# NUI MAYNOOTH

Ollscoil na hÉireann Má Nuad

## Title:

## Schooled Bodies? - Adolescents Encountering Complexities in the Pursuit of Embodied Validation

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# Table of Contents

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## Dedication

This research is dedicated to all those children and adolescents who struggle with their bodies on a daily basis. It is also dedicated to all of those delightful and insightful adolescents who opened up their hearts to me during the course of this study.

# Abstract

This research is concerned with adolescence as an embodied experience. It represents an attempt to bridge the gap between the sociology of childhood and the sociology of the body, a connection that is infrequently made within sociological literature.

This investigation is specifically concerned with questioning how adolescents are schooled on the body and if the types of schooling they receive give rise to complexities in their pursuit of embodied validation. Throughout this study I explore how adolescents are schooled on the body in many social spheres. From the ever-abounding, ever-astounding body images portrayed in consumer culture; to the hushed comments directed at the bodies of school peers. From the popularity of those with the physical prowess to make it onto prestigious school teams; to the physical regulation adopted by mothers and fathers. Each of the aforementioned contexts, among others school adolescents on the body to some degree. However, this schooling may often be conflicting and contradictory, leaving adolescents to overcome the complexities they encounter.

It is a primary contention of this research that adolescents are not passively schooled on the body to such a degree that they become slaves to contemporary trends. This study shows how youths actively negotiate the forms of embodiment they encounter and the complexities they experience with certain forms of embodiment. This research provides a vital window into the worlds of participating youths and importantly how they experience these worlds as embodied individuals.

## Introduction

Is eating one bowl of brown rice a day the unavoidable reality of a Zimbabwean child or the dietary choice of a Western child? Is intervallic vomiting the involuntary plight of a cancer sufferer or the elected ritual of an insecure teenager? Is enduring physical pain to the point of blood, sweat and tears, an economic consequence for child slaves or a self-inflicted necessity for young exercise enthusiasts? How can the hand, which the former in each case appear to have been so harshly dealt, be almost identical to the hand that the latter seeks out and utilises? How can what is horrific for some, fail to be horrific for another? A Western youth resorting to eating minute amounts, purging after any nutritive intake, or working out to the point of sheer exhaustion may not be viewed as unusual. On the contrary, these are often practices that are seen as one aspect of adolescents' 'normal' obsessions with physical perfection. There appears to be a general lay consensus that adolescence is a period in one's life, where concerns relating to the body are at a particular high. According to Fingerson -

> The sociology of the body and the sociology of childhood have developed substantially in recent years, often along parallel lines. However, there is little contact between these two fields. (2005: 91)

Fingerson goes on to suggest that there has been a particular neglect within the sociology of childhood, for "older children ('teenagers') and their bodies" (ibid). It is the intention of this present research investigation to greatly assist in developing a more comprehensive understanding of adolescents and their bodies, and more crucially of adolescence as a complex embodied experience.

My initial interest in this area began many years prior to any academic introduction to the field. My schooling on the body began in early childhood. Most girls in primary school have a best friend and I was no exception to this. Most of

1

the people in my class changed their best friend through the course of their years in primary school. However, I was an exception to this. My best friend was born one day before me. We were baptised on the same day and began school on the same day. We remained best friends throughout all our time in primary school and although much changed and developed around us, our friendship remained the same. What did not remain the same, however, were our bodies.

I was an extremely active child with a strong passion for dancing. This, accompanied by a genuine inability to consume large amounts of food meant that I was always slim and light. My best friend, on the other hand, was what might be termed a 'chubby' child. She preferred to draw pictures than dance and had quite a sweet tooth. We would laugh at her attempts to dance and my drawings always seemed dull and childlike beside her incredibly mature creations. Even at a very early age we were aware of our embodied state and how to use our individual bodily talents for self-expression.

We became increasingly aware of our bodily appearance and the differences between us. My friend was among two other girls in my class whom the boys picked on because of their overweight appearance. As we reached an age where boys became less intolerable and disgusting, it appeared that their opinion began to matter more. It is no overestimation to say that the experiences my friend encountered, because of the complex nature of being embodied in a particular way, completely changed her life practices. My friend began to diet intensively, only eating small amounts of an apple at lunchtime. She also took up running and trained very hard. Within months she took pride in showing me and some other girls how she could suck her stomach in so far that you could clearly count each and every one of her ribs. She took huge pride in the fact that she was now such a

fast sprinter that she could better the times of any other girl or boy in the class. She also took pride in being able to rhyme off the exact amount of calories which various bars of chocolate and packets of crisps contained. Somehow, she now felt more validated. She was eleven years old.

By the time we reached secondary school, most of the girls in my class were frequently either thinking about or talking about their bodies and those of others. For my best friend, however, she had become consumed by her embodiment. Battling with the complexities of embodiment, by age fourteen she had to be hospitalised and subsequently never returned to school. Throughout this time she would refer to other girls' seemingly effortless slenderness in most resentful ways. She was now much thinner than me, but she could not see reason on this. Eventually, we drifted apart and it is fair to say that our bodies had a significant role in this. She grew tired of trying to fathom why our bodies were so different and I grew tired of trying to explain to her that her body was much different to how she saw it.

The personal experiences described so far can only account for wanting to examine the complexities that females encounter in their quest for embodied validation, but other experiences shaped my desire to include males also. I attended a single-sex girl's secondary school and therefore, contact with males was confined to lunchtime and the bus to and from school. The most popular boy in my class in primary school was fun loving, cheeky, intelligent, musically talented and a gifted footballer. In fact, it was comments from him that had affected my best friend's decision for bodily transformation most, as she fancied him desperately. However, during his time in secondary school, this young male obtained 'train-tracks' to straighten his teeth. This totally transformed his bubbly, energetic personality and

3

during the years he wore 'train-tracks', he would only talk to one other boy on the bus home from school. It was obvious that he found this new embodied experience complex and difficult. In my final year in school, I was friendly with a guy who appeared to be the most confident person I had ever met. However, I soon discovered that he saw himself as being much bigger than his other friends and regularly used self-induced vomiting after eating. His girlfriend at the time was also my friend. In the summer of our exit from school she lost two stone in weight through almost compulsive exercising. Another friend at the time was taking strong medication to overcome the complexities he faced because of his moderate amount of acne. His girlfriend had just had her navel pierced and was coping with the accompanying tenderness and taking measures to avoid infection. Could it be possible that I was the only one surrounded by adolescents who were seeking to improve their bodies or even transform their bodies in the hope of attaining some kind of embodied validation? I now know that it was sociologically typical.

This dissertation is concerned with the centrality of the body in contemporary adolescent lifestyles. If you take the experiences of my friends then questions must be asked about the social circumstances that make parents feel that they must spend thousands of Euros on orthodontic and dermatological treatments for their children. For youths themselves questions must be asked about the social realities that cause children to feel that they must diet, that self-induced vomiting is a usable tool and even that staring at their navels, are all legitimate activities if they are to feel validated about their bodies.

It may be suggested that the body is viewed as essential for individual prosperity. Individuals appear to display sole responsibility for attaining such prosperity within de-traditionalised and individualised times. Identity is less

predetermined for youths today than it was in traditional times. Indeed Beck contends that -

> Family, neighbourhood, even friendship, as well as ties to a regional culture and landscape, contradict the individual mobility and the mobile individual required by the labour market. (1992: 88)

Individuals within our modern Western context are encouraged to live their own lifestyles. For Reimer "young people no longer follow in their parents' footsteps, but instead are able to choose more independently how they want to live" (1995b: 122). It is legitimate to spend this independent time inspecting one's navel piercing or assessing how one's teeth straightening is progressing. Indeed, success often demands spending time on such self-inspection and self-assessment. Evens suggests that late capitalism demands not just a hard-working individual -

> But a person who possesses the public characteristics, of being an acceptable shape, size and 'well dressed', and who, therefore, confirms the desirability of the products of a service-sector economy. (2003: 10)

The presentation of an acceptable body is seen to be essential for social validation. Therefore, the quest for embodied validation becomes a very labour intensive, but necessary, journey.

Teenagers are often seen to be primarily concerned with having fun. Robert Elms suggests that everyone wants a part in this fun and consequently "nobody is a teenager any more because everybody is" (cited in Chambers, 1987:2). According to Reimer, "Interest in pleasure is stronger for a majority of youth than interest in more serious activities" (1995b: 135). However, even perceived leisure activities can be serious activities for adolescents who feel self-discomfort. Take clothes shopping as an example of this. "Our consciousness of dress is heightened when something is out of place" such as clothes not fitting us (Entwistle, 2003: 133).

This can evoke a sense of discomfort and serves to acutely heighten embodied consciousness. According to Craik, "clothes are activated by the wearing of them" (1994: 16), and thus, it is the body which wears them that is of most vital importance. The actual physical body, which lies under clothes, tattoos, piercings etc. will be the focus of this study, because it is arguable that it is this which impacts upon all other forms of bodily adornment. Hence, throughout this research investigation I will examine youths' experiences of complexities that they encounter as a consequence of their actual physical frame and how they work on, or present, their bodies in the pursuit of embodied validation.

I will now provide a brief account of the structure and contents of this study. It is my intention that the following chapters represent a sample of the multifaceted concepts, arguments and theories which facilitate a better sociological understanding of how participating adolescents are schooled on the body and how this schooling gives rise to complexities in the quest of embodied validation.

Chapter One of this dissertation is concerned with the complex nature of consumer culture and adolescents' negotiation of the images they internalise. This chapter unpacks what is often thought to be a straightforward relationship between adolescents and consumer culture. I will look at existing theories on this relationship, none of which deny adolescents' particular vulnerability to images of supposed embodied validation conveyed in consumer culture and the media. It unpacks the type of body images that adolescents are schooled on through advertising. However, the approach of this chapter questions how dominant consumer and media images are over youths. It argues the need to explore a more micro-based, complex and multiplex understanding of adolescents' relationships

with body images found in dominant discourses. This chapter questions the level of agency involved in the way adolescents are schooled on body images and the extent to which such schooling is individually negotiated.

In Chapter Two of this study I will focus on the importance of peers in schooling one another on the pursuit and possible attainment of embodied validation. It is arguable that the need for peer acceptance during teenage years is especially strong. However, being accepted is not without its challenges and complexities. Furthermore, I will look at the way in which being accepted has specific challenges and complexities for the body. I will argue that during adolescence, recognition within peer groups and activities is significantly tied to the body. This chapter explains how this dependence on the body for peer recognition must focus on both males and females, although the bodily activities undertaken to attain acceptance may vary. Drawing on existing literature I will suggest that possessing a valid body form, may facilitate entry into valid groups and activities. Consequently, this may lead to embodied validation through social validation. I have already outlined how being picked on because of a perceived 'invalid' body image affected by own school friend and this chapter finally addresses the emotional impact of negatively labelling the body.

If adolescents feel they are left outside a peer assignment of embodied validation, then it is possible that they will take measures to try to attain this validation. This process is the focus of Chapter Three. Again, my own teenage friends schooled one another to identify physical regulation of the body through dieting and exercise as a way of attaining embodied validation. However, they also had to overcome desires for tempting, and often fattening, foods. In this chapter I examine how adolescents appear to be caught up in complex contradictory

7

messages, where they are schooled to consume yet regulate. I turn to existing theories to facilitate an understanding of the importance of body regulation and to provide some possible suggestions for how regulation can occur. Finally, this chapter questions the effects of regulation for validation. For regulation to achieve 'embodied' validation it must impact back upon the entire individual self, both physically and psychologically.

In Chapter Four the methodology implemented to generate data for this study is discussed. Obtaining a detailed insight into how bodies are schooled and the accompanying complexities this causes adolescents to encounter in the pursuit of embodied validation was the driving force of this study. The sensitivity which must be employed when talking to youths talking about their body, is central to this investigation and, therefore, the concept of the 'reflexive researcher' was employed.

Chapter Five focuses on a process of adolescent deliberation. Participants deliberated when negotiating their relationship with the bodies they were schooled on through consumer society. They pointed to the impact of media images on perceptions of their own embodiment but had 'agentic' reasons for their decisions to attain particular body images. This chapter also outlines the gendered complexity that emerged in deliberation where very different processes occurred for young males and females. It explores the impact of advertising body images and the impact of encounters with peer bodies on a daily basis.

Chapter Six explores the significance of embodied peers for schooling of the body. It examines the complex nature of balancing embodied displays and expressions and peer validation. It focuses on the particular complexities, which

are faced by Irish male youths in particular given their seemingly huge dependence on high levels of physicality.

