerate the behaviour of new admissions who behaved in response to this 'myth'. Newly admitted young people approached the resident group in the belief that they would be in physical and emotional danger. The resulting practice of withdrawal and antagonism or bravado were understood by the resident group as being the product of a misdirected view of residential care and a means of protection from the anticipated attack by the resident group.

The understanding that the young people had of the outside world and more importantly the view that this outside world had of them was a central feature of the daily experience of residential life and a key finding of this research. Despite the 'moral panics' surrounding young people in a general sense and young people in groups more particularly (Thompson 1998) the young people in this study experienced perceptions of themselves as contradictory; they knew that they were perceived as a threat but they themselves perceived the outside world as a threat. Their response to this fear varied from withdrawal from the community to an 'attack before defence' mentality. For many, opportunities to have a network external to the unit were limited to other young people with a background of local authority care. The level of acceptance and understanding, it was felt, could only be granted by those who shared a similarly marginalised identity.

Recent government reports and research have explored the 'danger' faced by young people in relation to having to live alongside others who have a history of 'abusive' behaviour (for example

Kent 1997). Residents in this study were aware of the diversity of young people requiring residential care. The data did not support the belief that young people resented the presence of particular types of resident or felt that there were some that had greater claim on the placement than others. However, it was found that young people expected a level of behaviour with the group and towards the community whilst the placement was underway. It was not so much the background of the young person admitted that concerned the groups but the way in which he/she behaved whilst attached to the unit. One strategy developed by the young people, as a means of protecting the resident group, was the way in which they managed the admission process itself. This thesis demonstrated that young people felt that they had no control over who was admitted. However they did have control over the ways in which they treated the new admission and the degree to which he/she was accepted. The 'testing' out of new admissions highlighted this. All young people experienced a period of 'testing' prior to their acceptance into the group. By 'testing' the loyalty, trust, safety and generosity of new admissions the group was to some extent able to protect its members prior to letting the new young person in.

Literature and research that has considered the resident group has tended to focus on the negative behaviours and 'peer group pressure' that young people in residential care experience (Kahan 1994, Kent 1997). Widespread assumptions, based on limited evidence, concerning the negative influence of young people on each other has led to further criticism of residential care as a means of caring for children. However it was clear from the data gathered in this study that the behaviours demonstrated by the young people were far more wide ranging and were balanced with what might be considered 'positive' group behaviours. Significantly this study found that the young people's use of support, advice, humour and sharing of material possessions were constant elements of daily

life. Young people regularly spoke of their own experiences and biographies as a means of 'teaching' others to learn by their mistakes. The value of group or peer support has received little attention in research on residential care. However at the time of writing, social services in Wales have begun to employ young people with personal backgrounds of residential care to work with those who are in residence. This move has been motivated by the recent disclosures of physical and sexual abuse within Welsh children's homes. The hope is that residents will feel more able to share their anxieties and concerns with young people who have actual experience of residential care (Inman 1999).

Interestingly young people in this study identified the group living aspect as the main benefit of residential care. Those who had elected to be placed in residential as opposed to foster care were motivated by the opportunity to live alongside others who had 'been in the same boat'. Young people also stated that residential provision did not compromise their relationships with their families in the way that foster care had or would do. Such a finding is consistent with research conducted by Potter (1986). She states that one of the most important qualities of residential care is that it does not attempt to create a new family and therefore does not create issues of divided loyalty. Furthermore it means that children who have had difficult or damaging experiences within a family are not placed into a familial situation with which they may have difficulty coping (Page and Clark 1977, Waterhouse 1989).

Group living provided an opportunity to share experiences and to identify with others who had faced difficulties that, it was felt, many 'normal' young people had not. This peer support or self help mentality extended to the ways in which the group was self-policed. From the data it appeared that

certain behaviours were not tolerated by either of the groups and it was often the force of the group that was more effective in changing the behaviour than the intervention of staff. The group members were able to enforce their expectations of appropriate behaviour on individual members through the use of exclusion or isolation. This appeared to be effective because all residents were aware of the value in feeling a sense of belonging and were therefore unwilling to jeopardise losing their place in the group.

The force of the group as a means of creating ‘positive’ change is counter to the approach most commonly used by institutional care settings. Here the individualisation of care is seen as ‘best practice’. Individualised treatment is one attempt to move away from the batch handling, group approach that has ‘plagued’ this type of provision (Abrams 1998). Goffman (1968) in his discussion of the ‘mortification of self’ provides what is perhaps the most powerful image of individuality being stripped away to produce a malleable ‘patient’ rather than an individual in need of care. Although right in its motivation, the drive for individualised care practice or treatment abandons the group as the site for change and disregards the positive potential that understanding the group in group care can provide.

The young people in this study also presented ‘negative’ behaviour toward one another. They demonstrated aggression, verbal abuse, exclusion and isolation of others. Brown et al. state that: ‘Children’s behaviours that worry adults - swearing, smoking, sex, bullying, running away *et cetera* – are largely controlled by the informal rules enshrined in these cultures and by the attitudes and actions necessary for staff and children to be popular (or unpopular) with their peers’ (Brown et al. 1998:6). However, it has been shown in this thesis that the positive practices demonstrated by

the young people had an equally powerful role in controlling behaviour or influencing credibility. Like all social networks residential groups have been shown in the course of this thesis to contain both 'positive' and 'negative' behaviours and strategies.

