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1

Girls' Talk as a Resource for Identity Construction

This book presents the spontaneous talk of three groups of adolescent girls from different socio-cultural backgrounds. My exploration of the girls' talk gives an insight into the range of discursive practices and subject positions/identities which young British women negotiate in their conversations and examines the interactive processes of these negotiations. The book aims to examine the interplay between local subject positions in the girls' talk and larger-scale socio-cultural norms via a focus on discourse, and to integrate a consideration of ethnicity and social class into a discussion of gender and (adolescent) identity. Both aims will be discussed in more detail in the two sections below where I introduce my approach to analysing language/discourse and (gender) identity, drawing on a range of analytic tools from linguistics as well as on research into adolescent identities across different disciplines.

My interest in gender in relation to other situational and macro-social aspects of identity was born out of my comparative exploration of my data which has revealed interesting similarities and differences in the talk and positioning of the three groups of girls. One group consists of five British Bangladeshi girls from a state school in the East End of London, the other of four white English/Irish working-class girls from the same school, and the third group is made up of four upper-middle-class girls from a private school in London's West End. The girls all attended year 11 at the time of the recordings, that is, they were between 15 and 17 years old. All three groups talk about themselves; their parents; friends and friendships; boys or boyfriends; sex; music; school, teachers, homework, grades; and leisure activities. However, the amount of talk dedicated to these topics, and the way the topics are approached varies greatly. For example, when Roberta, Elizabeth, Jane and Nicky from the private school talk about school-related topics it is interesting to observe that on the one

hand they clearly foreground their academic selves in their talk about literature, art and scientific topics (such as 'human nature'), but on the other hand they also make a noticeable effort to present themselves as cool and anti-school. Their anti-school stances, however, are very tame in comparison to the truancy or even the resistance to homework which several of the girls in the other two groups are familiar with. At the same time both of the working-class groups also voice pro-school discourses; these are particularly marked in the group of the white East End girls, Pat, Jenny, Susan and Natalie, who frequently try to present themselves as responsible and mature in opposition to their truanting or (allegedly) promiscuous friends. Several girls in the group of Bangladeshi friends, Ardiana, Dilshana, Henna and Varda, adopt tough anti-school and truanting stances, and support these tough stances with verbal challenges and insults in the form of teasing and boasting. As this example shows, my exploration of the girls' talk frequently focuses on the different positions that the girls take up with respect to similar topics.

Some of these topics will be discussed as parts of individual chapters, others, like the girls' positioning in relation to sexual experience, identities and practices, are explored in more than one chapter (see Part II). Whereas Pat's group produces a great amount of self-disclosing talk about sex-related topics, for example about 'the first time' and contraception, there is very little personal talk about sex in Roberta's group. In their sparse 'sex talk' Roberta and her friends tend to adopt what I define as 'knowing but not doing' positions, that is, presenting themselves as being fully informed and uninhibited about sex, without engaging in any personal self-disclosure. A very different approach is taken in Ardiana's group. Here the sex talk is marked by the girls' switching between playful teasing or boasting and more serious talk, with the former allowing the girls to present themselves as sexually experienced 'bad girls', and the latter as sexually inexperienced 'good girls'.

In addition to the topics which are discussed in all three groups, albeit in different ways, each group also deals with certain topics which are considerably less or not at all prevalent in the other two groups. Thus Ardiana's group often engages in talk about weddings and marriage; Pat's group produces an unusual amount of talk about their mothers; and Roberta's group is the only one to talk explicitly about social class.

As this preview of some of the data shows, my exploration of the girls' discursive construction of identities focuses on how the girls position themselves in relation to specific topics in their talk. The positions the girls take up are frequently associated with certain discourses,¹ that is, different ways of speaking (and thinking, perceiving, representing)

which are informed by ideologies or belief systems, and reflect, affect as well as constitute social and cultural practices.² This focus on (the girls' interactive negotiation of) different discourses is central to my exploration of the local and supra-local aspects of the girls' positioning in their talk, as I explain in the following section.