Discussions on the negative labelling of youths who possess 'undesirable' bodies were a key feature of the data generation. Chapter Seven describes the types of bodies which participants believed most likely to be labelled and excluded and the processes through which these occurred. I argue here that studies on this topic have failed to uncover the extent to which individuals are schooled to reject certain bodies. Emotional narratives are presented from those who face 'embodied invalidation' or witnessed 'embodied invalidation'

Chapter Eight explores the importance of self-schooling practices, which attempt to maintain the body's equilibrium in the face of contemporary complexities. It presents the mechanisms, which these adolescents suggested, are used to overcome such complexities and attain embodied validation. This chapter uncovers the fine line that exists between moderate and obsessive modes of regulation and construction in the narratives of these adolescents.

Finally, the Conclusion of this dissertation describes some of the key findings and the theoretical import of these finding in progressing our understanding of the complexities that accompany adolescents' informal and hidden schooling on the body. It also identifies the issues relating to their lack of formal school on the body and how this impacts upon their seemingly endless pursuit of embodied validation.

# Chapter One: The Complex Individual Negotiation of Consumer Culture

## 1.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the role of consumer culture in schooling adolescents on the creation of embodied identities. It examines adolescence as a time of high self-consciousness where the body is subject to natural changes and subject to deliberate manipulation. Adolescents seek embodied validation in an environment where consumer culture constantly schools its audiences on what a true and valid embodied identity should be. I suggest that consumer culture produces what Foucault describes as power 'discourses' which claim to hold a status of truth.

In the past in Western society, 'truth' was found in Christian asceticism and in capitalist industrialism, while it now appears to lie in consumer aestheticism. Consumer culture educates large populations of individuals on how the aesthetic body has become the 'true' or valid body. Ever-pervasive embodied images in consumerism and advertising may be seen to act as a form of surveillance, policing bodies in a similar fashion to Foucault's panoptic surveillance in nineteenth century prisons. Abounding images incessantly inform adolescents on what constitutes a valid female and male body.

On an additional level, I also wish to focus on adolescents as agents who produce as well as consume structures and discourses. I emphasise the ways in which adolescents can be seen to 'individually negotiate' structure for their own unique personal, social and biological reasons and not simply because they are subjected to some form of external power. There is a complex micro agency at play

10

within what may often appear to be simply a docile subjection to dominant structures, and this is also explored.

## 1.2 Adolescents and Consumer Culture

There are biological and social reasons why adolescents may be particularly susceptible to the powers and promises of consumer culture. In addition, adolescents in Ireland have seldom been in a stronger financial position to buy into consumerism's 'valid' body. However, is it possible that consumerism only serves to increase embodied-doubt rather than facilitating embodied validation?

Consumerism places self-consciousness and reflexivity at the core of culture. How does this impact on the adolescents living in this context? Perhaps an enormous awareness of one's embodied state takes hold. Firstly, deterministic biological growth alters pubescent bodies with the emergence of new outer contours and inner sensations, new physical pains and social privileges, making bodily self-consciousness quite unavoidable during adolescence. Secondly, consumer culture serves to enhance self-consciousness and individual deliberation upon the 'reflexive project' of the self (Giddens, 1991a). Reflexivity lies at the core of what Arnot and Mac an Ghaill refer to as the second stage of modernity. They suggest that a type of *self-culture* underpins this stage, where "the new generation of youth are now *'becoming individual'* through reflexivity" (Arnot and Mac an Ghaill, 2006: 2). Consumer culture and the mass media act as educators on what a valid self-project must exhibit in contemporary times and proliferating advertising images induce constant reflexivity upon how to become a validated individual.

11

Due to the fact that adolescents have to find comfort within a biologically evolving body and are caught between the world of the child and the adult, they may be particularly vulnerable to consumerism's promise of physical aestheticism. When targeting markets, capitalist producers knowingly home in on adolescents' reflexivity upon their own embodied state. Quinion (2001) suggests that reflexivity upon the attainment of a 'valid' body is practiced long before one becomes a teenager. Quinion identifies a category of 'tweenagers' (children from 7-11 years of age) who are more street-wise, fashion conscious and media informed than their counterparts of previous epochs.

> They have lived through a decade of economic boom and are now therefore, fairly affluent, they are often from small families with dual earners ensuring households with sizable disposable incomes, they are able to draw upon strategies such as 'pester power' to get their own way, they have a high awareness of labels, media and technology. (Quinion (2001) cited in Boden, 2006: 291)

By the time the tweenager becomes a teenager, he or she has not only had ample time to perfect the tactic of 'pester power' but more importantly many will have their own disposable income. Adolescents who are searching for identity and independence are being told on every shop window, billboard, TV programme and magazine to satisfy their desires and to overcome self-consciousness through the consumption of goods and images.

Many adolescents in Ireland are participating in the some type of part-time employment. Hence, most Irish teenagers have some form of disposable income, whether from employers or parents. According to McCoy and Smyth (2005), over 60% of Irish Leaving Certificate students have regular part-time employment. Students from less advantaged backgrounds are more likely to participate in such work, the purpose for which finance is intended has become largely classless in that it is aimed at funding a 'lifestyle' rather than arising out of financial need

(ibid). Are adolescents buying into body image regardless of social class? Reimer holds that -

> Young people no longer follow in their parents' footsteps, but instead are able to choose more independently how they want to live. Neither are they forced into one single, somewhat momentous choice of lifestyle; on the contrary, it is entirely possible to seek out and change lifestyles. (1995b:122)

Featherstone is also of the opinion that tangible freedoms, however limited and restricting they may turn out to be, are found through family members earning independent incomes (1991a: 175). For Featherstone the task of realising one's self-identity has largely come to be viewed by individuals as a free choice to be bought without the slightest hesitation.

This undoubtedly "suggests that within consumer culture a new relationship between the body and the self has developed" (Featherstone, 1991a: 187). According to Baudrillard, this new relationship is characterised by an accepted obsession with bodily projection and perfection (1998: 143). Consumption offers an apparent control over the perfection and direction of self-identity. The nature of consumerism, however, is that the ever-evolving stimulation of desire must never end. Individuals led by consumerism run the risk of becoming engulfed on a merry-go-round of self-perfection, self-absorption and self-accumulation. A preoccupation with personal gratification, termed as 'narcissism' is necessitated by consumerism.

Giddens draws on the work of Lasch in emphasising narcissism as reflexivity involving imperfections rather than perfections. Narcissism, for Lasch is driven by self-uncertainty, rather than a vanity driven by self-absorption. He holds that in traditional times individuals took pride in their virtues and values, while now they anxiously scan the faces of those who judge them, in a process of

gauging how the self is being read (Lasch, 1979: 53). That obsession with the beautification, perfection, decoration and aestheticisation of one's physical self is likely to be significantly more about self-criticism rather than self-care is particularly relevant to understanding adolescents. According to Bauman -

> The market feeds on the unhappiness it generates: the fears, anxieties and the sufferings of personal inadequacies it induces release the consumer behaviour indispensable to its continuation. (1989: 189)

Advertising was created to school its audience into an awareness of their bodily inadequacies. Through an ever-changing array of images and by "presenting individuals as continually subject to the harsh social scrutiny of the surrounding world" (Corrigan, 1997: 66), it achieves this. Baudrillard is of the opinion that, while for centuries there was a relentless effort to convince people they had no bodies; today this has become a relentless effort to convince them of their bodies and of the bodies of others (1998: 129). This is especially applicable to adolescents. The need and desire for the aesthetic -

> Seems to be much more important for youth than for adults, both as regards producing something of one's own and the need to consume cultural products. Melucci (1992) claims that this is partly because youth in general are more receptive to the symbolic, partly because the message is directed more to them than to adults. (Reimer, 1995: 63- 67)

In summary, in the lived experience of adolescents, reflexivity takes place around the natural body and the deterministic changes this brings and also around the consumer body and the voluntaristic manipulation this may bring. This begs the question, how do actual and real adolescents buy into the consumer body? Does it involve embodied validation or exasperate embodied consciousness and self-scrutiny?

## 1.3 The Production of the 'Valid' Consumer Body

Consumer culture and the media act in a form known as 'bio-power' (Foucault, 1979, 1980), where they produce discourses about a vital truth for living. Consumer culture also uses a form of surveillance similar to 'panoptic surveillance' (Foucault, 1977), as one means of ensuring the continuation of the true or valid body it has produced.

Foucault holds that individuals search for truth. Indeed, it is "the ceaseless drive to establish normalizing regimes of truth that is characteristic of modern society" (McNay, 1994: 105). According to Foucault,

> Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint, and it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as truth. (Foucault, 1980: 131)

There has always been an array of authorities considered competent enough to speak the truth. The normalisation of truth holds the promise of an improved existence for individuals and collective groups. The ability of certain authorities to inform the behaviour of large populations of individuals has been termed by Foucault as 'bio-power' and more recently by Turner within his conceptualisation of increased 'governmentality' (1992). In the past authorities such as the Church advocated that ultimate truth was to be found in Christian asceticism. With the rise of Industrialism and Protestantism, such authorities claimed that maximum production and efficiency lead to the truth. With the growth of secularisation, however, authorities such as consumer institutions and the media, appear to be educating populations on which regimes of truth they should normalise in their lives. Regardless of the authority, McNay claims that -

15

By the nineteenth century and the increase of the grip of disciplinary power on the bodies of individuals, these rules are less externally apparent; rather they have been internalised by individuals and are manifested in the modern compulsion to confess. (1992: 62)

Responsibility for implementing regimes of truth into one's life and the feelings of inadequacy which failure brings, certainly appear to have moved away from the Church and Industry and into the hands of consumer culture in contemporary times. For instance, within consumer culture, advertising may be seen as a manifestation of Foucault's bio-power. It informs the behaviour of large populations of individuals through a constant display of 'discourses', which hold a status of truth and simultaneously creates feelings of inadequacy should one fail in their quest for truth.

According to Terence Turner "Foucault made *parole*, i.e., 'discourse,' the manifestation of an equally transcendental, extra-historical demiurge called 'power'" (1994: 35). Foucault has argued that discourses of power are the primary producers of continuities and discontinuities between epistemes. He refers to these as the knowledge systems, which chiefly inform the thinking patterns and perceptions of individuals during certain periods of history, with different discourses dominating at various points. For instance, while adolescence in previous epochs may have been told that validation and truth lay in Church discourses, today they are told that they lie enormously within consumer discourses. Foucault's description of discourse may be conceptualised as the constitution of knowledge that is ultimately processed and practiced within space and time. Thus, it is plausible to state that it is in and through discourses that adolescents constitute their knowledge on, and practices of, a valid body image. For Foucault the body is vital since it "is not only given meaning by discourse, but

is wholly constituted by discourse" (Shilling, 1993: 74). The body is ultimately the main object of discourse, as it is the body which discourse targets and transforms. In an almost identical vein, consumer culture targets the body as an object of voluntaristic manipulation.

> In the consumer package, there is one object finer, more precious and more dazzling than any other – and even more laden with connotations than the automobile, in spite of the fact that that encapsulates them all. That object is the BODY. (Baudrillard, 1998: 129)

It will certainly be fascinating to see where present day adolescents are finding discourses that hold a status of embodied power, truth and validation.

Consumer culture may also be seen to act as a form of surveillance which polices the implementation of truth through its constant presentation of discourses, in ways similar to those seen in nineteenth century prisons. Through its intrinsically related family of advertising, press, television, film, music and sport, images of true embodiment appear to be surrounding adolescents, scrutinising them through "progressively finer channels, gaining access to individuals themselves, to their bodies, their gestures and all their daily actions" (Foucault, 1980: 151). Consumer culture as a powerful authority does not police adolescents' implementation of discourses of truth in a physical sense, which may once have occurred, but rather it polices through a form of panoptic surveillance.

In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977), Foucault examined the transition within top-down social control, from a form of physical intimidation imposed by sovereign power to a more differential and sinister form of disciplinary control through surveillance. With the invention of the 'Panopticon', by Jeremy Bentham, methods of control within the prison changed dramatically. There was an obvious change in the 'target' of discourse where -

> Subjects were no longer formed by discourses which directly
> constituted the body as flesh but, increasingly, by discourse which
> indirectly controlled the body by constructing it as a 'mindful body'
> controlled less by brute force, as in traditional societies, and more
> by surveillance and stimulation. (Shilling, 1993: 76)

Surveillance and stimulation were achieved through the Panopticon's central watchtower position. It was designed in such a way that it made observation of the entire prison possible at any given time. Prisoners became permanently aware of an authoritarian 'gaze' focused upon them and regulated their behaviour accordingly. The spatial distribution of prisoners was complemented by strict regulation of the minutest details of daily action. Schooling on body regulation through specific rules and precise timetabling, was accompanied by constant supervision. Rather than inflicting pain on the body in order to control prisoners, as had been the method previously adopted, the Panopticon allowed for the generation of increased and more effective control. Prisoners began to police their own bodies with 'disciplinary technologies' driven by their own minds and a consciousness of being watched.