A number of key research studies have presented findings illustrating the impact of maintaining familial networks on the length of placement experienced by the young person (Bilson and Barker 1995, Millham et al. 1986). Such a correlation was not examined by this thesis; however the impact of a network on the group view of the young person did emerge from the data. In particular it was found that the group expected young people to have a level of contact with family members, specifically with siblings. This study also highlighted the ease with which young people could penetrate the 'outside' world if pre-existing social networks were close at hand. Those who appeared to have the strongest links with the community were those who had relationships in that community prior to their admission. Those young people who had to move in order to be 'looked after' experienced great difficulty in accessing the wider community. It appears therefore that not only does family or external contact ease the process of returning home it also has major implications for the way in which everyday life in residential care is experienced.

In the main, research on residential childcare has taken an evaluative approach with concern for specific outcomes, for example return to the family (Bilson and Barker 1995) or independent living (Morgan Klein 1985). Interestingly many of these studies have shown that the 'outcomes' for young people using this service are little different from those in foster placements (Kendrick 1995, Colton 1988, Berridge 1994, Rowe et al. 1989). Whilst worthwhile, this continued focus has resulted in a limited knowledge of the lived experience and social processes within residential care. Indeed

Berridge and Brodie (1998) identify the need for research on the impact of residence on 'particular sub-groups of children' (Berridge and Brodie 1998:21).

This thesis has addressed a number of key gaps in knowledge relating to residential care. Primarily the use of ethnography to examine the everyday experience of the young people's groups has led to added insight not only in relation to the ways that young people manage their everyday lives but also in relation to the complexity and variety of peer relationships and practices. This concluding chapter and indeed the entire thesis has not been evaluative in its approach. It is not the task of this piece of work to comment on the value or effectiveness of this way of life for young people, rather it has aimed to present the young people's stories of their experiences in order to provide a more rounded picture of life in residential care.

Locating Findings in the Sociology of Childhood and Youth

The social study of childhood has, over recent decades, culminated in what has been referred to as a 'new sociology of childhood' (James, Jenks and Prout 1998). The main proposition of this school of thought is that childhood ought to be understood from a social constructionist perspective rather than the biological determinist perspective of the past. In the last century the conception of a 'universal' childhood has become synonymous with notions of innocence and purity; children ought to be protected and cherished. Children therefore are constructed as requiring the safety and nurture that will allow their progress into adulthood to remain untainted by 'adult' concerns or pressures.

The young people in this study held a belief that they had, by their placement away from the family, transcended the boundaries of 'normal childhood' and were therefore regarded as a threat not only

to the community but more specifically to other children. From the data it emerged that young people had had experiences with the outside community which demonstrated the community's lack of understanding as to why they were 'looked after'. Often this misperception centred on a belief that young people requiring residential care had committed criminal offences. Indeed many of the young people themselves believed their placement to be as a result of an offence rather than the breakdown, violence or abuse that had taken place in their families. They talked of the resistance they had experienced in penetrating the community both through formal institutions, such as schools and youth organisations, as well as more individual families and networks. Indeed the young men talked of the expectation that was held of them to be 'tough'. On a number of occasions this has led to boys in the community actively seeking opportunities to test their strength against them. All those involved in the study mentioned the view that the community saw them as 'other' and as a force to be feared.

The notion that children's everyday social experiences shape their particular local cultural identities as children (James 1993, Mayall 1996) is particularly interesting in relation to the study of young people 'looked after' in residential care. It may be argued that the cultural tensions between the organisation of the children's home and the family results in young people creating a separate culture influenced often by both where they have come from and where they are presently situated. This is best demonstrated by the range of social currencies that the young people valued and which were used to negotiate credibility and position. For example despite clear expectations by the staff regarding violent and aggressive behaviour, some young people continued to draw on these 'skills' to influence their position. They would then justify their actions by making reference to the belief systems of the families or by making contact with a parent to report (and often be rewarded for) this

behaviour. Similarly many of the myths passed down from families with regard to the motivation of social services and police were embodied in the practices of the young people. Young people appeared at times to be genuinely confused about the 'right' way to operate. In situations of threat for example there appeared to be real tensions between the expectations of the unit staff that, for example, one should 'walk away' and parental expectations to 'stick up for yourself'.

To compensate for this confusion the development of the groups' own codes of conduct or expectations were developed. Interaction with peers not only allowed for the development of acceptable levels of social competence (Heaven 1994) but further aided a sense of belonging and identity (Stone 1982, James 1993). This finding supports the belief that children and young people develop strategies to manage their own practices rather than being in a one-way power relationship, with adults wielding the most power. Whilst there can be no dispute that, especially for these groups of children, adults hold a great deal of power (e.g. to decide where they shall live) this study has shown that children and young people achieve momentary power in their everyday lives. Indeed one of the social currencies valued by the young people centred on the knowledge of adult practices as a means of exploitation or corruption. Young people recounted stories of gaining money, possessions, time and attention by means of 'trickery and deception'. Therefore, despite young people's behaviour being controlled and restrained by adults these young people continued to be active in forming their own everyday worlds.

The study of children and young people within institutional or peer-dominated settings came as a response to the view held in the 1950s and 60s that children were to be studied as part of the family. This academic backlash led to the study of children being 'removed' from the 'child in the family'

thus allowing insight into the agency of children and the strategies and structuring of their 'everyday' lives. James and Prout (1996) argue that it is now time once again for the study of children to be relocated within families, to allow researchers to explore the social and emotional context of the family and its impact on the lives of children.