The discursive construction of (gender) identities

The primary research context for this book is the area of language/discourse and gender. Language and gender scholars have generated a substantial amount of research on the interaction of adolescent girls and their friendship/peer groups, investigating a range of accent, grammar, turn-taking and discursive features of talk (Bucholtz 1999; Coates 1999; Eckert 1993, 2000; Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1995; Eder 1993; Goodwin 1999; Mendoza-Denton 1999). Much of this linguistic research during the last two decades has been united by a social constructionist approach to gender and by a theorisation of identity as 'a discursive construct that emerges in interaction' (Bucholtz and Hall 2005: 587). The theoretical context of this 'social constructionist-' or 'post-modernist turn' in language and gender research (Cameron 2005a, 2005b, 2009; Swann 2002, 2009)³ is informed by Judith Butler's (1990) post-structuralist theory of performativity (applied to linguistic discourse analysis for example in Barrett 1999; Cameron 1998; Preece 2009, forthcoming) as well as by Conversation Analytic (CA) notions of 'doing identity' in interaction (e.g. Antaki and Widdicombe 1998; Schegloff 1997; Sidnell 2003). Despite their consensus to oppose conceptualisations of identity as biological, fixed or monolithic, the two methodological frameworks differ considerably in their approach to analysis (for an in-depth discussion see Bucholtz and Hall 2005: 588; Cameron 2005a, 2005b; Holmes 2007). Pure CA studies tend to focus on structural/turn-taking features of talk-in-interaction and acknowledge the relevance of social categories only if they are 'oriented to' by participants (e.g. Schegloff 1997). Performativity approaches foreground the interplay between micro and macro contexts and explore power relations, but, due to their focus on the repeated and stylised, that is, 'conventionalised' (Benwell and Stokoe 2006: 33) performance of identity, are at times accused of not offering enough fine-grained analysis of interactional positioning (see Wetherell 1998 for a detailed discussion).

In this book I adopt a perspective which combines a focus on the local, situated identity work of interacting speakers with an exploration of

supra-local resources for identity construction. By examining ideological meanings in the form of discourses (but also stereotypes, defined here as representational practices involving reduction and simplification, following Talbot 2003: 471–2 and Hall 1997: 471) I acknowledge the contextualisation of the girls' group talk in the larger-scale, socio-cultural, historical context. My approach to the girls' talk on a discourse level is aimed to encourage an exploration of the girls' discursive positioning, that is, of the stances and identities which the girls take up in their talk. My own, post-modern, conceptualisation of identity as related to discourse is, to some degree, indebted to philosopher and social theorist Michel Foucault, whose understanding of the relationship between identity and discourse is captured in the following famous quotation which characterises discourses as 'practices which systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault 1989 [1972]: 54). My analysis and interpretation of the girls' talk provides evidence for the power of words, which, as Cameron (2001: 16) argues, is acknowledged in the above quotation: different types of discourse form or constrain the identities that individuals 'construct' or produce when they use language. As Jennifer Coates (1996: 261) argues 'more mainstream discourses position us in more conventional ways, while more radical or subversive discourses offer us alternative ways of being'.

However, my analysis of discourses is as much interested in the agency as in the constraint of speakers. I therefore explore not only the 'what' but also the 'how' of the girls' positioning. That is, I examine how the girls negotiate discourses in interaction, how they align themselves with, resist, switch in between, or amalgamate discourses in their talk. My exploration of this process of interactional and discursive positioning focuses on a range of linguistic features (like turn-taking; lexical, grammatical, intonational and paralinguistic cues) and draws on theoretical concepts (like 'cultural capital'; 'voice'; 'interactional frames', etc.) which I shall introduce below and develop throughout the book.

The analysis of my data led me initially to identify several situated identities or local subject positions⁴ which are relevant to the girls' friendships groups, such as the 'cool girl', 'sheltered girl' or 'tough girl' positions. However, in addition to these more local positionings, I have also been interested in macro-aspects of identity, and particularly in the connection between one level of identity and another. For example, the 'cool girl' positions adopted by the private-school girls appear to go hand in hand with the girls' efforts to resist stereotypical representations of a posh and socially unaware upper-middle-class femininity, which the girls themselves associate with many of their peers at their private school.

My exploration and interpretation of these micro-macro relations of identity construction are supported by a range of theoretical and analytical concepts, including Michel Bourdieu's concept of 'cultural capital', Michael Bakhtin's notion of 'voice' and Erving Goffman's notion of conversational 'frames'. A more detailed overview will be provided in the overview of chapters, below.