> With the disappearance of older forms of bodily control such as
> torture, public spectacle and so on, control operates through
> internalisation, and becomes, to a large extent, self-surveillance.
> (Wolff, 1990: 125)

While present day adolescents may be free from the gaze of prison officers, the power of particular discourses, may leave individuals feeling they have a societal gaze fixed upon them, constantly scrutinising any failure in their implementation of such discourses of truth. According to Bartky, in the constant self-surveillance of the "inmate lies the genesis of the celebrated 'individualism' and heightened self-consciousness which are hallmarks of modern times" (1990: 65). This research contends that consumer culture is indeed a hallmark of modern times, acting out a form of surveillance over large populations of individuals.

Consumer culture, therefore, can certainly be viewed as an authority, which schools individuals on discourses of truth, while subjugating others, and which also uses mechanisms to stimulate the implementation of such truth discourses. The ever-pervasive nature of displays of valid embodiment ensures that consumerism as an institution has optimal panoptic control over populations of teenagers. It would undoubtedly be intriguing to see if adolescents, within this framework, internalise the all-encapsulating gaze of displays of bodily perfection in the same 'mindful' way that prisoners did the gaze of their guards. To view consumer culture in this way, fits in with Corrigan's notion that -

> We are always being scrutinized, we are always being evaluated,
> our very being is absorbed into the ways in which others look at us:
> at every moment and in every way we may fail the test of the
> scrutinizing world. (Corrigan, 1997: 68)

Hence, through the advertising of consumerism's 'true' body throughout magazines, newspapers, television, billboards, department stores, music, film, the internet and all other forms of media, contemporary individuals are haunted by the reality of their own deviation from the truth. This is indicative of the type of narcissism proposed by Lasch in the previous section, where identity consumption is as much about self-doubt as it is about self-indulgence (1979).

It has now been established that the consumer body can attribute its success to two Foucauldian notions. Firstly, powerful consumer authorities attach a status of truth to a particular body form, validating it through its proposed benefits for individuals and collective populations. Secondly, consumer culture can be witnessed using mechanisms of panoptic surveillance by virtue of its pervasive presence, stimulating the normalisation of regimes of truth. This in turn causes individuals to be persistently self-conscious of any departure from regimes of truth. It is now necessary to develop upon this and to attempt to identify what exactly

consumer culture is schooling adolescents to believe the 'true' or 'valid' body looks like.


## 1.4 What is a 'Valid' Body in Consumer Culture?


In this section I describe the messages that consumer authorities are sending to adolescents with regard to what a valid body form is. Sections 1.2 and 1.3 have explored the ways consumerism can lead an adolescent population, which is highly bodily reflexive to further embodied doubt rather then embodied validation. This may occur when adolescents feel they have failed to attain a body which is true to themselves and crucially, which is true to their gender. In this section therefore, I focus on consumer culture's displays of valid gendered bodies. I focus on the female body and then turn my attention to the male body.

With the emergence of new physical contours and sexual drives, adolescents are likely to be particularly vulnerable to displays of gender and a need for gender validation. The body is vital here, in that gender is constantly validated through one's visual physicality.

> The body becomes a peculiar nexus of culture and choice, and 'existing' one's body becomes a personal way of taking up and reinterpreting received gender norms. (Butler, 1987: 133-134)

Consumer culture uses advertising as a discourse to create knowledge systems and educate individuals on how bodies should be received and read; particularly 'gendered' bodies. For Bordo "no body can escape either the imprint of culture or its gendered meanings" (1990: 109). The notion of gender as something, which is visually interpreted, may unquestionably cause adolescents to be "more conscious of external appearances, bodily presentation and 'the look'" (Featherstone, 1991a:

20

179). Connell is of the belief that both masculinities and femininities are formed in a process of social embodiment, in which bodies, and also social relations, are shaped (2002).

In order to examine the notion of gender construction among adolescents, I believe it is necessary to revert back to Baudrillard's earlier point regarding Western society's "fascination with slimness" (1998: 141). I propose the notion that subjection to the 'slender gender' perpetually targets both females and males with a thin, and never a fat, physique. The continuous reproduction and re-emergence of the slender body image in consumer culture, point to its constant accreditation with a status of truth. It also indicates the way in which the image of the slender body acts as a form of bio-power, sending an awareness of its status of truth to large groups of people. Its prevailing presence can be seen to act as a form of surveillance, as Foucault might have proposed, or as producing a practice of reflexivity, as Giddens may suggest, upon the approximation of one's embodied project to this slender truth. Baudrillard describes the true consumer body under the terms 'phryneism' and 'athleticism'.

> Phryneism being defined roughly as the woman of *Elle* and the fashion magazines, masculine athleticism finding its wider model in the athleticism of the executive, a model presented everywhere in advertising, films, mass literature: bright eyed, broad shouldered, lithe muscles and a sports car. This athletic model also encompasses sexual athleticism. (1998: 136)

It may be suggested that 'phryneism', understood as beautiful and charming, and 'athleticism', understood as defined and toned, appropriately describe the gendered identities which both male and female adolescents are surrounded by and internalise as ideal (while admittedly to varying degrees). We can combine these two bodily descriptions into what I would like to conceptualise as the 'aesthetic-athletic' body.

21

Advertising encodes 'aesthetic-athletic' bodies with a language so mass communicated that its inherent Western signification of perfection can be decoded globally. Adolescents who receive images of gendered forms, which they believe to be representative of idealism, may wish to imitate, copy and consume such an identity in a mirroring fashion. Frank holds that, "the medium of the mirroring body is consumption; based on consumption, the body becomes as predictable as the objects made available to it" (Frank, 1991: 61). According to Terence Turner, this type of body is passive, as its conformation to the unpredictable variables which capitalism necessitates makes it merely a possession which has things done to it. Hence what makes it predictable is its willingness to conform to unpredictability, without questioning why.

The process of 'individual negotiation', which will be addressed in the subsequent section of this chapter, will attempt to shed doubt on the extent of adolescent passivity. Nevertheless, many well documented theorists who have written on the area of consumer culture such as Featherstone (1991), Bordo (1993), Corrigan (1997) and Baudrillard (1998) have all documented a simplistic view of consumerism where individuals follow the prevailing consumer trends. Therefore, while I will later question the level of passivity which exists among adolescents, that is never to deny that they are influenced by the gendered bodies which consumer culture validates at particular points in time, such as the 'aesthetic-athletic' body in the present. Consequently, at this stage providing a sample of the messages which advertising sends to adolescents in relation to the female body is a useful exercise.

What the female body has sought to mirror has changed both dramatically and discontinuously over time. In the West in the past, the voluptuous and plump

shape was viewed as the main indicator of femininity. The growth of consumer culture and advertising in the 1920's saw the ideal female body significantly reduced in size. In yet another discontinuous manner the 30's and 40's moved towards the mirroring of a more shapely and curvaceous body form, at a time when social circumstances of war would more naturally facilitate the opposite. In the 1960's fashion models and entertainment stars, again changed the direction of visual femininity, until this re-embracing of thinness reached the standard of Twiggy in the 1970's. Continuing in the 1980's, plummeting to levels of practical malnourishment in the 1990's and asserting a more toned look since, the slim body retains its Foucauldian like status of truth, into the twenty first century. As opposed to the heroine addict washed out look which attracted much opposition in the 1990's, the body of the new century is tanned, youthful and fit. While never so muscular so as to run the risk of looking masculine, today's ideal boasts a significant chest size, thin waist, firm abdomen, pert yet understated buttocks, toned thighs and long slender legs. This is the 'true' body of Hollywood, rich, successful and sexually attractive. This is the body which women of all ages aspire to, particularly those at an adolescent age when such attributes and benefits might ensure the perfection of a quavering and unconfirmed self-identity.

> The contemporary popular media is saturated in images of thin and healthy beautiful female bodies. Female film stars, pop stars, cat-walk models, television hosts, the 'leading lady' of romantic fiction narrative, and advertising hoardings, in the main, operate under a 'tyranny of slenderness' (Chernin, 1983), where thin is beautiful, desirable, and valuable (transferring success onto a range of life goals, practices and products, and women who fit the thin ideal). (Redmond, 2003: 172)

It is impossible for female adolescents to escape subjection to the fit female body ideal and to escape reflection upon the status truth and embodied validation it depicts. According to Redmond, magazines are full of information on, and

23

examples of, how real women have defeated their bulges and bulk and are, thus, placed alongside images of major and minor celebrities, making their positive, glamorous and ideal images appear the obvious indicators of femininity (2003: 182). Images of teenage idols such as singers Brittney Spears, Chiristina Aguilera, Pink, Girls Aloud and actors such as Jennifer Aniston, Renée Zellweger, Cameron Diaz, Angelina Jolie and Paris Hilton, among others, bombard magazines, films, TV screens, billboards, music stores and the Internet. They act as a form of surveillance over large populations and mediate very similar images of femininity to all. They convey their ideally proportioned, semi-naked bodies as an intrinsic and normal part of the rise to fame, success and an ultimate truth. These women are strong, secure and self-assured, possessing all the values that young girls aspire to. Artists such as Angeline Jolie and Victoria Beckham, prove to admiring onlookers that is it not just in the songs and in the movies that the trimmed-down, toned-up body offers power and prosperity, but also in matters of love. The body form they present must be viewed as personifying beauty and attractiveness since men such as Brad Pitt and David Beckham, themselves icons of masculine perfection, have fallen for them.

An abundance of companies use the semi-naked, 'aesthetic-athletic' body as their selling mechanism. These often portray poised moments of passion between two equally perfect male and female models. The male may be depicted as being completely engulfed in the moment; in her beauty, in her body. The female, however, although similarly lustful, keeps her eyes half open and stares into the camera. Her fit and firm borders mirror equality with his. Her desire, yet evident self-management, mirrors a true feminism to others. With her firm buttocks, flat stomach and half exposed breasts she stands over him, in the position of

24

dominance. She is "the 'new woman', unconstrained by biology or old social roles" (Bordo, S., in L. Goldstein, 1994: 293). Like the women of Nike and Reebok campaigns to whom Bordo refers, the females in contemporary advertisements confirm "physical fitness with resistance to old constructions of femininity with 'softness'" (ibid).

With regard to the true male, it appears to be the muscular body that has prevailed throughout history, despite the degree of 'muscularity' varying at different periods. Long before the female body became the focus of nude paintings in the 1800's, the male ideal of wide-shoulders and tight-buttocks, had been regularly depicted and displayed. It wasn't until the 1980's, however, that this semi-naked male body re-emerged as commonplace once again.

> The advent of such magazines as *For Women*, together with the appearance of male erotic dance troupes such as The Chippendales and The Dreamboys who play to all-women audiences, have blurred the traditional boundaries between men as viewers and women as the viewed. (Grogan, 1999: 17)

At the turn of the twenty first century, however, the extensive use of the male body in the media and advertising is aimed at schooling males on masculinity construction, more than it is at lusting females.

> While the reasons for it are contested, there is widespread agreement that a significant change has occurred, in which men's bodies *as bodies* have gone from near invisibility to hypervisibility in the course of a decade... More fundamentally, there have been suggestions that males may increasingly be *defining themselves* through their bodies. (Gill, Henwood and McLean, 2005: 39)

Whether selling their own talents or consumer products, the male body has become subjected to a surveillance of aestheticisation, as it has never existed before. According to Baker the male body began to rampage through the media and advertising for reasons which have long since targeted the aestheticisation of the female. Baker suggests consumer discourses had to find a way of "persuading men

25

that it's actually macho to use a moisturiser" and not feminine to have a facial, "hence the pictures of hunks splashing on the perfume" (1994: 132). More recently Demetriou has drawn upon forms of masculinities advocated by consumer culture and has suggested that it is now possible for heterosexual men to appropriate "bits and pieces" of homosexual styles and practices (2001). Indeed this has given rise to the commonly used concept of the 'metrosexual'. The metrosexual man is but one among a number of fashionable terms aimed at modern men such as "the New Man, the New Lad, Millennium Man, the Dad Lad, Metrosexual Man and Colditz Man" (Beynon (2002) cited in D. Ging, 2005: 30). It would be interesting to see if this is indeed the reality for adolescent males in Ireland or if they are locally quite restricted in how free they are to experiment with bits and pieces of homosexual styles. Indeed Ging's recent Irish study found that -

> Limited versions of the masculine (in school, family and community life) may... restrict young men's ability to explore and enjoy the diversity of images of and discourses on masculinity that are becoming available in the media. (2005: 47)

Hence, even though young boys are encouraged to find the true self by purchasing aestheticising products in the same way young girls do, they may be limited in terms of how overt this can be and whether or not it damages their unambiguous display of heterosexuality and hegemonic masculinity. In this study I wish to find to find out whether this means that "men's talk about the appearance of their body is structured by a very limited range of key discourses" (Gill, Henwood and McLean, 2005: 43) in an adolescent context. Perhaps males are under the same policing and surveillance as women by consumerism and the media, but may be more limited in the way embodied validation can be expressed? Perhaps, the media definition of valid masculinity will only 'sell' to adolescent males so long as it remains within the boundaries of the dominant (heterosexual) masculinity that

26

pervades the discourses defining gender identity for adolescents? Nonetheless, media and advertising make continuous attempts to capture as wide of a male audience as possible.