However the study of young people in a residential setting allowed access to what might still be considered as 'private' or backstage behaviours. Friendships or peer group relationships are often conducted beyond the adult gaze (Hey 1997). Indeed for young people much of the motivation for spending time with age mates concerns reducing the time spent with adults. 'Adolescence' is marked by the quest for identity separate from that of one's parents and this identity formation occurs alongside peers (Erikson 1962). For most children and young people experimentation with what are regarded as 'adult' practices occurs out of sight of adults. Indeed many children would be prevented from undertaking such behaviour by their adult carers. This study has demonstrated the strategies young people develop to protect their behaviour from adult interference. The use of lookouts or of defining and owning space, for example, created opportunities for the young people to conduct behaviour that would not be tolerated by the adults caring for them.

The public nature of residential living, coupled with the young people's reluctance to spend time outwith the unit, meant that much of their everyday lives were conducted in the public gaze. Despite attempts at encouraging young people to feel a sense of ownership over the unit there continued to be an awareness that the larger social work department had control over and ultimate responsibility for it. Young people were aware that there were discreet budgets relating to all aspects of their care and regarded 'screwing the system' as a means of gaining a sense of power or

control not only over adults but over their own lives. Such thinking led to acts of vandalism or wastage of food.

This thesis has contributed to the sociological study of childhood by exploring the power of the resident group in shaping and controlling individual behaviour. The socialising element of the resident groups, it may be argued, was used to bridge the gap between the culture of the unit and the culture or belief systems of the family. The group was shown to be arranged principally as a means of protecting and nurturing fellow residents rather than as a ‘negative’ ‘abusive’ force. Fundamental to this finding was that young people had social agency in creating and managing their groups. They displayed control over who or when people were admitted to their groups; they created strategies to punish or to re-educate members and negotiated around the formal adult structures that existed. Significantly this study has enabled the ‘voices’ of a group of children and young people to be heard rather than have them ‘muted’. It has placed their experiences at the centre of the study and has used young people as the sole source of data.

Considering Methodology

The literature surrounding the sociology of childhood has suggested that there is no one ‘true’ childhood rather there is experiences of many different childhoods. With the growth of this perspective has come research on a wide range of children and young people at work, at play, at school and at home. This thesis contributes to this body of work by presenting insights into groups of children who live away from the family home and who are cared for by the state.

However the existing body of work, which has concentrated on research with children and young people, has tended to present techniques that are universally acceptable to all children and young people (Alderson 1995, Stanley and Sieber 1992). This interesting dichotomy between the social study of children and the methodologies used to undertake it has been highlighted by this thesis. It has been through trial and error that an appreciation of the variety of childhoods and the impact that this variety may have on research techniques was developed. Originally I had considered it most appropriate to use semi-structured interviews with young people in residential care. It was only through discussion with these young people that it became apparent that they had had repeated experiences of being interviewed by adults. These interviews, conducted by a range of 'professionals', had required the young people to talk about their lives and experiences and had more often than not resulted in decisions being taken about their care.

Not only had the young people that I approached constructed 'scripts' that they presented to me they were also concerned about the ramifications of their disclosures. The insight gained into the experience of living in residential care through such interviews was therefore greatly restricted by the young people's previous experiences of being asked questions by adults. Such a position may be likened to that of the street children in South America who are regularly 'interviewed' by researchers, 'helping' organisations and journalists. The result is that these young people choose not to participate or they work from a scripted response, playing up to what they think the interviewer wishes to hear (Ennew 1994).

A further finding from this research has been the range of understanding relating to notions of consent and confidentiality. Young people in this study understood that confidentiality was

something of a moveable feast. Information had, in their experience, been passed on to other social workers, the children's hearing, schools and on occasion parents and family members. In the past confidentiality, it appeared, had rested on the 'seriousness' of the information. As a researcher therefore it took a great deal of effort and 'testing' by the young people to convince them of my ability to hold confidence. Consent was also an important feature of this research. It was essential to me that young people agreed to take part in this project from a position of informed consent, and I found that young people had a variety of abilities and a range of self-confidence, which impacted on the way in which I could gain consent. The result therefore was that for some young people a short discussion of the project and its potential publications was enough whilst for others negotiations took place over a longer period and required regular clarification and explanation.

The opportunity to conduct a participant observation study with this group of young people is rare. It would appear, on reflection, that a number of 'accidental' methodological techniques aided my acceptance by the groups. Principally the input given by the young people at the pilot stage of the study resulted in an invitation to 'live in' the units. That this had been the young people's idea perhaps made them more willing to accept my presence when I did move in and begin the research. It may be argued that maintaining this level of negotiation with the young people served not only to fine tune the research instruments but also allowed the young people to have a sense of control over what was taking place. I was sensitive to the implications of making and then breaking relationships with young people who had already experienced a number of 'losses' in their lifetimes. The ability to mirror the care career, of admission, of entering the group, of extended home leave and finally of discharge eased this process for both parties.

Ethnographic studies of this kind must also have implications for safety. The experience of living alongside young people and being granted insight into the ways in which they negotiated their own safety provided me with a basic set of principles which then guided my research practice. Unlike the young people I took extra precautions such as locking my bedroom door and keeping my door open when I had visitors. At no point did I feel threatened by the young people. However I was conscious that they could regard me as a threat. One further element of ethnographic research, which I found problematic in this setting, was the freedom of new admissions to refuse to participate. Although each was given the opportunity not to take part, realistically I would still have been a constant presence in their lives despite their voices not being transcribed or analysed. This is one element of ethnographic research that perhaps requires greater consideration as I am sure that the situation of others joining in during the course of the research is not unique to studies undertaken within residential units.