One of the most central arguments in my book is that gender has to be seen in relation to other categories of social identity such as social class and ethnicity. Whereas the rare recent linguistic studies of adolescents and social class focus predominantly on accent and dialect features (Eckert 2000; Rampton 2003), my own exploration of social class in relation to gender is conducted predominantly on a discourse level. This focus on social class and discourse has encouraged me to build on research from sociology, cultural studies and social psychology (Frazer 1988, 1992; Frosh et. al. 2002; Hey 1997; Kehily and Pattman 2006; Skeggs 1997; Walkerdine et al. 2001), situating my work, and particularly Chapters 2 and 3, in a cross-disciplinary research context of social class and gender/adolescent identities.

Similarly, research on language and ethnicity which has built on the concepts of 'new ethnicities' and 'hybridity' (Hewitt 1986; Rampton 1995; Sebba 1993) tends to focus on linguistic style and features of pronunciation, grammar and lexis in analyses of code-switching and crossing, rather than on different discourses. Moreover, although language and gender research has explored a range of femininities, the talk and identity practices of British Asian girls have so far not been studied. My discourse analytic approach to gender and ethnicity is therefore framed by (feminist) cross-disciplinary research on young hybrid British Asian identities (Alexander 2000; Ahmad 2003; Brah 1996; Shain 2003), which I shall review in Chapter 4.

The girls' sex talk, which provides the basis for Chapters 5, 6 and 7 in Part II, will also be approached from a discourse-analytic perspective which combines linguistic tools with insights into adolescent sexuality from a range of cross-disciplinary studies (Holland 1993; Holland et al. 1998; Hollway 1995; Lees 1993; McRobbie 1978; Segal 1997; Tolman 2005). Like recent linguistic publications on language and sexuality (Cameron and Kulick 2003a; Bucholtz and Hall 2004; Sauntson and Kyratizis 2007a) I approach sexuality as constructed in discourse. My analysis will explore how the girls draw on a range of different discourses to position themselves in relation to sexual experiences, norms, practices, orientations and desires and suggests that the girls' positioning in their sex talk bears inflections of gender, ethnicity and social class.

The girls' talk

The girls

This book focuses on the talk of three groups of girls, each of them a pre-established friendship group, who volunteered to tape-record their spontaneous friendship talk for me, after I had made initial contact with their schools. Groups 1 and 2 attended school C, a comprehensive, that is, state-funded school for girls, situated in the East End of London, and recruiting mainly from the surrounding multi-ethnic, working-class communities (which is reflected in the large number of girls at the school qualifying for free school meals). The majority of the girls in this school were bilingual, with more than half of the students from Bangladeshi backgrounds, and less than 20 per cent registering their ethnic background as English/Scottish/Welsh. Group 3 attended School P, a highly selective and successful private school for girls in the West End of London. Although the school offered a number of bursaries, scholarships and government-assisted places (the exact number was not revealed to me), most of the girls' parents were paying high fees. As the school told me that no record was taken of the girls' ethnicity, I am not able to provide any reliable information; however, my own impression was that the majority of the girls were from white British backgrounds. Table 1.1 gives an overview of the three groups. All names are pseudonyms.

Table 1.1 Overview of groups

Group 1	Ardiana, Dilshana, Rahima, Varda and Hennah year-11 students 15/16 years old at time of recording British Bangladeshi girls attend School C, a girls' comprehensive/state school in the East End of London
Group 2	Pat, Susan, Natalie and Jenny year-11 students ⁵ 16/17 years old at time of recording 3 girls from British/white European background; one (Susan) from black Nigerian/white British background also attend School C
Group 3	Roberta, Elizabeth, Nicky and Jane year-11 students 16/17 years old at time of recording 3 girls from British/white European background; one (Nicky) from Persian/English background attend School P, a private girls' school in London's West End

The ethnic and social class background of the girls in the three groups varied greatly. Four of the five girls in Group 1, and two of the four girls in Group 2 were eligible for free school meals, due to the parents receiving income support or job seeker's allowance. Most of the fathers in Ardiana's group (Group 1) were unemployed, with the mothers being housewives, and the girls' in Pat's group (Group 2) were largely living in single-parent households,⁶ with their mothers being employed as home-help for the elderly, or as bakery manager, for example. By contrast, the mothers and fathers of the girls in Roberta's group (Group 3) were all in paid employment, ranging from work in text-book writing and marketing to top-level posts in management as well as in the fields of medicine and the arts. My initial assessment of Groups 1 and 2 as working class and Group 3 as upper-middle class was thus based on the traditional criteria of parental occupation and schooling of the girls. However, my discourse analysis explores how the girls (re-)negotiate the meaning of social class and ethnicity in their local friendship group talk.