Whether selling aftershave, hair gel, shower gel or jeans, to mention but a few, most companies address a target male audience in their advertising. Having moved away from the clean-cut look of previous decades most of today's male advertisements display men with ruffled hair, dark eyes and rugged stubble, with a perfect smile. He may be seen with arms positioned on his firm waist, leaving onlookers helpless but to be drawn to his muscular 'abs', broad shoulders, distinctive 'pecs' and an abdomen which exhibits the definite outline of a 'six-pack'. Not too muscular, so as to intimidate the opposite sex, his body is the form which equates with desirability. Grogan is of the belief that -

> Adolescents present a slender, muscular ideal that is very similar to that of the adult male ideal. They are fearful of becoming fat, and would diet or exercise to avoid becoming overweight. Men are socialised from a young age to aspire to the masculine, mesomorphic shape, which is linked with concepts of fitness and health. (1999: 127)

I would like to suggest that mixing the 'mesomorphic' with approved expressions of the 'metrosexual', creates an image which is equally summed up by my 'aesthetic-athletic' body as adopted from Baudrillard's athleticism (i.e. mesomorphic) and phryneism (i.e. metrosexual). This means that the masculinity which has attained a status of truth, is charming and endearing, as well as fit and muscular.

Muscles are extremely important within the mirroring of masculinity. Muscles have the ability to signify strong will power and self-management. They proclaim an indisputable validation of maleness and an embattled manhood. Companies such as Marks and Spencers and Nike use the athletic, muscular body

of footballer David Beckham to market their products. David Beckham is now as well known for his body as he is for his football skills. Once a symbol of the working class, muscles are now synonymous with a classless masculinity. They are the essence of male validation and acceptability. Whether it's pop stars like Justin Timberlake or rappers like Eminem sporting his Calvin Kleins, "their shirtlessness is intended as sincerity, their exposed muscularity as dignity in labour" (Fussell, 1994: 54). This laboured self does not indicate the body of a working class labourer as it may have in the past, but rather a modern labour in the form of planned training and workouts. Film heroes such as Australian Russell Crowe, American Keanu Reaves and even Ireland's own Colin Farrell, represent the globalised display of the fruits of a self-styled modern-man's labour. From Terminator to Gladiator, the 'aesthetic-athletic' body is constantly gazing down from billboards and TV screens on young males, mirroring a masculinity armed with it's own embodiment, a heroic adornment whether on or off screen. Muscles simply are the embodied validation of masculinity.

This section has identified the 'aesthetic-athletic' body as the most popular physical form presented to adolescents by advertising in the present. Although to varying degrees of 'aestheticism' and varying degrees of 'athleticism', this is the body, which has been given a Foucauldian status of truth by consumer culture. Adolescents witness how the 'aesthetic-athletic' body is validated through its global popularity and success. What this section points to most fundamentally, however, is the need to investigate the extent to which adolescents are influenced by the bodies projected in advertising and the media. To presume that youths are passively schooled within these images is to fall into an ideology which dominated Foucault's earlier work and which largely dismisses adolescents as active agents.

28

This notion of passivity is also evident in the work of those who have adopted Foucault's 'social constructionism', such as feminists Bartky (1990), McRobbie (1991), Bordo (1993), Davis (1995), Frost (2005) and consumer theorists, like Featherstone (1991), Corrigan (1997), Baudrillard (1998), who present a simplistic view of structural dominance over individuals and neglect certain complexities. Adolescents must be seen as agents. Firstly, they are agents in the construction of consumer structures. Secondly, they are agents in their 'individual negotiation' of images such as the 'aesthetic-athletic' body. I dedicate the next two sections to dealing individually with these two complexities.

## 1.5 Adolescents as Active Creators of Consumer Culture

This section is concerned with adolescents as agents in the production and maintenance of consumer culture and the images of valid embodiment that it presents. I firstly summarise why theorists have largely viewed agency as occurring at the macro level of structure. I briefly identify some of those who have called for an acknowledgement of agency at a micro, and more specifically, an embodied level. Following on from this, I show how theoretical contributions by Bourdieu and Giddens are useful for understanding the way in which adolescents are active participants in a more complex process than simply consumers of a predetermined schooling on the body.

In the previous sections we have seen that, for Foucault, a discourse of truth is "produced only by virtue of multiple constraints, and it induces regular effects of power" (1980: 181). Within this framework the quest for a true identity may be

restrictive for adolescents because it guarantees maximum control for capitalist producers and their needs.

> It is not a question of the market reacting to the expressed desires –
> the sovereign needs - of the consumer, it is rather that the
> manufacturers deliberately attempt to shape consumer behaviour
> through advertising. (Corrigan, 1997:19)

By a similar token, Baudrillard remarks "in its tendencies at least, this is total dictatorship by the sector of production" (1998: 38). This is not to say that "'needs are the fruits of production', but that the system of needs is the product of the system of production" (Baudrillard, 1998: 74). However, here consumer theorists appear to be falling into the trap of prioritising structure over agency. Frank brings the agent back into this realm by reminding theorists of a slightly more complex situation whereby "social systems may provide the context in which tasks" of embodied validation "are defined, enacted, and evaluated, but social systems themselves have no tasks... Bodies alone have 'tasks'" (Frank, 1991: 48). More recently Connell has called for a similar understanding of the body as an active agent within social structures. Bodies must be seen to participate in a more complex way in producing forms of embodied validation than common understandings suggest.

> The common social scientific reading of bodies as objects of a
> process of social construction is now widely inadequate. Bodies are
> involved more actively, more intimately, and more intrinsically in
> social processes than theory has usually allowed. Bodies participate
> in social action by delineating courses of social conduct – the body
> is a participant in generating social practice. (Connell, 2005b: 851)

This agency inevitably brings to mind Bourdieu's structuring habitus and Giddens' structuration theory, implying that consumers retain their agency in that, although guided and perhaps manipulated by producers, production would have no use without the tasks undertaken by individuals within consumption.

Bourdieu allows for "an analysis of the body as a material phenomenon which both constitutes, and is constituted by, society" (Shilling, 1993: 74). One of Bourdieu's most fundamental aims was to conquer the great divide which existed between theories of structure and theories of agency and he labelled this dichotomy as an "absurd opposition between individual and society" (Bourdieu, 1990: 31). It was through the formation of the concept of 'habitus' that Bourdieu was able to "escape from under the philosophy of the subject without doing away with the agent..." and also "from under the philosophy of the structure but without forgetting to take into account the effects it wields upon and through the agent" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:121-122). The body plays a fundamental role in Bourdieu's concept of habitus, since the habitus not only internalises social structures, but embodies social structures. In turn, social structures maintain their power, through embodied interaction. The notion of habitus is an extremely beneficial conceptual tool when applied to adolescents' attempts to attain embodied validation. For instance, this sees adolescents embodying social structures, such as consumer images, which in turn, serve to construct a habitus comprised of -

> Systems of durable, transportable dispositions, structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations. (Bourdieu, 1990: 53)

Such practices and representations can be "objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without being in any way the product of obedience to rules" (ibid), as Foucault might suggest. In addition "they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor" (ibid). Collective orchestration empowers adolescents to embody a 'true' body form for interactive and

31

communicative purposes. They are not simply being produced by rules, by an organising conductor or by a panoptic observer.

According to Cicourel, Bourdieu "focuses on the cultural emergence and enforced use of practical reasoning said to be constitutive of daily social interaction" (1993: 91). Hence, the body as agent in communicating the self interactively is always present within habitus. This presence is necessary since "my embodied understanding doesn't exist only in me as an individual agent: it also exists in me as the co-agent of common actions" (Taylor, 1993: 53). The body with most communicative and interactive powers, for Bourdieu, is likely to have been that which was victorious within the 'field'. His notion of 'field' is a type of "competitive marketplace in which various kinds of capital (economic, cultural, social, symbolic) are employed and deployed" (Ritzer, 1992: 542). According to Bourdieu certain forms of capital may achieve victory over others. This bears much resemblance to the way in which Foucault described discourse as "based on a constant struggle or warfare between different power blocks which attempt to impose their own system of domination" (NcNay, 1994: 89). In the case of Bourdieu -

> Victory in a symbolic struggle means that one's symbolic goods have been judged to possess more value than those of one's competitors. The fruit of such victory is the right to impose one's symbolic goods on the social field: that is to exercise symbolic violence on the 'consumers' in the social field, and this entails the complicity of those subject to such violence. (Lash, 1993: 197-198)

When this interpretation is applied to adolescents' appropriation of particular body images, it seems that the body image which is chosen to facilitate embodied validation, is that which has assumed a symbolic victory over alternative images. Bourdieu might say that the 'aesthetic-athletic' body has won a symbolic victory over alternative body forms within consumer culture, just as Foucault might

32

suggest that it is a dominant discourse that has attained a status of truth. What sets Bourdieu's victorious capital apart from Foucault's dominant discourse, however, it that Bourdieu views an internalisation of such capital within one's habitus and its embodied communication to others, as a definite form of agency. While on the surface the difference between the concepts of 'dominant discourses' and 'victorious capital' seems slight, the consequences for the notion of the agentic body are enormous. Fundamentally, Bourdieu recognises that power is located 'in' and 'on' the body, rather than simply 'over' it. It allows the body to be a signifier of power as well as a receptor of power. It indicates an indispensable duality between structure and agency which is later adopted by Giddens.

According to Ritzer "one of the best-known and most articulated efforts to integrate agency and structure is Anthony Giddens' structuration theory" (1992: 528). While Foucault has been criticised for examining the body as an 'object', Giddens has also been criticised for falling into the trap of objectivism in his examination of the body as 'project' (1991). The body as 'project' appears to eradicate the biological and corporeal in favour of a body which, like Foucault's body, discourses have "an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it" (Foucault, 1977: 25-26). Unlike Foucault's body, however, this is a 'reflexive project' (Giddens, 1991) and any efforts to change and alter the body are explained by the pursuit of agency rather than the fulfilment of discourse. Furthermore, for Giddens the production of discourses is dependent on individual participation within them. Within Giddens' structuration theory, no social investigation of human actors can incorporate structure and not agency, or vice versa, since they are seen as an inseparable dual process.

While Margaret Archer has been particularly critical of the shortfalls of examining structure and agency as a unified concept, for this research I believe it is necessary to view adolescents' embodiment as influenced by structures and responsible for structure. For instance, this chapter so far, has referred to capitalist consumerism as an authority which acts in a similar way to Foucault's bio-power, controlling the embodied discourses which are presented to large populations of individuals. This guarantees success for capitalists through consumers' wish to attain a stated truth. However, in light of structuration theory, it must be acknowledged that discourses of truth only attain their power when they are adopted by actors. If images stayed on shop windows and advertisements and agents did not adopt the knowledge they display in their own everyday practices, then discourses would have limited power. For Giddens "structure only exists in and through the activities of human agents" (1989: 256). Thompson explains Giddens' theory by suggesting -

> What must be grasped is not how structure determines action or how a combination of action makes up structure, but rather how action is *structured* in everyday contexts and how structured features of action are, by the very performance of an action, thereby *reproduced.* (1989: 56)

Structures are in no sense outside of adolescents, working upon them behind their backs, since they are shaped by human actors. In relation to consumerism, practices to consume images of valid embodiment, such as the 'aesthetic–athletic' body, are shaped by actors choosing this as a valid body image. More simplistically, consumer culture presents the 'aesthetic-athletic' body as a valid form of embodiment. It is, however, adolescents as agents who actively 'validate' this form through their individual embodying of it.

It is arguable that adolescents participate in actions to attain embodied validation for their own personal, biological and social reasons in a way which is much more complex than merely wishing to reproduce a dominant discourse. The approach to structure as "something which constrains action, or even determines it", neglects the way in which Giddens argues that "it is also enabling, it makes possible for us to do things" (Craib, 1992: 34). According to Giddens, one example of an enabling action is 'speech' (1976). Here he draws on Goffman's 'shared vocabularies of body idiom', (1963a, 1967). For Giddens, speech is an action which takes place within a structured framework of 'language'. However, language only exists in so far as people speak it and people only speak it because they see it as enabling to their everyday communication. Similarly embodied adolescents are schooled on the body through discourses and they may use all, or perhaps, elements of, this schooling for enabling and empowering purposes. What Giddens contributes to understanding adolescents' quest for embodied validation, therefore, is that consumer culture provides a language in which valid embodiment within a given space and time can be decoded and understood. Agentic adolescents must appropriate this language within their everyday embodied actions, however, in order for it to be meaningful, enabling, empowering and crucially 'validated' in social interaction.