Negotiating Positions

Studies of residential care have contributed to the construction of young people's groups as something to fear (see for example Polsky 1962, Triseliotis et al. 1995, Farmer and Pollock 1999). The research focus on young people's inter-relationships has often concentrated on issues of safety and protection and the potential damage that young people may do to one another. Indeed, as mentioned in Chapter One, Kahan in her study of residential care cites the peer group under the heading 'contemporary hazards of growing up' (Kahan 1994:136).

It may be argued that the young people in this study demonstrated the dichotomous belief systems surrounding groups of young people by their control or policing of their resident groups. Young

people feared exclusion and yet at the same time were conscious that their behaviour as individuals was often regarded as a result of their behaviour as a group. Young people were regularly excluded as a means of punishment. Not only were they rejected in this way but concern was also centred around the potential ‘attractiveness’ of the young people and the impact that this would have on the ‘image’ of the group. Those young people who were appropriately behaved and were regarded as attractive added to the groups’ presence; by contrast those who were seen as ‘ugly’ or who behaved in a way that brought ‘shame’ or discredit to the group were more likely to be ostracised or excluded. There appeared therefore to be an awareness of what it meant to be a child without friends and the concerns that this would create, not just for the young person but also for the staff. Young people also used the group as a collective force to make statements or threats against staff or new admissions. Again they were aware of the potential threat that group force could instil.

This study has argued that the quest for status and credibility within the two groups studied was a key element of the young people’s everyday lives. Unlike the bully/victim dichotomy or Polsky’s hierarchical explanation of resident group organisation, it was found that status was time-limited and was related directly to the social context in which the young people were operating. From this perspective all young people had moments when they were regarded as credible and were ‘looked up to’ by their fellow residents. By identifying that status was momentary, I was able to concentrate on the methods used by young people to gain this social position. It was found that not only were young people required to have competence or skills in certain areas; they were also required to know at what points to use them. It is this link between action and situation that resulted in these practices being made distinct as ‘social currencies’. Indeed to bring forth knowledge or behaviour at inappropriate times could result in a loss of credibility or status.

Unlike the bully/victim dichotomy this study has highlighted the range of practices that were valued by the group. Credibility was not simply granted to those who demonstrated aggressive or 'negative' behaviours. Position also required a demonstration of 'positive', 'caring' behaviours. There did not appear to be the sense that young people were waiting to achieve power rather than they were aware that status was only fleetingly granted and would require a shift in social context in order for them to be able to contribute their knowledge or skill. Such a finding supports the notion that young people are active social agents in shaping not only their own social groups but also their own position within these groups.

The complexity of negotiation and the fluidity of power exchanges extended to all of the young people studied. There were no social currencies that were accessible only by those of a specific age or gender, rather all young people had access to status and position. The notion of older children exerting force or power over younger residents (La Fontaine 1986) was not supported. This is not to say that children were not humiliated, ostracised or attacked. Indeed the data suggest that they were. However it was not their age or gender which dictated this reaction; rather it was their behaviour and the social context in which it took place. Key to the findings of this study is the notion that young people were not fixed into stronger or weaker positions. They were able to negotiate moments of strength and equally experience moments of 'weakness'.

This study attempted to explore the residential group experience without the 'lens' of pre-existing sets of beliefs which have in the past dominated studies of young people's behaviour. I was conscious of age and gender only where it was influential. It appeared to me that such variables did

not limit or extend the access to power. In relation to some social currencies however, gender in particular may have had influence on how the currency was used (for example sexual story telling undertaken in quite different ways but with similar effect).

Reflecting on the Analysis

It appeared that there were no fixed roles or status positions emerging from the data; rather power or position was constantly changing. There were moments in time when young people seemed to be given credibility or status by the other young people and this notion of being granted power rather than vying for it became the basis for the analytical framework. Negotiating status rested on the use of demonstrating various knowledge or skills. However it appeared that even though these skills were demonstrated the protagonist was not always granted status. On closer inspection there emerged a relationship between what was occurring in the social world, the skill that was demonstrated and the potential for status being granted. This acknowledgement of the relationship between the social context and the skill or knowledge displayed resulted in the creation of social currencies. It was the ability to utilise not only knowledge and skill but to know when to use them that resulted in momentary credibility or status. The analysis then set out to identify which social currencies were being practised by the young people and the ways in which their value was established.

During the analysis I searched for existing sociological theory which would support what was emerging from the data. In previous studies of 'institutions' (Polsky 1962, Heffernan 1972) resident groups appeared to be made up of fixed status positions, hierarchical in nature and maintained through aggressive or deviant behaviour. It was clear from my data that this model was not

appropriate to the practices of the young people in this study. Indeed it was felt that the very notion of status suggested fixed positions that were in many ways hierarchical in origin. It was at this point that I discovered the work of Pierre Bourdieu. As discussed in Chapter Five, Bourdieu argues that the quest for power is central to everyday life. He further acknowledges the relationship between what people bring to interaction, in the form of habitus and what they actually do, in the form of practices. Not only does he allow for this relationship he also stresses the influence of the 'field', or where the interaction is taking place. The appreciation of the inter-relationships between the skills and abilities which one brings to an interaction, the context in which the interaction takes places and what one actually does appeared to be consistent with what was emerging from my data.