The girls in Groups 2 and 3 had received all of their schooling in the UK, whereas the number of years girls in Group 1 had spent in UK education varied between two and eight years, with three of the girls having been born in Bangladesh, and two in the UK. Although there is a certain amount of code-switching, the girls in Group 1 speak mostly in English during their recordings. This may have been partly for my benefit, but my in-group informant, Hennah, explained that the girls in this group 'find it easier to communicate' in English. School records indicated that the 'home language' of all the girls in the group was Bengali. However, according to Hennah, only two girls were fluent in standard Bengali, the official language in Bangladesh. Two other girls spoke Sylheti, a language related, but considerably different from Bengali, but not all the girls in the group understood Sylheti. This complex linguistic situation together with the school context, the larger (British) peer group and the girls' awareness that I did not speak Bengali/Sylheti were probably all reasons for the girls to use mainly English when they recorded their conversations.

The talk

I asked the girls to tape-record themselves in their pre-established friendship groups as I was interested in the everyday spoken interaction of young women with their same-age friends, with a view to exploring the interactive and discursive positioning of adolescent girls from a range of different socio-cultural backgrounds. One additional reason for choosing pre-established friendship groups was that this meant that the girls were used to meeting up and chatting to each

other, which, I hoped, would allow them to be less self-conscious in front of the tape recorder.

I had gained access to the two schools in different ways and for different reasons. School C was the only one out of 30 comprehensive/state schools in the Greater London Area which I had contacted that allowed me access to their premises. My relationship to School P was a different one. School P was very protective of the privacy of its students, and the only reason for me to be granted permission to carry out my research was that I had been working there part time as a language assistant (of German). At the time of the recording I had been 'up-graded' to part-time teacher of German, but many of the girls were still on first-term names with me (and very proud of this), unheard of for teachers, but common for language assistants. Although my status as a part-time member of staff may have influenced the girls' talk to some extent, I believe that this influence was lessened by my comparatively low status (as staff), and balanced by the girls' decision to move their recording from the school to the home environment (see below and introduction to Part II). Above all, it is clear that all three groups would have felt an awareness of the tape recorder (and ultimately myself) at some stage. The girls told me that at times they were aware of the tape recorder, at other times they weren't. This is reflected in their recordings, during which moments of awareness stand out (as when the girls address the tape recorder to fill me in on some details) and can therefore be taken into consideration in the analysis.

The data which I will discuss in this book consist predominantly of spontaneous talk recorded by the girls themselves. After receiving my only instruction to fill a tape with their everyday talk, the girls were given full control of these recordings. They were provided with a tape recorder and told that they could switch it off or erase material at any time. However, the girls rarely made use of this offer. In Groups 1 and 2 the recordings tended to be interrupted mostly by fellow students, or by the school pips indicating the end of the break. My intention was for all of the three groups to carry out their recordings during break time at school, partly because I did not want to assume that all girls had the privacy of their own bedrooms at home, and partly because the school environment made it easier for me to meet up with the girls and get to know them a little bit. However Group 3 never managed to find time during their busy school days to carry out the recordings, and therefore moved the recordings to their private sphere, that is, to the house/bedroom of Roberta.⁷

My analysis will draw on the spontaneous conversational data from all three groups, collected over twelve months in 1998 and 1999, as well as on some interview data from my collaboration with one of the girls in