So it is important to draw attention to a more complex side to consumer culture in that individuals are more than passive consumers. Adolescents must be seen to 'structure structures' (Bourdieu) rather than simply as being structured by them. In conclusion, this indicates a reality whereby what is deemed by consumer culture to be a valid body, is embodied by adolescents because they find it enabling. While in Section 1.3 Frank's 'mirroring body' was presented; for agency

35

to be present this cannot offer a total explanation. Therefore, it is necessary to see Frank's 'communicative' body (1991) as intrinsic to any mirroring which may take place. Mirroring what is externally valid, ultimately gives priority to structure and macro processes. The communicative body brings the focus down to the level of the individual, the habitus, the agent, the micro and is concerned with a complex process of 'individual negotiation' which accounts for how exactly and why exactly mirroring takes place.

## 1.6 Adolescents' 'Individual Negotiation' of Consumer Culture

What does the micro decision-making processes of adolescents look like? As long as macro, structural processes remain the focus of debates on consumer culture, we will continue to see adolescent bodies only through a broad, generalised and uncomplicated lens. Bodies will continue to be mirroring more than communicative.

In reality, each and every adolescent is uniquely embodied. Therefore, even though the body form which has been deemed as valid or true in consumer culture may be the 'aesthetic-athletic' body, the way in which this is negotiated must be seen to take place in a very individualised way. For Bourdieu, each individual habitus will be comprised of an adolescent body, which is naturally changing in unique ways, and also of a uniquely embodied history. It is inevitable therefore, that each adolescent's consumption and internalisation of the 'aesthetic-athletic' body will be different. Essentially, embodied individuals should be seen to negotiate the socially true and valid body, in light of their own unique bodies. Thus

it is vital that research investigations build individual adolescent bodies into their methodological framework, as will this research.

According to Frank the essential quality of the communicative body is its active agency, as it is continually involved in a process of creating itself. Frank contends that, like the mirroring body the motive of the communicative body is production but -

> Unlike the mirroring body, the communicative body's desire is for dyadic expression, not monadic consumption. It produces itself not as a surface mirroring all around it, but as an expressiveness recreating a world of which it is part. (1991: 80)

It may be suggested that consumer theorists who have adopted Foucault's approach to discourse domination and individual passivity, have neglected the complexity of this process in that even in mirroring there is communication. I am not contradicting the focus of Section 1.4, which stated that adolescents are influenced by the body images found in consumer culture and often imitate them. However, it is unlikely that adolescents would want to adopt a particular body image, simply out of adherence to external dominance. Therefore, even when adolescents attempt to mirror the 'aesthetic-athletic' body from dominant discourses, it is because they see this physique as communicative of a desirable self to others. By the same token, if the communicative self that is involved in a process of recreating itself, expresses a self that mirrors dominant discourses, this must not take from its meaningfulness or agency. This complex combination of two facets allows us to see that -

> Growing boys and girls are active creators of their own lives – both individually, and as Willis (1990) argues, collectively. They are not just passively engaged in role learning and being 'socialised'. (Connell, 2005a: 13)

Adolescents do not simply conform to structurally imposed rules, but they may 'choose' to follow such rules because they see this as being enabling to their personal and social embodied validation.

For Foucault, truth appears to be created outside of individual social actors (1980). According to Foucault (1977, 1980) and indeed Bordo (1993) discourses which hold a status of truth have become 'normalised' "insuring the production of self-monitoring and self-disciplining 'docile bodies' sensitive to any departure from social norms" (Bordo, 1993: 186). However, it would be interesting to see whether adolescents' behaviour is described better by Connell's or Foucault's approach. For Connell, they are not passively socialised into what is true but actively create what is true.

If we look briefly to Foucault we can see, therefore, that the introduction of agency to Foucault's notion of truth can be viewed in two ways. Firstly, a discourse of truth is not something which is simply normalised because it exists in structure and -

> Reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives. (Foucault, 1980: 39)

Rather, a discourse is normalised as a result of its collective appropriation by individuals who actively wish to communicate its enabling dimension and not because they are 'docile bodies' afraid to depart from social norms (Bordo, 1993: 186). As with Giddens' 'structuration theory' and Bourdieu's 'habitus' norms only become normal, and therefore truthful, because they are appropriated for purposive reasons into agent's everyday practices. Indeed in Foucault's later writings he arrives at an understanding of the normalisation of discourses of power or truth which acknowledges the dualism of structure and agency. "In order to exercise a

relation of power, there must be on both sides at least a certain form of liberty" (Foucault, 1988: 12). It is this autonomy which failed to feature in Foucault's earlier works, and turns the 'docile' body into an 'active' body, which is vital to this present research.

Secondly, therefore, truth must be viewed in a way which recognises it as structurally visible, but within which it is very much individually negotiated. Focusing too much on bio-power allows Foucault to define the journey from discourse to practices as straightforward and generalisable. Although Foucault later considers how problematic it is to turn individuals into objects schooled by discourses, he offers no detailed explanation of the processes through which individuals negotiate schooling discourses in uniquely diverse ways. The voices, choices and motives of individuals remain missing from this process.

To put the process of individualised negotiation in context, I will return to the prevalence of dreamlike body images found in consumer culture which I discussed in Section 1.4. It may be said that mass culture, implies mass bio-power, where the truth is equated with the dreamlike, desirable, defined body.

> The imagery may summon up pleasure, excitement, the carnivalesque and disorder, yet to experience them requires self-control and for those who lack such control there lurks in the background surveillance by security guards and remote-control cameras. (Featherstone, 1991b: 25)

Once control has been established, once truth has been reached within the 'aesthetic-athletic' body there is less need for inhibition and inadequacy. For adolescent males and females, such dreamlike images within advertising and consumerism, make "the lithe and energetic body, tight and slim, with its firm and toned-up boundaries... a powerful image of contemporary culture" (Sassatelli, 2000: 227).

Bordo (1993) and Grogan (1999) agree that an internalisation of dreamlike images causes individuals to make negative self-comparisons. Grogan states, "the core of body image dissatisfaction is a discrepancy between a person's perceived body and their ideal" (1999: 100). Her 'Social Comparison Theory' contends that on failure to judge their own appearance directly, individuals turn to a method of comparison with others in order to arrive at a conclusion of self-evaluation that satisfies their needs. Upward comparisons with body images portrayed in the media produce unfavourable self-judgements, given that real shapes will not be perfect body shapes by definition. "Body image is a mental construction, not an objective evaluation. Hence it is open to change through new information" (Grogan, 1999: 101). When information about the ideal body is internalised as more valid than one's evaluation of the self, the void between the 'objective body' and the 'possible body' expands. This leads to the production of personal inadequacies and the lowering of personal worth. Advertising of the perfect body form, which manipulates inadequacies in individuals, is built on the premise of such comparative surveillance. More recently, Frost has stated that -

> People may identify with delusions, against which any achievement induces a sense of disappointment. A young woman who tries to reflexively constitute her physical self to resemble a heavily touched up studio portrait of a pre-pubescent model may believe that she is responsible for failing to match up, when in reality she has little chance of making herself resemble what is in fact a photographic illusion. (2005: 70)

It would be intriguing to see, however, if youths are as taken in by dreamlike bodies as the above commentators suggest. Again, they appear to be focusing on bio-power and forgetting to include a comprehensive and realistic negotiation of truth by individual actors within this framework. Perhaps empirical studies have captured a more realistic picture of adolescents' agency. De Casanova's study

found that participants recognised and objected to the artificial nature of idealised media images (2004: 301-302). Indeed Budgeon, on the basis of her own empirical work calls for acknowledgement of the complexity of this process, in relation to females.

> Media projections of images of thin, fashionable and glamorous women were often cited as contributing to the dissatisfaction they felt with their bodies, but most young women were able to negotiate these discursive constructions and their effects in a way that allowed for strategies of resistance, lending support to the suggestion that the relationship between self and body is about a process more complex than that which involves the inscription of the text upon the surface of the body. (2003: 43)

The basic argument, which I am proposing is that while adolescent males and females are influenced by fashionable, glamorous and dreamlike images and advertising can be viewed as an authority that communicates discourses of truth, nevertheless, how much of this supposed truth is accepted and how much is rejected by adolescents? It is perhaps worked out through an extremely individualised and complex process and in relation to the communicative needs of diverse bodies. The notion of bio-power in Foucault's work is very convincing but remains a large, macro theory that attempts to account for every aspect of body regulation in a singular fashion. It is like saying that a large group of individuals receive a particular type of schooling, but neglects that each individual is likely to remember, draw upon and utilise difference elements of their schooling for their own unique purposes. What is required to comprehend uniquely embodied agency, therefore, is what Judith Mayne calls for in local studies which focus "less on large theories that can account for everything, and more on the play and variation that exists at particular junctures" (Mayne, 2002 cited in D. Ging, 2005: 31). Such local studies she proposes may account for processes of ideological control, on the one

41

hand, and for "series of discontinuities, heterogeneous, and sometimes empowering responses, on the other" (ibid).

The fact that each adolescent is living through a period of unique physical development, means that they will negotiate what is to be taken as true within discourses in a way which enables the creation of a uniquely communicative and empowered body. This implies that even though the 'aesthetic-athletic' body may have attained a status of truth, every such body, even in advertising is essentially different, just as each and every adolescent body is different. Therefore, what an adolescent will take as true and chooses to adopt into their own embodied project, may be negotiated in a very unique way and for diverse reasons.

It is arguable that Crossley is accurate in his assertion that the reasons for agents engaging in body regimes is a key question in sociology and an issue on which most of the major perspectives have contributed something (such as "Bartky, 1993; Baudrillard, 1999; Bordo, 1993; Bourdieu, 1977, 1984; Foucault, 1980; Giddens, 1991; Shilling, 1993)" (Crossley, 2005: 15). However, it is Crossley's belief that -

> We must approach it in a way that recognises the great diversity of RBT's (reflexive body techniques) in the societal repertoire and the very different social logics that can attach their appropriation. 'One size fits all' explanations, such as we get from most of the above-mentioned theorists, are deeply problematic because they fail to recognize this diversity. (ibid)

Hence, it is my argument that while the notion of popular media as a form of bio-power over individuals, informing them on discourses of truth is applicable to our understanding of structure, it does little for our understanding of agentic individuals, their unique bodies and their complex processes. There is a distinct individualised, decision-making process which is negotiated on the journey from discourse to practice which must be empirically investigated, so that the theoretical

42

notion of bio-power may be explained to incorporate individual diversity also. This notion of individual negotiation is an issue that has been empirically addressed by Monaghan in relation to bodybuilding. He holds that "clearly each bodybuilder is an individual... participation does not entail a transitory loss of self or individuality" (1999: 275). Nevertheless, empirical research, which allows us to understand how individuals negotiate discourses of truth in relation to their own embodied needs, is overwhelmingly absent.

Commentators have recently stated that -

> Many writers lament the fact that the increasing theoretical interest in the body has not been accompanied by empirical studies (e.g. Davis, 1997; Wacquant, 1995; Watson, 2000)...The sociology of the body has, by and large, ignored the voices that emanate from bodies themselves. (Gill, Henwood and McLean, 2005: 40-41)

It is vital that the journey from discourse to practice lends itself to individual diversity. To ignore how individuals internalise and negotiate discourse in relation to their own unique embodiment is to propose that agents' "own understandings of their embodied selves are reduced to an effect of image consumption" (Budgeon, 2003: 42). This leads to a bio-power type, singular reality whereby "the process and practices through which the self and the body become meaningful are left untheorized" (ibid). Discourses of truth may exist within a structural realm but negotiating truth needs to be both theoretically and empirically viewed as an individual process of empowerment. Creating an embodied identity during adolescence is not something which is predetermined and mirrored, but rather a product complexly tailored by each adolescent to suit their own communicative needs.

> The Body is not a prior fullness, anteriority, or plenitude that is subsequently identified and organised through restricting representations. Representations are not negations imposed on otherwise fluid bodies. Body images are not stereotypes that

43

produce human beings as complicit subjects. On the contrary, images, representations, and significations (as well as bodies) are aspects of ongoing practices of negotiation, reformation, and encounter. (Bray and Colebrook, 1998: 38-39)

Perhaps the creation of a valid self during adolescence is predominantly geared towards gaining acceptance and approval among peers? After all adolescence is not so much about receiving social processes as it is about participating in social processes. According to Connell "the adult world confronts young people as fact, as a world already made, not as the product of their own desire and practice." However, "adolescence is, by definition, the process of becoming a participant in" (2005a: 16). It is evident that an adolescent can receive a 'valid' body form but they must participate in embodied validation through collective interaction. Since embodied validation largely comes through an indicated social approval and acceptance of one's body-project, during adolescence, is such approval and acceptance sought predominantly from peers? Are adolescents schooled on embodied issues within the wider social sphere or does it take place largely within the physical structure of schools themselves? Has too much emphasis been placed on adolescents making negative self-comparisons with discourses found in consumer culture, when the emphasis of self-comparisons should focus on the group closest to adolescents; their peers? This study seeks to investigate if the 'valid body' is to be found by adolescents in individuals within their localised setting or in those in the mediated press. After all, it is the local individual who sanctions embodied validation through interaction and communication, not the mediated individual.