As my research had used a participant observation method the data that I had access to tended to be concerned with what was happening, where it was happening and how it affected the ways in which young people regarded each other. I felt it most appropriate to try to formulate a way of conceptualising this inter-relationship and as a result created the notion of social currencies. Unlike Bourdieu the data presented have principally related to what he might refer to as the practices or strategies of the young people. It was felt however that to name them as such would downplay the relationship between what was done and where and when it was undertaken.

The desire to 'hang my hat' on a theoretical peg was at times overwhelming. Principally Bourdieu has provided me with a springboard from which my data could be analysed. His work provided me with the knowledge to critique existing models of peer and residential organisation and to remain faithful to the data in acknowledging the fluidity and complexity of negotiations for position. This thesis therefore is not an analysis of resident group interactions from a Bourdieuvian perspective.

Indeed Bourdieu himself argues that he has no 'theory', merely a set of thinking tools. During the course of the analysis these tools were not so much adapted as inspirational to what would become my own analytical framework.

Thoughts for the Future

The danger in rejecting fixed social roles is to downplay what were for some young people long periods of time where they felt isolated, excluded and at times victimised. It is important that recognition is made of the difficulties young people in residential care face when living with peers. However it was clear from the data that there were no fixed 'bullies' and 'victims' and that all young people participated in negotiations regarding their own and other's credibility. Furthermore it must be stressed that both groups involved in the study demonstrated 'positive' caring behaviour more frequently than they did negative, aggressive behaviour.

It remains relatively unclear as to why the groups placed value on the social currencies that they did. It has been suggested that the apparent 'caring' nature of both the staff groups had a degree of impact on resident group behaviour as did the individual backgrounds of the young people studied. I would argue that the development of behaviours as 'valuable' is an element of the thesis which could be developed for future study.

The method of analysis put forward by this thesis has allowed the complex nature of peer group interaction to be explored. It has embraced not only what the young people did but also where and when they did it. The acceptance of not only the social agency of young people with regard to the creation and maintenance of their groups but also the impact of the group as a site for socialisation

has resulted in an interesting framework through which to study more 'mainstream' friendships groups.

The role of the group in influencing individual behaviour has been recognised by social researchers in the past. With regard to young people this has generally focused on troublesome 'delinquent' behaviours. It would however be worthwhile to examine the ways in which this influence is created and how resident cultures are established. Not only would this have sociological implications in relation to the study of children's social groups but it might provide an opportunity to influence practice in relation to the way in which resident groups are managed by residential staff.

Epilogue

This study was motivated by a broad concern to develop insight and understanding of the resident group in community children's homes. Crucially it has demonstrated the complex nature of the social organisation of these groups and has shown the high level of investment in the groups by the young people. In uncovering the negotiations that took place to achieve individual status this study has demonstrated the range of behaviours that were valued by group members. Interestingly these behaviours did not match with adult concerns about the 'delinquent' nature of 'looked after' children. Indeed the data presented have shown the support, advice, sharing and protection that the groups offered. A key finding that has been addressed has been the impact of relationships in the outside world on the everyday experience of young people in residential care. Although research has acknowledged the value of such relationships this has principally been concerned with the potential outcome for young people living in residential care. This study has shown that these relationships impact beyond the possibility of returning home and indeed that they influence the young people's experience of entering the group, their community and formal institutions such as schools. Vital to this thesis has been the finding that young people have agency over their organisation and behaviours. It was the young people themselves who negotiated around the adult controls to create and maintain residents groups which they believed served to protect and support them.

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Appendix One

Interview Schedule

Introduction

As you know I am interested in finding out what it is like to live alongside other young people that you are not related to. I've got some questions that I would like to ask. If my questions don't make sense then get me to stop and try again. Also if there are questions that you don't want to answer that's fine.

We talked as a big group about who would get to know what you decide to tell me today. I'd like you to know that it will just be me who hears the tape and if I write anything about anything you say then I'll make up a name so people won't know its you.

Background Information

How old are you?

How long have you lived at Brunswick/Strathmore?

Since you came into care the first time how many times have you moved?

Being in the Building

Can you describe the building here to me?

What your favourite bit of the building?

Why?

What's your least favourite bit?

Why?

Tell me about the places in the building that are just for kids?

Why are they just for kids?

Tell me about the places that are just for staff?

Why are they just for staff?

If Brunswick/Strathmore was a person what sort of person would it be?

Admission

I want you to think back to the first day that you came to live here. Can you remember it? Can you describe what that first day was like?

Before you came what were you told about here?

What did you imagine it would be like?

What do you remember about the staff when you first came here?

What do you remember about the other kids when you first came into care?

What do young people do when a new person comes to live here?

What do the staff do when a new person comes?

What advice would you give to a new person coming to live here?

Settling In

How did you settle in to living at Fernbank/Strathmore?

Was there anything that made it difficult to settle in?

Is there a way that all new young people are treated by other kids?

Is there any questions that young people always ask new admissions

What advice would you give to a new young person about the best way to settle in?

What would you tell them not to do?

What about the best way to get in with the other group of young people?

The Group

Can you tell me what it's like living here?

What's it like living with a lot of other kids you're not related to?

What are the good bits about living with a group of other kids?

What are the bad bits about living with a group of kids?

In what way is living here like living at home, anything that's the same?

In what way is it different?

How do you think the kids view the staff - what do you think they think about the staff?

How do you think the staff view the kids?

What's the most important thing about here at Fernbank?

Rules and Regulations

Can you tell me what the rules are at Fernbank/Strathmore?

Are there rules that are not always the same or not always stuck to?

Are there rules that apply to the group of young people, like to you all?

Are there rules that are here just for you, that just apply to you, nobody else?