Group 1, collected after the completion of the groups' self-recordings. Hennah helped me to translate the Bengali and Sylheti utterances (the former is the standard language in Bangladesh, the latter is a language spoken in northern Bangladesh) into English and increasingly also acted as my 'in-group informant', providing me with rich and insightful details about herself and the other girls, their families and communities. The sessions therefore developed into ethnographic-style interviews, which, together with other information which I had obtained from questionnaires, school records, as well as from observing and talking to the girls in all three groups, provided an additional resource for me to draw on in the interpretation of my conversational data. It is, of course, essential to acknowledge that my informant's views and positions may or may not have been representative of the entire group. Nevertheless, hers is a more 'insider' view than my own, and my interactions with Hennah certainly turned the research process into a more collaborate effort and aided my reflexivity as a researcher (see Chapter 4; Pichler 2008a). She increasingly also adopted the role of data analyst, providing me with her own interpretations of some of my material and interpretations, thus enabling a particularly fruitful dialogue between researcher and researched.

Overall, the three groups of girls self-recorded about eight hours worth of spontaneous talk for me. In addition, I met up with Hennah for five five-hour sessions in her house to work on the transcript, another time to have lunch with her and her friends, and on one further occasion I was smuggled into her college.

I chose to represent my data on a stave system, which, similar to a musical score, uses alignment of utterances within a stave to signal simultaneity and thus allowed me to capture multi-party talk more clearly (Coates 1996). All of the Sylheti and Bengali utterances have been converted into Roman script and translations are given at the end of each stave. Transcription conventions are provided at the front of the book.

Analysing girls' talk

This book examines the discursive construction of identities in the talk of adolescent girls. In order to identify different discourses, that is (ideologically loaded) ways of speaking and representing (Fairclough 2003), my analysis focuses particularly on lexical and semantic traces of these discourses in the girls' talk. As Norman Fairclough (2003: 129) argues, 'discourses "word" or "lexicalise" the world in particular ways'. For example, when Ardiana and her friends speak about her 'wedding

proposal' several items of vocabulary and their semantic relations (my mum and dad; my sister; related to you; cousins; *their* son's bride) indicate that the speakers at this moment position marriage arrangements as involving families rather than only individuals, highlighting the important role parents and relatives play on behalf of the couple in this practice of arranged marriage.

Extract 1: the wedding proposal (See also Chapter 4)

(1)

Ardiana they wrote a letter to my s- my mum and dad right
[...]

(2)

Ardiana my sister was like reading it to me yeah and

(3)

Ardiana she goes "<they want me to be their bride>" and everything

(4)

Ardiana and I was like saying (.) ["EXCUSE ME-"]
Dilshana wh[o are they] related to you

(5)

Ardiana = they just live next door to m[y h]ouse in
Dilshana (.) cousins = [ah]

(6)

Ardiana Bangladesh (.) and they just want **me** (.) as their

(7)

Ardiana son's bride
Hennah oh [my God]
Varda [(Ardiana)] did you see the photo (.)
[...]

(8)

Ardiana EXCUSE ME I LOVE MY BOYFRIEND here right

(9)

Ardiana I don't wanna get married to somebody else I don't /**know**

The group position the wedding proposal (and to some extent themselves) in a discourse of arranged marriage, a discourse the speakers show great familiarity with. However, this is not the only discourse in the extract, and lexical and semantic cues are not the only means to identify specific discourses. Grammatical features also help the girls to position themselves, utterances like: 'they want me to be their bride' vs. 'I don't wanna get married to somebody else I don't know', present Ardiana's agency differently on a grammatical and ultimately a discourse level, the latter introducing what appears like a discourse of romantic love at this stage of the transcript.

This brief example (discussed at greater length in Chapter 4) shows how I approach the analysis of discourses and of the girls' positioning in this book. Significantly I do not stop at the identification of specific discourses (on the basis of a range of linguistic features), but I am particularly interested in how the speakers negotiate these discourses. Do they collaborate in their voicing of a discourse, as seems to be the case in staves 1–7, or do they switch between or even resist discourses (as Ardiana in staves 8–9)? A micro-linguistic analysis of a detailed transcript as the one I provide here allows for an exploration of the interactive negotiations that take place when speakers position themselves in discourse, in relation to a specific topic, to one another, or to outsiders of the group. These negotiations can be complex, they frequently result in the speakers' shifting their positions, and they capture differences as well as compromises within the groups.