## 1.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined the place of embodied adolescents within consumer culture. It takes the reader from a straightforward, generalisable and macro understanding of adolescents within consumer culture on to a more complex, individual and micro understanding, arguing the need for empirical research to comprehend embodied adolescents in consumer culture.

It has argued that adolescents are particularly susceptible to the body images found in consumer culture, as they struggle to cope with natural physical changes and to create a validated embodied identity. I have suggested that consumer culture acts as an authority, implementing bio-power in the presentation of the 'aesthetic-athletic' body type as a true or valid form to large populations of individuals.

Turning from the macro to the specific, this chapter has focused on a more complex understanding of adolescents' place within consumer culture. Adolescents are seen to be active agents who reproduce and sustain certain body forms through their collective embodiment of them. I have argued that what is true or valid must be seen as individually negotiated in light of each adolescent's unique embodiment. This sets the research agenda as locating the exact processes by which adolescents chose what is a valid body for themselves and questions just how influential peers are in the validation of embodiment.

# Chapter Two - The Cultural Complexity of Peer Validation

## 2.1 Introduction

It is widely accepted that adolescence is a time when youths begin to move away from dependence on parents for acceptance and support, towards an increasing dependence on peers for acceptance and support. In their movement away from 'significant others' (parents), towards the more 'generalised other' (peers) (Mead; 1934), Steinberg refers to adolescence as the "social redefinition" (Steinberg, 1996: 103) of the individual. The importance of the generalised other to Mead's work is that the very way in which the individual begins to experience his or her own identity is from the "particular standpoints of other individual members of the same group, or from the general standpoint of the social group as a whole" to which he or she belongs (1934: 138). However, acceptance among peers is not always a smooth flowing process. This chapter examines some of the complexities, particularly within the school context, which existing literature suggests adolescents may encounter in their quest for approval from their peers.

I argue that during adolescence, acceptance within peer activities is significantly tied to the body. To put this argument simply – having a valid body form, allows for access to valid activities and valid groups, which consequently leads to embodied validation through social validation. This may

occur in quite different ways for males and females and this chapter looks at some of these possible gendered differences in peer acceptance.

There are also those adolescents who will be deemed to have unacceptable embodied projects. Using existing theories I explain the process by which rejection takes place and point to some of the possible consequences facing adolescents who fail to achieve embodied validation from peers.

## 2.2 Achieving Validity in Adolescent Culture

It is the aim of this section to outline the methods adolescents may use to achieve acceptance among their peers. In order to do this, I compare adolescents to Bourdieu's 'new petite bourgeoisie' (1984). The new petite bourgeoisie can be seen acting as 'cultural intermediaries', schooling others on popular presentations and representations. This group seeks comfort and acceptance, through embodied expression and subsequent validation, making them quite comparable to teenager's quest.

Quite simply 'being comfortable' may be one of the key motives encouraging adolescents towards the appropriation of powerful body images, such as the 'aesthetic-athletic' body identified in Chapter One. The fear of inadequacy or rejection, particularly when youths are striving for acceptance among peers, is certainly enough to instil a great sense of discomfort should they fail in their appropriation of 'shared vocabularies of body idiom' (Goffman, 1963, 1967). It is in the battle against meaninglessness and

discomfort among peers, in the pursuit of accreditation and respect where the adolescent agent faces a most challenging complexity. Feeling comfortable and successful does not come from mirroring the image which is deemed to be valid in consumer culture. It comes from instituting the right amount of this image into one's unique communicative self and feeling comfortable that this image is being correctly recognised and validated by onlookers. Recognition by others, therefore, is of immense importance to adolescents as it implies that the body and its practices have been successfully decoded. Recognition is a response to an evident schooling on body representations and importantly, accredits the display of the right amounts and types of schooling. Thus, the body is socially rewarded with the cultural capital which the everyday choices and routines of the agent have been working towards. It is socially validated through its mirroring and communication of correct and acceptable amounts of particular images. On this basis, can adolescents be equated with Bourdieu's 'new petite bourgeoisie' (1984)?

Bourdieu believes the new petite bourgeoisie to be most pertinently described as 'cultural intermediaries' who express symbolic goods and services to others (1984). Adolescents, like the new petite bourgeoisie, have access to the liberated, independent styles of living experienced predominantly by more wealthy adults in traditional times.

> Outside of the fixed parts of daily life comprised by school and the workplace, most young people want to have fun. They want to amuse themselves and meet friends. Interest in pleasure is stronger for a majority of youth than interest in more serious activities, and pleasure is more important for youth than for adults. This orientation *unites* youth: it exists

almost independent of socio-economic background. (Reimer, 1995b: 135)

However, being a cultural intermediary involves much more than being a passive, fun loving adolescent. It demands relentless labour by the agent in communicating an identity that will be accepted by peers. All activities are serious activities when one feels discomfort within them. Feeling comfortable itself, in an equally serious fashion, requires a habitus that is *ad infinitum* reflexive, incessantly internalising newly emerging forms of capital which may be validated among peers.

According to Bourdieu, the new petite bourgeoisie may be influenced by the mediated experiences of certain 'intellectuals'. 'Intellectuals' may be compared to what Giddens terms the affluent, but specifically those who are affluent in terms of the cultural capital which they possess (1991). The meaning of the word 'intellectuals' in this context, deviates from the conventional one and refers to those who display a style of living and self-styling which the new petite bourgeoisie decodes and identifies with in terms of their own communicative desires within a range of cultural capital. Following Bourdieu, these 'intellectuals' may be seen to have ownership over three different forms of cultural capital. He holds that cultural capital exists firstly in an embodied form, expressed in one's self-presentation, vocal articulation and aesthetic practices. Secondly, it exists in an objectified form through cultural goods such as art, media, literature, architecture and machines. Thirdly, cultural capital is evident in an institutionalised form through educational credentials (1984: 243). Intellectuals are likely to possess one if

49

not all three of these forms of cultural capital. This is where the new petite bourgeoisie, identifying with a desire for the attainment of such capital, act as intermediaries in transmitting the intellectual's styles of living to other young onlookers. Indeed by their appropriation of embodied, objectified and institutionalised cultural capital, Bourdieu goes so far as to label the new petite bourgeoisie as the 'new intellectuals'.

Featherstone is of the opinion that through their communicative roles, 'new intellectuals' may subsequently become cultural entrepreneurs in their attempts to validate the intellectualisation of new fields of expertise and styles. For Featherstone, -

> Here is not a question of the new petite bourgeoisie promoting a particular style, but rather catering for and promoting a general interest in style itself, the nostalgia for past styles, the interest in the latest style, which in an age which itself lacks a distinctive style – what Simmel referred to as the peculiar styleless quality of modern life- have a fascination, and are subjected to constant interpretation and reinterpretation. (1991b: 91)

Youths as the intermediaries of style must be seen to have empowered agency. They are persistently ready to decide upon the correct appropriation of styles and images for their diverse physical selves, in the quest for recognition among their counterparts.

According to Bourdieu, the new petite bourgeoisies are not confident of their recognition. Bourdieu suggests a definitive distinction between the habitus of the old bourgeoisie and that of the new petite bourgeoisie. While the former held a certain embodied confidence and self-ease, the latter is self-analytical and self-monitoring, subjecting the body to endless surveillance.

Theirs is a lifestyle which focuses very much on identity, appearance, presentation of self, fashion design, decor; and considerable time and effort have to be expended in cultivating a sense of taste which is flexible, distinctive and capable of keeping abreast of the plethora of new styles, experiences and symbolic goods which consumer culture and the culture industries continue to generate. (Featherstone, 1991b: 109)

Paralleling adolescents with Bourdieu's new petite bourgeoisie then, would be worthwhile if adolescents can be seen to be endlessly striving to ensure that their vocabularies of embodiment are being decoded and validated in a way which will increase their peer group recognition and popularity.

In this section I have viewed adolescents as cultural intermediaries, who seek peer approval of their mediating tasks. Peer approval may be seen as necessary during adolescence but is far from guaranteed; it presents adolescents with a complex process of constantly evaluating their proximity to peer recognition and validation. Bearing this in mind, therefore, the extent to which collective peer recognition and validation is required by adolescents must be viewed as vitally important and worthy of investigation. This section begs the question of how fundamental the body is in working as an access route to peer groups for adolescents. According to Frost -

Identification, appearance, consumerism and the group are theorized as symbolically connected, and recent empirical research is also beginning to support the notion that group acceptance and identification may be dependent on what kind of image, including body image, a young person can construct (Frosh et al., 2002; Frost, 2001). (Frost, 2005: 75)

Using a desirable body form to situate the self within a favourable social network or location indicates undeniable agency among adolescents. In this

51

instance their embodied self-projection is much more than simply a case of adherence to imposed structural rules regarding powerful bodily representations, but it is about the body being a vehicle; an agent transporting the adolescent to a validated social position.

## 2.3 Adolescents Balancing Cultural Capital

This section identifies some of the peer activities and groups which youths may inhabit within a school setting, and also outside. Participation in activities and groups which have been validated among adolescents, may lead to a subsequent validation of the individuals who are accepted within them. Again, this is not a straightforward process without complexity. Adolescents must balance the cultural capital they mediate, in a way that allows their acceptance in groups and activities. For instance, dedicating too much time to the mediation of institutional and objectified capital may lead to neglect in the mediation of embodied capital. However, if institutional and objectified capital are accompanied by an overt dedication to embodied capital, it is arguable that group validation is more likely.

Rice (1999) is of the opinion that within the school system, adolescents are divided into three distinct peer groups: formal, semiformal and informal subsystems. For Rice membership within each group conveys a certain level of social validation, achieved on the basis of desirability to become a member of that group. While Rice is not a theoretical sociologist, his subsystems provide a

logical framework through which Bourdieu's cultural capital can be examined. I am arguing that what Rice refers to as 'group status' (1999) is based on a mediation of Bourdieu's cultural capital in the form of institutional, objectified and particularly embodied capital. It is also arguable that one's display of such capital and subsequent positioning within school subsystems, may also be applied to one's positioning outside of school, for they significantly impact upon each other.

According to Connell, for adolescents "schools are the most important formal institutions in their lives" (2005a: 21). Connell even goes so far as to suggest that "the growth of a secondary education system was a key condition for the emergence of 'adolescence' as a social category" (ibid). In his division of peer subsystems within such secondary schools, firstly for Rice -

> Adolescents are involved in a formal, academic subsystem shaped by the school administration, faculty, curriculum, grades, and rules. Students in this group are concerned with intellectual pursuits, knowledge, achievement, and making the honour roll (Rice, 1999: 241).

Adolescents who falter in their competitive academic pursuits run the risk of being excluded from this group. Equally, depending on peer interplay, validation through formal subsystems can be damaged in schools where academically inclined students are rejected socially.

However, literature suggests that "Girls rate hard work as being important in contributing to academic success whereas boys rate cleverness, talent and luck" (Ireson and Hallam, 2001:184). This means that boys have an added complexity in their mediation of institutional (educational) capital which

53

girls may not have. It would be interesting to see if the males in this study confirm the relevance of this theory and of the findings of a recent study by Gill, Henwood and McLean which state that -

> The elevation of 'having a laugh' and 'not taking yourself too seriously' fits in with contemporary ideas about postmodernism in popular culture... Men were keen to distance themselves from being seen as too serious, too committed, too earnest – things that were likely to attract a comment about obsession. Being cool seemed to involve a stance of distance or disinterest. (2005: 54)

It will be intriguing to see if males are actually disinterested in achieving educational capital or rather if educational capital is indeed important for accessing other groups. Also is the process of attaining such capital, and one's overt display of this process, notably gender specific? Is it possible that adolescents counteract participation in 'nerdy' academic activities with participation in 'cool' physical activities? This may then be a case of embodied capital, for example, being used to neutralise institutional capital, for example.

It is likely that this type of balancing of cultural capital can also be found within what Rice refers to as school's 'semiformal' subsystems. This involves participation in sports, drama and developmental clubs. Acceptance by peers is greatly impacted upon by one's position within such clubs and -

> The amount of prestige that any position bestows depends on its rank within each respective group and the prestige standing of the group in relation to all other groups. (Newman & Newman, 1987 in Rice, 1999: 241)

Perhaps Bourdieu's institutional, objectified and embodied capital are all advantageous for accessing semiformal subsystems, with the latter two being

of most importance within such groups. However, is there a complexity whereby adolescents need to balance objectified capital with embodied capital?