What do you think of the rules?

Why do you think there are rules?

Who makes the rules here?

Getting On

How do you think everyone gets on here?

How do you think the staff get on?

What about with one another, do you think the staff get on with one another?

How do you think the other young people who live here see you?

What do you think your position in the group here is?

Do you think that's changed whilst you've lived here?

Do you think you've changed, then, since you've been here?

Do you think how you are in the group's changed – what you do for the other young people has changed?

Do you think there's a top dog here?

Do you think you've got friends here?

Are there young people here that you don't get on with?

Are there staff you don't get on with?

In what ways do the young people help one another here?

Ending

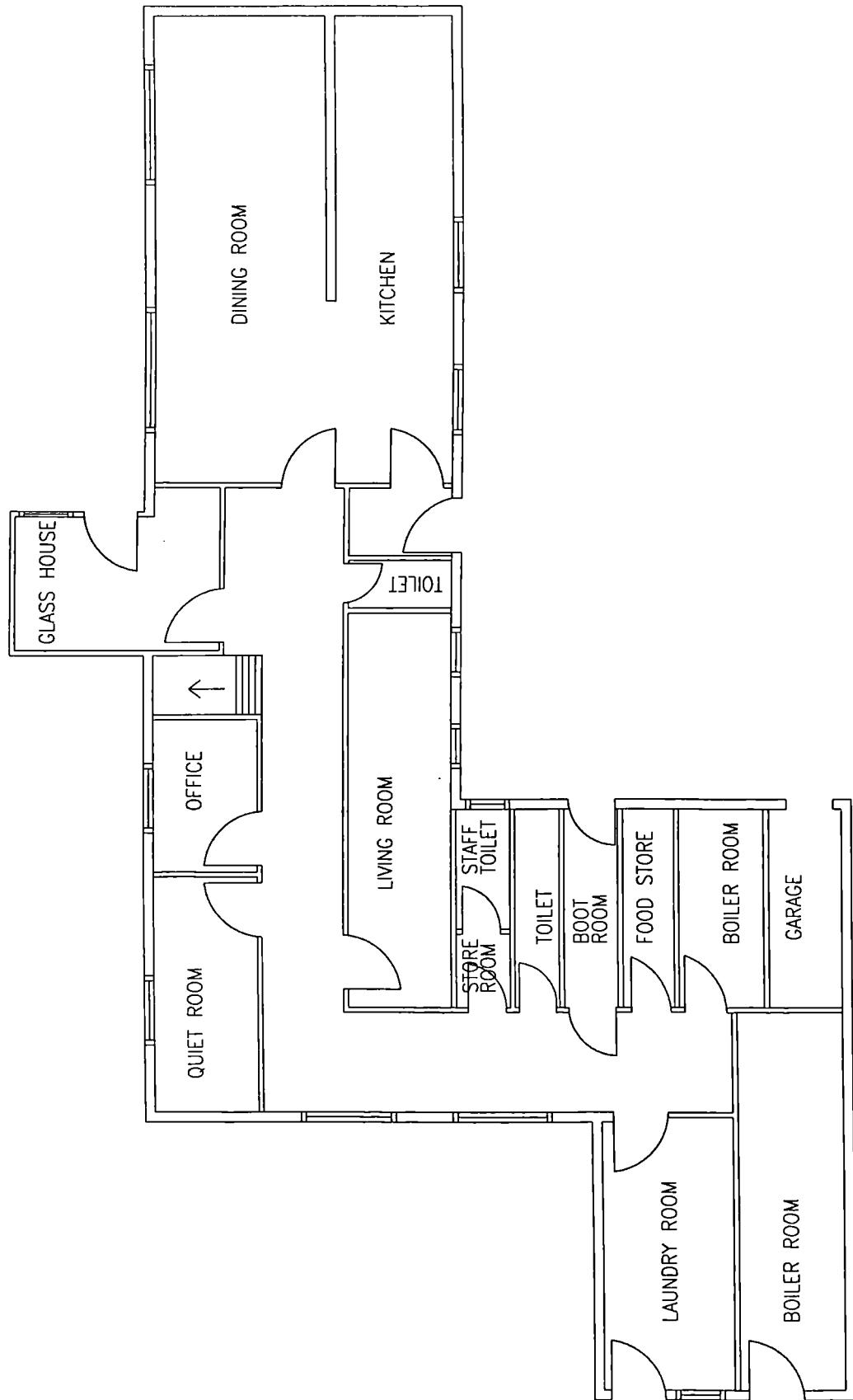
That's all my questions. Do you have anything you would like to add that you think would help me understand what's it like to live here?

What were the hardest questions to answer? Do you think that there are questions that should be left out? Do you think there are some that I should add in?