In order to interpret the girls' discursive and interactive positioning in their group talk I therefore focus on a range of linguistic features (lexical, grammatical, more rarely phonological), prosodic information (intonation, stress – e.g. stave 6), and paralinguistic cues (such as changes of voice quality, speed and volume – e.g. stave 8). I also contemplate the girls' turn-taking behaviour, that is, I consider instances where the girls build on or interrupt each other's contributions, where (and why) the girls hesitate, and, to borrow from Conversation Analytic terminology, how they 'orient' to each other's contributions, that is, how they receive and understand what is going on in a specific conversational extract. The meaningfulness of these features beyond the semantic realm – as cues for interactive and discursive positioning – is partly displayed by the speakers themselves (see CA 'next-turn-proof-procedure', e.g. Hutchby and Wooffit 1998: 15–17). However, I would argue that data is interpreted by the analyst in all cases. For example, Hennah's 'oh my God' (stave 7) clearly signals/indexes (Ochs 1992) her surprise, but whether this surprise indexes a critical position towards the practice of arranged marriage per se or not (as indeed I argue) is

more difficult to discern. That is, the relationship between this level of interactional meaning and a higher level of social meaning, or, the relationship between different levels of indexicality (Ochs 1992; see also Bucholtz and Hall 2005; Silverstein 2004), always requires a more complex process of interpretation. In this instance, the remainder of the extract, together with my (ethnographic) knowledge of Henna led me to reject an interpretation of Henna's utterance as a criticism of arranged marriage per se. The interpretive role of the analyst is even more significant in the discussion of discourses and their effects on the positioning of the speakers, than in the exploration of interactional roles (Ardiana as the 'story teller') or interactional stances (like Henna's 'surprise'). As critical discourse analysts remind us in their research, discourses frequently do not appear to speakers as different, ideologically loaded ways of talking about and perceiving the world, but are 'invisible' as they are perceived as commonsensical or factual (e.g. Fairclough 2001: 71).

In this book I draw on participants' and the analyst's understanding of what is going on in a particular extract. In the debate between Conversation Analysts on one side and sociolinguists as well as non-CA discourse analysts on the other, the former tend to focus on the 'oriented-to context' (Schegloff 1997: 184), that is, aspects of social context and identity categories which are 'demonstrably relevant to the participants' at a specific moment in interaction (Schegloff 1991: 50). My own stance is in alignment with many other language and gender researchers who take a constructionist approach to identity and carry out micro-level analysis but 'simply do not accept that social categories need to be observably and explicitly salient for participants in order to be considered relevant to their analyses' (Holmes 2007: 54; see also Bucholtz 2003; Cameron 1998; Weatherall 2000; Wetherell 1998). For my interpretation of discourses and subject positions in the girls' talk I find a consideration of the participants' orientation to categories relevant and necessary but often not sufficient. Particularly in order to establish connections between local meanings and positionings and larger-scale (ideological, socio-cultural, gendered) practices as I seek to achieve in this book, I draw on my own situational, academic, cultural and social knowledge. That is, I draw on my insight into the data gained by comparative analysis, by my observation of and engagement with the participants in my study, but I am also clearly influenced by dominant discourses of post-modern approaches to language, gender and identity, by my training and practice as a feminist sociolinguist/discourse analyst in the UK, and by my position as a white,

adult, middle-class woman from Austria living in London for more than a decade at the turn of the twentieth/twenty-first century.

I maintain a postmodern approach to (situational as well as gender, ethnic and social class) identity as a discursive process throughout the book, but in order to do justice to the different foci emerging from the data of each of the three groups I draw on a range of different methodological and theoretical concepts, which are made explicit at the beginning of each part or chapter and which will briefly be introduced below.

Overview of chapters

Part I presents three chapters on the interplay of gender and adolescent identities with ethnicity and social class; the first one based on the talk of Roberta and her three upper-middle-class friends from a private school, the second based on the talk of Pat and her three friends from a state school in a working-class area of London's East End, and the third chapter captures the talk of Ardiana and her four Bangladeshi friends from the same East End state school. All of these chapters explore the relationship between local- and larger-scale positionings, between language, gender and other socio-cultural identities.