Bourdieu describes objectified capital as being based on the attainment of goods such as art, media, literature, architecture and machines (1984). We should update this list to include 'entertainment technology'. It cannot be denied that the past twenty years has seen a drastic increase in the production and availability of entertainment technology. While televisions were once the sole indicator of technological cultural capital, they now joined by a wide range of goods including videos, dvds, cds, mp3s, game boys, PlayStations, X-Boxes, computer games, cyber worlds and mobile phones, among others.

> We live in this constant sort of foetal position where we are
> seated in a soft chair looking at the world through a glass
> square, be it the windshield of the car or the screen of a
> television or computer. It's sort of constant, and we're in a
> little bubble. (Lanier and Biocca, 1992: 157)

For the contemporary adolescent, in particular, the ownership of technologies is of particular significance. "Much more than previous generations, present-day youth have access to knowledge which gives them more of an equal footing with adults" (Reimer, 1995a: 68). Through the medium of technology adolescents have access to the various roles of adults; not merely their official and segregated roles. Undisturbed by parents, many adolescents can acquire adult knowledge, create independent identities and build peer networks from the private setting of their own bedrooms. The extensive ownership of personal phones among adolescents, as well as the huge growth of networking websites such as 'Bebo', demonstrates the degree to which young people are gravitating

towards transformed, emerging forms of objectified capital. The mediation of such capital is itself an access route to semiformal subsystems since ownership of, and expertise in, technologies can socially position youths.

Objectified capital such as owning entertainment technologies has the ability to shape semiformal subgroups that converge on a shared interest in and expertise in such areas. What worries certain social commentators, however, is that further and further retreat into the fascinating world of ICT turns the acceptable into the addictive and draws adolescents away from participation in more embodied, physical activities.

> Twenty years ago, 80 per cent walked or cycled to school. Now only five per cent do so. The amount of food they eat would be appropriate for a Victorian child doing manual labour for 15 hours a day. The calories they consume are quite inappropriate for a day spent doing nothing more strenuous than playing a few computer games and walking from the school gate to a waiting car. (Childs, 2003: *Telegraph Weekend*)

Similarly Schlosser contends that in America it is estimated that the typical child –

> Now spends about twenty-one hours a week watching television – roughly one and a half months of TV every year. That does not include the time children spend in front of the screen watching videos, playing games, or using the computer. (2002: 46)

However, adolescents are likely to be well aware of the complexities they are faced with in balancing cultural capital. Perhaps most adolescents will acknowledge the benefits of attaining the cultural capital which being schooled within ICT implies, but they are also educated in the need for cultural intermediaries to be active. Bourdieu's new petite bourgeoisie never becomes

so absorbed in one aspect of culture that it is detrimental to the mediation of others and, I suggest, neither do adolescents. Well aware that "computer technology was developed to promote and speed up global communication", it can also have the effect of "disconnection and distance" (Elwes, 1993: 65). Here, a passive adolescent may retreat further into a 'lonely crowd' (Featherstone and Burrows, 1995: 12). However, it is arguable that most adolescents can actively recognise the cultural pluralism at play and strive to achieve a balance between many cultural activities. In particular, adolescents' schooling on the body makes them aware that the embodied capital which emerges from being a technology junkie is noticeably removed from that displayed by the TV hunks and the cyber babes which the technology itself perpetually presents. It will undoubtedly be interesting to see if adolescents feel the need to neutralise quite 'inactive' activities, with more physical activities in order to attain social validation and acceptance. If this is the case, it is also necessary to find out how exactly the body is used to achieve a balance in the mediation of cultural capital.

In this section I have identified some of the groups and activities which adolescents may participate in, both inside and outside of school. Just as Bourdieu suggests that mediating institutional, objectified and embodied capital is important to the new petite bourgeoisie for collective recognition, I propose that this is true of adolescents also. However, in this section I have given attention to a possible reality which Bourdieu neglects. This is where peer interplay presents individuals with the complexity of neutralising their

schooling in one form of cultural capital with another. The aim is to attain a balance that significantly increases one's chances of social validation within peer groups and importantly within 'desirable' peer groups. Based on existing literature, this section has addressed the possibility that balancing cultural capital may be quite specific to the interplay of gender, an assertion which this research investigation will explore.

## 2.4 Sport as a Highly Validated Activity

Sporting activities may be seen as an extremely highly validated activity among adolescents. Therefore this section looks at the significance of embodied capital within the school context, particularly in light of the educational and objectified capital discussed earlier. Embodied capital is of course intrinsic to sport. Is it a coincidence that it is the same 'aesthetic-athletic' body, which was seen to dominate consumer culture in Chapter One, which is desired for and becomes desirable through sporting activities? Are adolescents aware of this correlation? Also are there gendered dimensions to sporting activities and sporting groups that need investigation if we are to understand adolescent validation through sport?

For Rice, sport, drama and clubs are all activities which are part of semiformal subsystems within educational institutions (1999: 243). Some research shows that sport, and particularly highly physical team sports are at the top of a hierarchy of activities in schools. Negotiating which activities are

most likely to lead to peer acceptance and validation, therefore, can be quite a complex process for adolescents. Connell cites Foley's research encounter with such hierarchies and the supremacy of those who participated in sporting activities in rural Texas. Foley refers to this hierarchy among males only and states that a number of types of masculinity can be identified.

> The sporting Anglo 'jocks', the anti-authoritarian Latino 'vatos', the complicit but inconspicuous 'silent majority'. The jocks hold most prestige, the vatos maintain a cool and ironic distance. (Connell, 2005a: 21-22)

Sport, and again more specifically team sports, may be seen as a primary form of validation of male embodied capital according to Foley and Connell. Swain's study of three British schools revealed similar data on the importance of sport for the social validation of a successful masculinity.

> For much of the time the boys defined their masculinity through action, and the most esteemed and prevalent resource that the boys drew on across all three schools to gain status was physicality/athleticism, which was inextricably linked to the body in the form of strength, power, skill, fitness and speed... Sporting success was a key signifier of successful masculinity, and high performance in sport and games was generally the single most effective way of gaining popularity and status in the male peer group. (Swain, 2003: 302)

Conversely, the importance of sport in the validation of female embodiment, does not feature to the same degree in sociological literature. Probyn states: "for me as for many other feminists, sport is a sociological area of which we rarely speak" (2000: 14). It will certainly be worth investigating whether sport is as significant for the validation of identity for the females in this study as it is for the males. Consumer culture leaves us in no doubt as to the magnitude of the 'aesthetic-athletic' body for females but are females involved in the same

hierarchy of activities to achieve this body as are males? This is a question this study hopes to answer.

Messner (2002) is of the opinion that masculinity formation now takes place almost as much on the sports field as it does in sexual encounters (Messner, 2002). Similarly Boden notes that -

> Sports, for example, according to Chung (2003), prizes traditional values such as hierarchy, patriarchy, male supremacy, heterosexuality and nationalism, and awards wealth and fame to those who have proven their athletic ability and can maintain their awarded status on and off the field. (2006: 290)

Not surprisingly, it is particularly sports stars whose bodies have been given the status of being 'true' and 'valid' forms of male embodiment within consumer culture. They serve as Bourdieu's 'intellectuals', and cultural intermediaries can attempt to mirror such embodied capital in their communication of valid embodiment to others. The schooling offered by the bodies of male sporting heroes, confirms the prestige attached to competition and competition for prestige. According to Connell -

> Organised competitive team sport – a distinctively modern social practice – is intensely gender-segregated and male dominated. Sports such as football are also extraordinarily popular, with high rates of participation by adolescent boys. A recreation involving bodies in ritualised combat is thus presented to enormous numbers of youth as a site of masculine camaraderie, a source of identity, an arena of competition for prestige, and a possible career. (2005a: 15)

Although participation in soccer has acted as a possible career path for males for a considerable amount of time, in Ireland this has only recently become the case for rugby also. Such realities must be seen to make participation in

semiformal sporting subsystems all the more desirable and thus, to give rise to increased participation within them. Irish sports commentator George Hook is of the opinion that -

> Today schoolboys train harder and longer than any amateur rugby players. In some schools they are expected to practice twice a day and over the school holidays. (2006: 13)

Gaelic football and hurling may not pave the way to professional careers, but their popularity remains steadfast. Regardless of the team sport, it is predominantly male leagues and competitions that drum up most media support and public interest, leaving highly physical team sports largely gender specific and male orientated. Those who attain places on team sports, and have been successful in the complex process of exhibiting practical strength and athleticism in their bodily actions and visual strength and athleticism in their bodily shape, may certainly be more likely to attain peer recognition on the basis of the validation given to this form of embodiment. According to Lynch and Lodge (2002) the boys who make it onto the main teams in Irish post-primary schools receive both accolades from peers and rewards from teachers.

For Frank the 'dominating body' seeks out other bodies as the enemy to fight and in fighting and winning the self is perpetuated (1991). Frank is of the opinion that this body needs to fight for it is only through fighting that proof of the self-worth of one and the self-lacking of another becomes apparent. This also bears resemblance to Messner's 'bodies as weapons' (2002). At secondary school level the sports field offers a site where such perpetuation of self-validation can be played out in a legitimate framework for young males. Given

61

the prestige which is attached to acceptance onto certain teams, this 'warfare' (Frank, 1991), in addition to being focused on opposition teams may also take place in a strategic interplay with fellow team members in the competition for team places. The notion of 'fighting males' using their muscularity and bodies to overcome the enemy, sits very closely with long established ideologies of 'hegemonic masculinity'. Connell holds that hegemonic masculinity is -

> Deployed in understanding the popularity of body-contact confrontational sports – which function as an endlessly renewed symbol of masculinity - and in understanding the violence and homophobia frequently found in sporting milieus. (2005b: 833)

Langman examines hegemonic masculinity within the sports of elite American colleges, and contends that sports with a high level of physicality affirm a 'heroic masculinity'. Langman views "football, as a violent competition between teams of males seeking territorial power and control" (2003: 223). Hence when the 'aesthetic-athletic' body emerges in this context, it is not only in line with the embodied capital needed for acceptance within these sporting activities, but it's success in these activities is a form of validating masculinity itself. Team sports are complex and retain places for those who possess a very particular type of energy, prowess, strength and athleticism. According to Swain's study, bodily strength was of great importance to the young males involved and -

> Was a prerequisite in physical games that were deliberately designed by the boys to test toughness and stamina. (2003: 304)

Those who successfully occupy places that display strength and athleticism are, thus, deemed to possess embodied capital worthy of recognition and validation.

Monaghan is of the opinion that -

(Adolescent) boys often enact masculinities, but the meanings attributed to their biological and socially immature male bodies exclude them from hegemonic definitions of 'manhood' in contemporary Western culture. (2005: 82-83)

However, I am proposing that adolescent males are not simply satisfied with enacting masculinities. They want to be masculine and this includes incorporating forms of masculinity into their embodied being because without this their acceptance in certain peer contexts, and more specifically sport, is less assured. According to Connell "the importance of masculine embodiment for identity and behaviour emerges in many contexts". However, "in youth, skilled bodily activity becomes a prime indicator of masculinity, as... with sport" (Connell, 2005b: 851). Over and above any other form of cultural capital proposed by Bourdieu, it may be embodied capital in its specific sporting context, which adolescents depend upon most for validation among peers.

The level of embodied validation which is associated with certain sporting achievements, and the level of competition for such validation, re-emphasises a fundamental question of this research which is whether adolescents are more likely to compete with the bodies that hold a status of 'truth' within their localised interactive setting or with distant media figures. Adolescents may certainly be schooled on the valid body through advertisements and the media. However, it is the contention of this research

that adolescents encounter and compete within a localised space, such as schools themselves, and that embodied validation is achieved by virtue of their social acceptance and recognition within the complex peer interplay within such local settings.

In this section I have looked at how adolescents' schooling may present sporting activities and their embodied status as highly valid activities for adolescents to participate in, particularly for young males. Adolescents must go through the complex process of negotiating activities and their position within them. Involvement in sports that are viewed to be highly prestigious, provides youths with an opportunity to incorporate this prestige into their identity. This section has suggested, therefore, that those who participate in sporting activities, and are deemed to be validly embodied with the capital necessary to do so, are likely to attain social validation on the basis of their embodied validation.

## 2.5 The Body's Role in Fragile Adolescent Relationships

This section focuses on the role which embodied capital plays in the creation and maintenance of romantic relations during adolescence. I propose that if embodied capital is vital for binding such relationships together, then lapses in embodied capital may cause relationships to fall apart. I suggest that this may be particularly true of the Irish context and its particular types of schooling. The importance of embodied capital for adolescent relationships, may certainly

increase adolescents' sense of self-consciousness and also decrease their trust in unconditional relationships. This may also leave adolescents unable to express any emotional concerns, for fear they might damage, or be damaged by, the relationship itself.