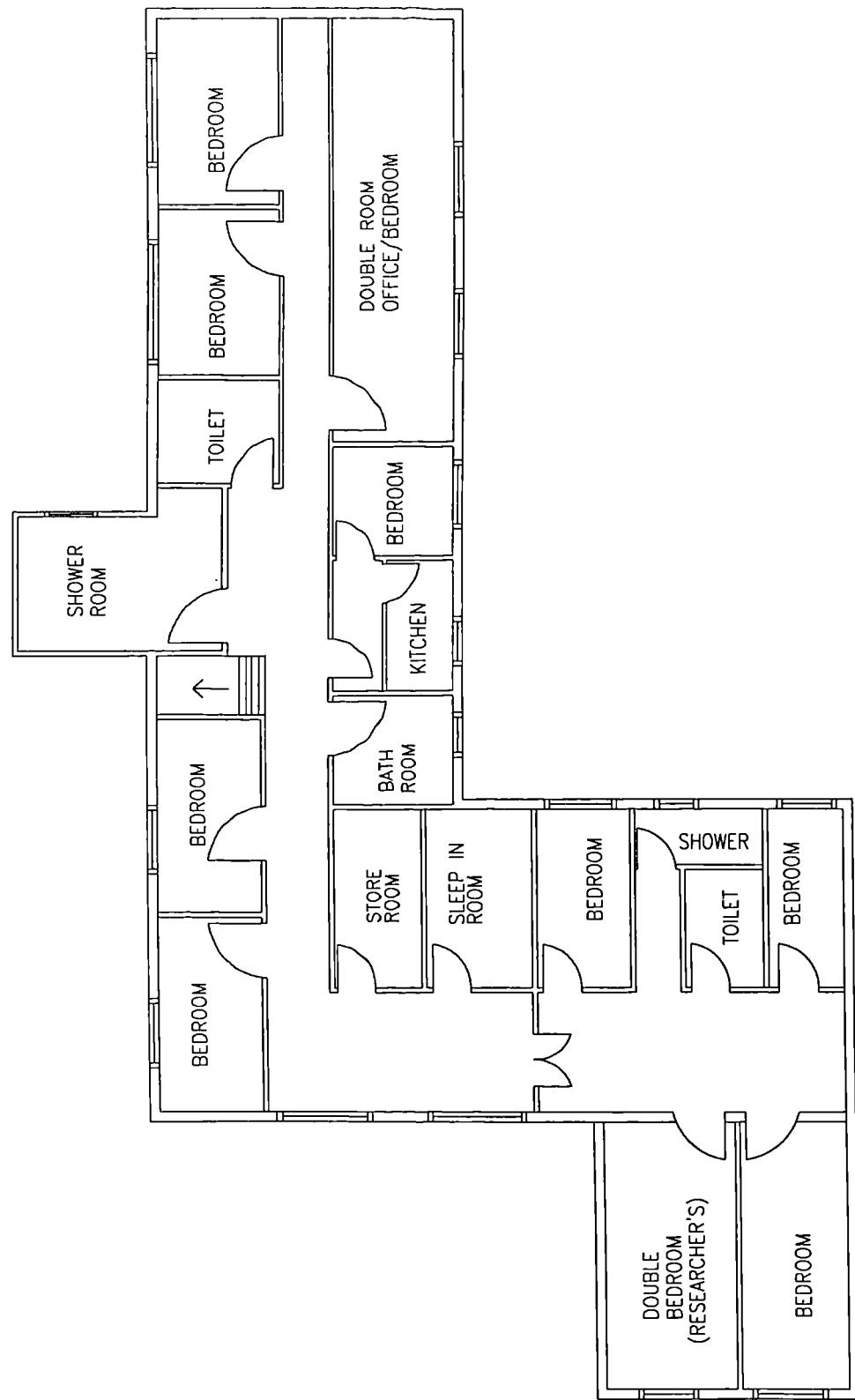
How did it feel to be interviewed?

Thank you for agreeing to take part.

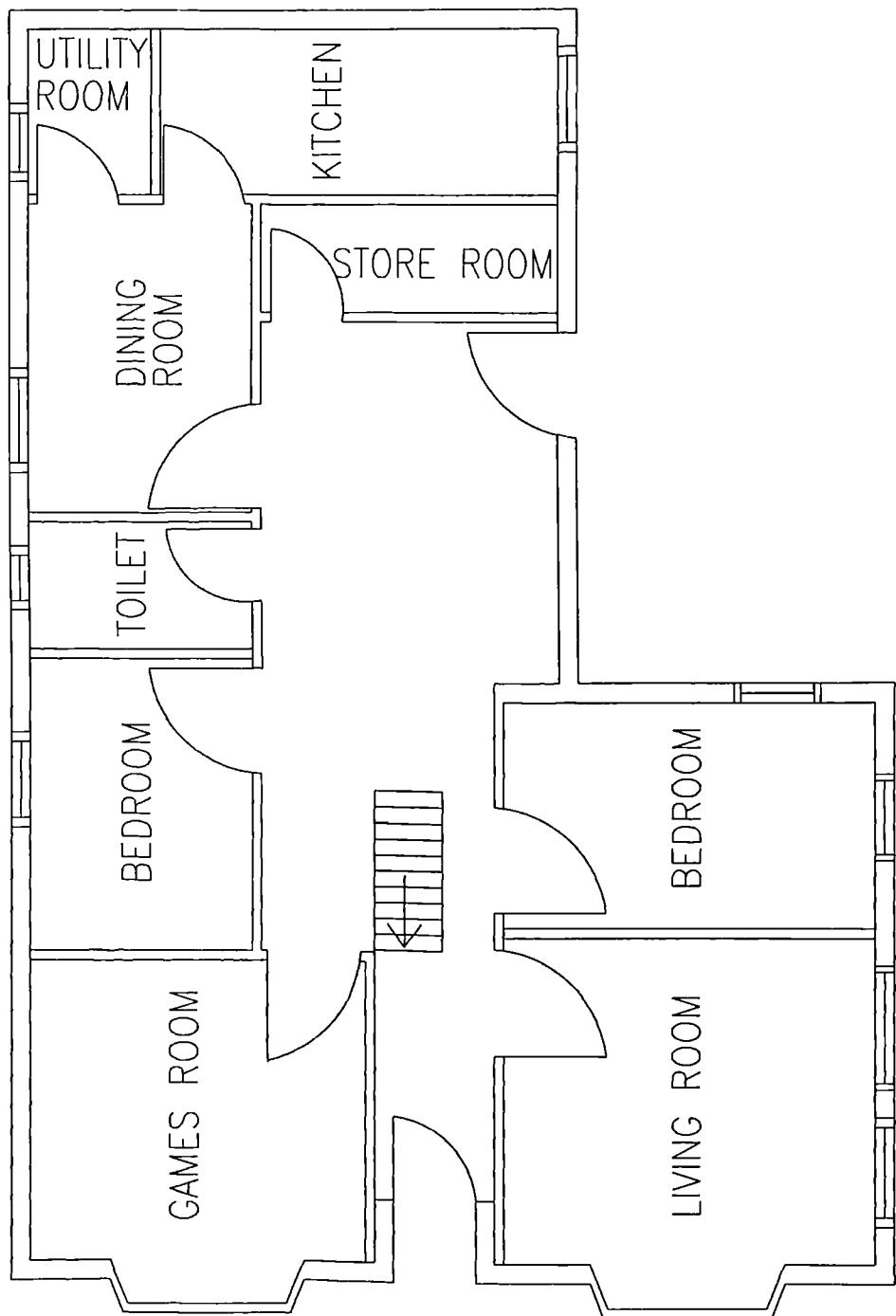
Appendix Two (a)