My analysis of the talk presented in Chapter 2 focuses on the efforts of Roberta, Elizabeth, Nicky and Jane to present themselves as 'cool', 'socially aware' and 'real' in their group talk. The tame non-conformity which is at the heart of the girls' coolness is displayed particularly in the girls' talk about soft drugs, about non-mainstream music, and in their mitigated anti-school stances. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu (1983, 1984, 1991) the chapter argues that coolness constitutes an alternative cultural capital in this group which allows the girls to position themselves in opposition to their 'posh' friends and school, and to stereotypes of a sheltered, overprivileged upper-middle-class femininity. The girls also reject this stereotype by presenting themselves as both 'socially aware' and as 'real', that is, as ordinary adolescents, in their talk about poems and mines, dance clubs, London's West and East End, state-school and private-school students, A-levels and future university degrees. At the same time this talk indexes social class both directly and indirectly, via 'cultural concepts' (Silverstein 2004) and cultural tastes and capital (Bourdieu 1984). The chapter argues that the girls' efforts to construct alternative private-school, upper-middle-class femininities for themselves locally in their group of friends have to be seen in relation to their dominant or 'legitimate' (Skeggs 1997) cultural capital in the

form of their elite education, whose value clearly goes beyond the local context of the girls' interactions.

The talk of Pat, Susan, Natalie and Jenny, which I present in Chapter 3, foregrounds the subject position of the daughter more than in any of the other two groups. Unlike Roberta and her upper-middle-class friends, the girls in this group, who tend to live with their mothers in one-parent families, present their mothers as authoritarian but protective and their fathers as (geographically) distant but caring, frequently constructing themselves as the protected and loved daughter. However the girls also highlight their self-determination or even rebelliousness, presenting different formations of their selves as daughters, and switching in between subject positions of mature adults and rebellious teenagers. In addition to my focus on discourses, which runs throughout the book, the girls' talk led me to pay particular attention to the different voices which they adopt in the evaluation and negotiation of these subject positions. Drawing on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin (1981, 1986) and, more recently, Janet Maybin (2007), I show that the girls frequently quote or even appropriate their mothers' or other authoritative voices to construct themselves as mature and reasonable grown-ups, for example when they object to truancy and vandalism or when they talk about prioritising education over boyfriends. Whereas social class is never topicalised in the talk of this group, I argue with Skeggs (1997: 3–4) that the girls 'recognize the recognition of others' and that their efforts to present themselves in opposition to subject positions like the neglected daughter, the vandalising truant and the future teenage mother, Pat, Susan, Natalie and Jenny demonstrate their awareness of pathologising discourses of (young) working-class femininity and their desire to disidentify from them.

In Chapter 4 I present the spontaneous talk of Ardiana, Dilshana, Hennah and Varda, and some extracts from ethnographic-style interviews with one of the girls. These data provide evidence for how the girls negotiate a range of cultural discourses, practices and identities, presenting themselves as both British and as Muslim Bangladeshi. My interpretation of the girls' talk and positioning is influenced by Stuart Hall's understanding of (ethnic) culture 'not [as] an essence but a *positioning*' (Hall 1990: 226). However, my two sources of data also show that 'essentialising' discourses of culture (-clash) can be significant for the girls' own construction of identities, and therefore led me to reflect on my own and other (romanticised) academic celebrations of hybridity. The influence of cultural studies (as well as anthropology, education and sociology) is evident not only in my theoretical approach to culture and hybridity, but also in the range of empirical studies I review to frame my

exploration of what emerges as the girls' hybrid British Bangladeshi femininities. Drawing on the concept of conversational 'frame' (Bateson 1987[1972]: 185; Goffman 1974: 10), I present a detailed exploration of the linguistic and discursive resources the girls use to switch between, manage and even merge culturally different discourses and subject positions. For example, several girls position themselves as 'tough' in their talk about truanting, school and in their tough teasing/verbal duelling. Whereas this position aligns them in many ways with tough British working-class femininities (cf. *ladettes*) in opposition to stereotypical notions of the studious, quiet, and submissive Asian girl, the group align themselves with notions of *sharam* (shame, modesty, shyness) and *izzat* (honour) in other instances. In the final section of this chapter I explore the girls' talk about traditions of marriage and argue that the discourse of arranged marriage emerges itself as a hybrid in the girls' interactive negotiations.

Part II is dedicated to the sex talk of the girls which reveals a range of different sexual experiences, norms, practices, orientations and desires. There was a considerable amount of sex talk in all three groups: least in Group 3, Roberta's group; most in Group 2, Pat's group. The introduction to Part II gives an overview of relevant existing research on young women's sexuality from different disciplines, and presents an argument for interpreting the groups' different approaches to sex talk from a cross-cultural, discourse analytic perspective. Each of the three (comparatively shorter) chapters shows that the girls in my study use their sex talk not only to identify as heterosexual or to signal varying degrees of sexual experience, orientations and desires, but also to carry out important gender and other identity work.

Chapter 5 presents the richest amount of sex talk produced by the three groups. Pat, Susan, Natalie and Jenny dedicate about a quarter of their total talking time to topics related to sex and sexuality. This talk about their own or their friends' actual sexual activities, about 'losing [their] virginity' or about contraception was produced spontaneously, rather than elicited by a researcher (with a pre-established interest in working-class girls' sexuality). In their talk the girls do not position sex as something that 'just happens' to them (Tolman 2005), instead they highlight their own agency. The girls in this group approach their sex talk predominantly from within a serious frame, in spite of self-disclosing very intimate details about themselves in their conversations. The chapter shows how the girls invoke and negotiate a range of frequently conflicting discourses to balance the strong pro-sex norms they experience in their peer group with their own needs, anxieties/concerns and pleasures in relation to sexual

intercourse. Some of these discourses position the girls as moralistic and romantic, others reveal that the girls expect to experience sexual pleasure and desire, yet others highlight the girls' resistance to dominant notions of romance and virginity. In all of their talk the girls present themselves as self-determined, as wanting to determine with whom, where and when they will have sex for the first time to guarantee that it will be an enjoyable, worthwhile experience.

Chapter 6 returns to the talk of Ardiana and her friends, and to their use of playful frames to manage sensitive topics within the group. This chapter provides a rare insight into young British Asian women's discursive positioning in relation to sexual experiences, practices and identities within their friendship group. The girls talk about kissing in public, watching pornography, and about having (or not having) been 'through it' with their boyfriends. Contrary to some (popular as well as scholarly) perception, the group's self-recorded interactions show that Dilshana, Ardiana, Hennah, Rahima and Varda do engage in some personal sex talk, however, mostly in the context of a playful conversational activity or 'frame' such as in their teasing and boasting. The sexualised 'bad' girl identities in playful frames are balanced with non-sexual 'good' girl identities which the girls adopt in most of their talk which is framed as serious. In the chapter I argue that these opposing adolescent identities are to a significant extent informed by two very different discourses, which are not only gendered, but also culture-specific, one celebrating sexual experience as a essential part of British adolescence, the other celebrating female premarital chastity, linked by the girls themselves to their Bangladeshi community and to their 'religion'.

Chapter 7 focuses on Roberta and her friends from the private school. Whereas this group is the only one to talk explicitly about social class, they produce comparatively little talk about gender relations, and even less talk about sex and sexuality. This limited amount of sex talk is, moreover, very impersonal, particularly if contrasted with the other two groups. However, Roberta, Elizabeth, Nicky and Jane engage in some 'academic sex talk', that is, sex becomes a subtopic in scientific discussions about issues like human nature, or in debates about literature and films. Their talk is clearly marked by an absence of the 'pro-sex discourse' which the girls in Pat's group experience in the form of peer pressure. Roberta and her friends are happy to talk about the sexual experiences of others, showing that they are not shocked by active sexuality. Overall, however, they present themselves as 'knowing rather than as doing', they foreground their cool *knowledge about* sex rather than their own sexual experiences or desires (just like they highlight

their knowledge about non-mainstream music and drug use). The data extracts I present indicate that for these girls it appears to be less problematic to present themselves as sexually inexperienced than as naïve and unknowing. In Roberta's group the girls feel driven to foreground their rational (academic) mind over their active sexuality (see also Walkerdine et al. 2001), a positioning which aids their discursive construction of a private-school, upper-middle class femininity.

Chapter 8 presents the conclusions to this book, summing up the main findings and highlighting the central argument of the book that a discursive exploration of gender, sexuality and adolescent identities in girls' talk needs to be conducted in relation to a range of local positions and larger-scale social categories such as ethnicity and social class.

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