Appendix Two

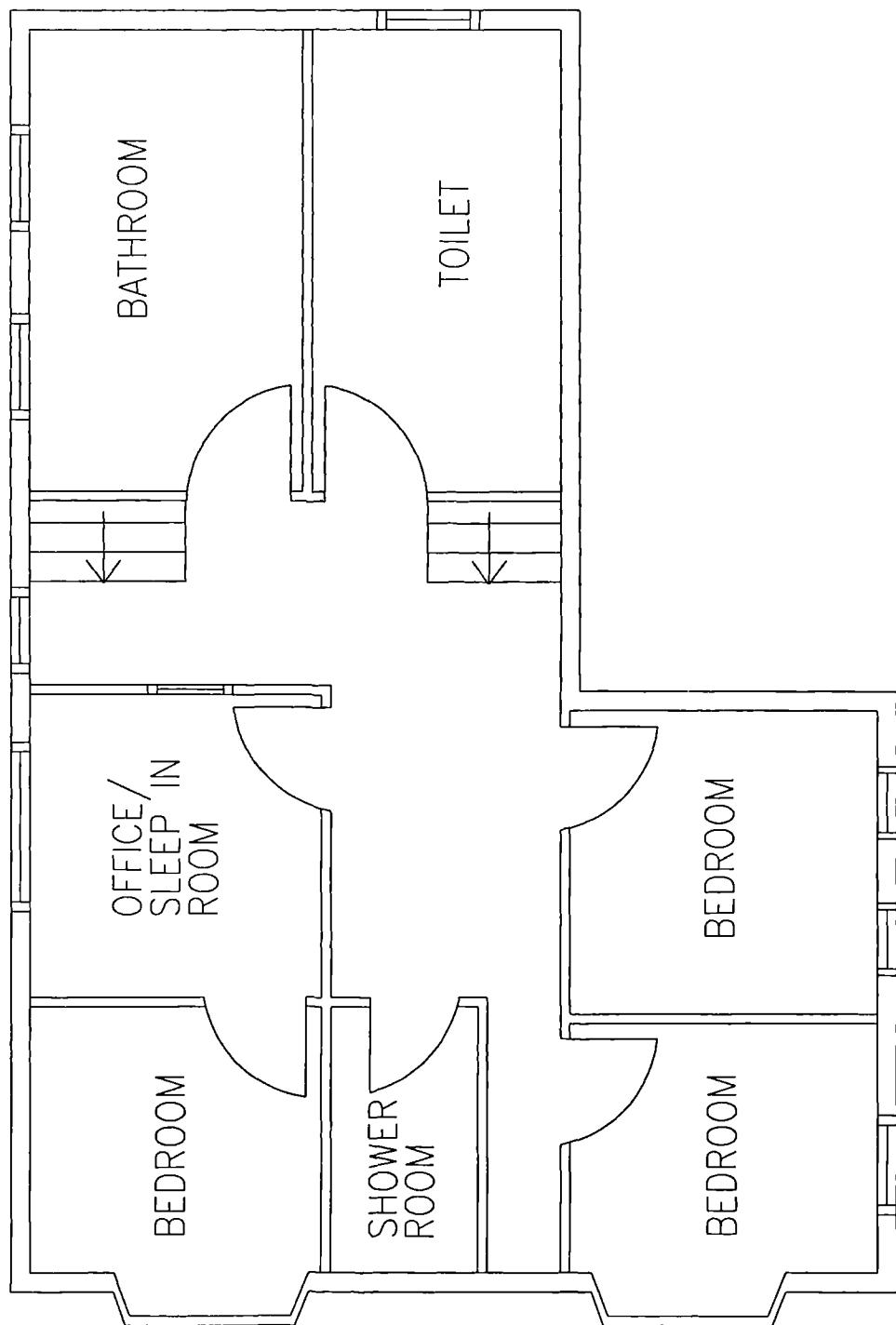


Appendix Two (b)



BRUNSWICK
GROUND FLOOR PLAN

Appendix Two (b)



BRUNSWICK
UPPER FLOOR PLAN