According to Rice, 'informal subsystems' or "friendship choices are directed overwhelmingly to other students in the same school, and ... to members of the same grade and sex group" (1999: 243). By the same token, relations with the opposite sex are intrinsic to teenage years. Indeed, it may be argued that during adolescence, the interplay between peer relations and romantic relations cannot be separated. Connell holds that "adolescence is the period in which heterosexual couples become a normative pattern in peer group life" (2005a: 17). Some might argue with Connell that this occurs even earlier, yet the normalisation and expectation of heterosexuality remains the same. Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, suggest that educational institutions discriminate against those who do not normalise heterosexuality.

> In terms of sexuality, compulsory heterosexuality is used to characterise the ways that education arenas structurally discriminate against people with different sexual identities.... Males and females, heterosexuals and gays/lesbians, exist in unequal structured oppositions. (Heywood and Mac and Ghaill, 1997, 51)

Hence, young males and females may find themselves in a school setting where sexual orientation towards the opposite sex is expected.

It must be reiterated that Rice is simply providing a framework for looking at peer groups rather than a theoretical understanding as such. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that Rice is basing his informal subsystems on

65

interaction between American youths, and this may be significantly more complex for Irish adolescents. It is important to question whether a long tradition of segregated schooling, which still remains to a great extent, has lead to a certain distance between males and females. Hence, while Rice states that adolescents choose same sex friendships, perhaps in the Irish peer interplay they have much less choice. It would undoubtedly be interesting to see if traditions of segregation and the prevalence of single-sex schooling are leading to a unique form of interaction between Irish adolescents. It is arguable that if male and female adolescents are unfamiliar with a socialisation process whereby inter-sex friendships are as natural as same-sex friendships, when interaction does take place it may be based more on sexual attraction than friendship construction. If this is the case then adolescents will attach greater significance to socially desirable and sexually attractive body forms, such as the 'aesthetic-athletic' image. Bourdieu has acknowledged that a display of desirable embodied capital demonstrates an agent's active ability to communicate cultural style and populism and as a consequence to increase the agent's own popularity (1984). It is possible that the embodied communication of a particular physical self will increase an adolescent's chances of sexual validation. It must be acknowledged that for some adolescents same-sex relationships are characterised by this same type of emphasis on sexual attraction and romance but it is arguable that this type of relationship is still subject either to non-recognition or mis-recognition (Young, 1990).

Why not pose the question, that if embodied capital is important for accessing romantic relations, what happens if this embodied capital weakens? While it is a slightly fanciful explanation, it is possible that Giddens' notion of 'pure relationships' may be of some assistance in understanding the fragile nature of adolescent relationships. According to Giddens, pure relationships offer -

> Opportunities for intimacy and self-expression lacking in many more traditional contexts. At the same time, such relationships have become risky and dangerous, in certain senses of these terms. Modes of behaviour and feelings associated with sexual and marital life have become mobile, unsettled and 'open' to abandonment. (1991: 13).

For other commentators such as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, "today's marriage manual no longer talks about the 'Christian world order and its values' or of 'state goals', and still less of the 'survival of the race'" (1996: 35-36), but rather today's guidance manuals contain "in effect, the warning that marriage – like excessive speed on the winding road – is a risky personal undertaking for which no insurances are valid" (ibid). They argue that relationships that were once bound together out of the mutual dependence of one spouse on the other have been cast off by the transformation of gender roles and the individualisation of personal goals. According to Lash, "love here becomes disassociated from roles and hence chaotic, while this chaos becomes totally normal" (2003: 53). It is possible, that what Giddens describes as characteristic of marital relationships, may have infiltrated all relationships, including adolescent relationships. In this instance, a lack of permanency in relationships

affects youths' lives and they may become caught up in the chaotic complexities of striving for relationship acceptance.

It is likely that the body could play a primary role in this chaos. For example, in certain school sports embodied capital acts as a vehicle for attaining team positions. The notion of pure relationships, however, heightens our awareness that an adolescent's team place is at risk should their embodied abilities and athleticism falter. The team partnership, in this instance, is not committed unconditionally to the individual but only to what their embodied capital can bring to the success of the team. As Bauman suggests-

> In the age of what Anthony Giddens has called 'confluent love', togetherness lasts no longer than the gratification of one of the partners, ties are from the outset only 'until further notice', today's intense attachment makes tomorrow's frustration only the more violent. (1993: 55)

Likewise, informal subsystems may be characterised by the distinct presence of pure relationships. If an adolescent was only accepted into the relationship on the basis (or at least partially on the basis) of possessing a valid form of embodied capital, then this renders the commitment fragile should one's level of embodied capital diminish. Giddens suggests there is -

> No doubt all personal relations of any duration are testing and tensionful as well as rewarding. But in relationships which only exist for their own sake, anything that goes wrong between the partners intrinsically threatens the relationship itself. (Giddens, 1991: 90)

Adolescents may feel that the relationship was less about its 'use-value' (Marx, 1867) and more about its 'exchange-value' (ibid) or 'sign-value' (Baudrillard, 1998).

Such fluidity in partnerships and relationships brings to mind Sennet's description of the Western world. He holds that we live in a world "whose architectural emblem is the airport waiting lounge" (1994: 349). Although individuals spend time in very intimate proximity to each other in the departure lounge, their commitment to one another is fleeting and its longevity dependent on the time-span one or other party must wait for their flight to new and exciting pastures. One's departure of course brings a new network of interactions which are also underlined by self-affirmation rather than unconditional commitment. In his broadening of insecure relations to envelope interaction in the Western world in general, Sennett overcomes Giddens' overwhelming focus on pure relationships within marital relations only. Bryan Turner is of the opinion that such fluid and fleeting relationships inevitably come with postmodernity, because "the postmodern world is one of shifting or thin solidarities and ironic or cool loyalties" (1999: 44). He continues to suggest that "such a world is described sociologically by the development of the revisable self and negotiated community of temporary loyalties" (ibid).

The prevalence of such relationships, above all else, leads to a shattering of trust. This may be even more strongly felt by adolescents who are attempting to break from parental trust and establish relationships of trust with the more 'generalised other' (Mead, 1934). If interactive success is dependent upon a mediation of certain forms of cultural capital, then those who lack such capital or loose such capital are reminded of the "multiple commitments, weak affiliations, loose associations and tentative arrangements" which characterise

modern social relationships (Turner, B., 1999: 46). The risk of rejection looms overhead the construction of trust. Threats of a socially unacceptable change in cultural capital, such as embodied appearances, may be sufficient for the withdrawal of one or other party from the affiliation. This immediately undermines the intimacy and trust which existed in the relationship. That being said, Giddens holds that trust and intimacy must not be equated with each other within the pure relationship as trust is undermined by the flexibility and volatility of intimacy.

> The pure relationship contains internal tensions and even contradictions. By definition, it is a relation which can be terminated at will, and is only sustained in so far as it generates sufficient psychic returns for the individual.... It is not surprising that rage, anger and depressive feelings swirl through the contexts of pure relationships and, in concrete circumstances, intimacy may be psychically more troubling that it is rewarding. (Giddens, 1991: 187)

On this note, it is worrying that in a recent study carried out by Cleary with Irish males, the lack of trust which they experienced was a continuous theme. According to Cleary -

> Basic trust, originating in positive childhood experiences, protects the self in negotiating uncertainty as it allows for the possibility of loss. This kind of trust, although often referred to, was rarely experienced by the men in this study. (2005: 171)

One of the chief findings of Cleary's study is that "one reason for the lack of trust is the threatening possibility that any shared information might be used against the person" (ibid). This implies that individuals not only fear that their perceived lack of valid embodiment might terminate a relationship, but also that merely sharing this concern could lead to social invalidation.

This section has already outlined the importance of Bourdieu's embodied capital in accessing adolescent relationships. Given the nature of Giddens' pure relationships, embodied capital may also be seen as a maker and breaker of relationships. What Cleary's findings add to pure relationships, however, is an awareness of an added complexity which adolescents face whereby they may feel unable to trust in relationships sufficiently to discuss difficulties and insecurities. With regard to embodied capital, therefore, this would imply that even if adolescents feel insecure about their embodied self-identity, they may not trust other adolescents enough to share this information for fear it might be used against them and their acceptance by others.

## 2.6 Male Expression of Embodied Concerns

I use the last main point of Section 2.5 as a point of departure for this section. This section discusses the way adolescents fear rejection from friends if they are seen to be emotionally vulnerable. Research suggests that there is a particularly strong interplay of gender at the core of such fears. It is said to be predominantly males who are faced with a more complex situation in which they fear rejection from peers on the basis of being labelled 'gay' or 'girlie' if they express concerns. I suggest that this may be particularly true of embodied concerns where an interplay of maleness calls for 'having a laugh' and 'not taking yourself too seriously' (Gill, Henwood and McLean, 2005: 54). In this section I discuss the possibility that this perceived lack of interest among males

71

in embodied issues, has led to a disproportionate research focus on female embodiment. Isn't it possible that men have concerns but fear the peer rejection that may come from expressing them?

Adolescents need friendships and relationships not only for proving themselves to be acceptable, but also as a form of emotional support and self-affirmation in the midst of what Hall once described a period of great 'storm and stress' (1904). Cleary refers to the fact that "research now shows that men's' and women's' needs and inputs around friendship are not dissimilar" (2005: 166). However, she also acknowledges that men have particular problems around same-sex friendships as a result of a traditional male schooling in displays of self-sufficiency where "any kind of confessional disclosure would likely be rejected by other men" (2005: 167). It is arguable that because of the type of fragile relationships discussed in the previous section, both male and females may fear that any type of emotional disclosure in a relationship might later fall into a more public arena with the possible dissolution of the relationship. However, perhaps it is still seen to be more natural for females to be concerned with emotional issues. Indeed, according to Ging, the adolescent males who participated in her recent study were well aware of the dialogic differences between males and females when it came to discussing emotions. The males involved perceived -

> Women as more mature, more complex, more emotional and better at dealing with problems than men on account of their ability to talk. Men, on the other hand, were often described as insecure, immature and unable to show their emotions. (Ging, 2005: 40)

While these two fresh studies point to a certain amount of active research on Irish males, there is a dearth of material relating to Irish male embodiment and to adolescent male embodiment. One British study states that -

> It is something of an irony that while representations of men's bodies have become a pervasive feature of the visual landscape, in sociological research men themselves remain largely invisible and unheard on the topic. (Gill, Henwood and McLean, 2005: 41)

Feminists have long since been advocating that women are targeted more by powerful discourses on body image, despite the emergence of a vast male imagery within consumer culture which was discussed in Chapter One. Feminists continue to suggest that feelings of embodied invalidation are female issues. Frost refers to research by Fombonne, 1995; Ransley, 1999; Favazza, 1998; House et al., 1999; Philips, 1996; Grogan, 1999 and states that all of these studies describe body dysmorphia and dissatisfaction as being predominantly female concerns. After all for girls "expressing dislike of their bodies is common" (Frost, 2005: 64). Frost even goes so far as to suggest that -

> Having recognised... that: 'Women are of course the most clearly trapped in the narcissistic, self-surveillance world of images' (Featherstone, 1991: 179), it may be that there is a tendency to theoretically underestimate the extent to which relations between body and self are gender specific. (2005: 71)

However, given new research that stresses male reluctance to express any emotional concerns, is it possible that just because males fail to express concerns surrounding their embodiment, this does not mean that concerns do not exist? The field research of this study will explore this possibility.

I am suggesting, therefore, that the disproportionate amount of research which exists, exploring female embodiment has emerged out of the reality that females constantly express concerns about their embodied capital. Conversely, it is possible that there is a public perception that males do not need research to investigate their bodily concerns, because they rarely refer to having such concerns. My question is whether we can imply from this that those concerns are not present or whether males fear the peer rejection which may result from revealing such concerns. After all, Cleary holds that -

> Relatively little is known about male emotion, as it is not a well researched area, but an implication from existing studies is that male and female emotions may not be so distinct (Frosh et al., 2002). Rather, it is the expression of emotions which is highly gendered and controlled. (2005: 157)

An unwillingness on the part of many males to express emotions has lead certain commentators to refer to this as a 'male crisis' (Connell, 2005a: 11; Connell, 2005b, 840; Beynon, 2002: 75). For Beynon, this is enhanced by the evolving structure of work where women are seen breaking through glass ceilings, the rise of feminist and heterosexual movements, male emotional illiteracy, male suicide rates surpassing those of females, male health problems, a shorter life expectancy, underachievement in school and overrepresentation in crime rates (cited in Haywood, Popoviciu and Mac an Ghaill, 2005: 195). Should the body have a stronger place on such lists as a source of concern for males? According to Connell, it is not only essential that "masculinities be understood as embodied but also that the interweaving of embodiment and social context be addressed" among males (2005b: 851). This research

74

investigation will explore the existence of context constraints on gendered embodiment.

According to Blood there are complex meanings attached to what "woman express through their talk about their bodies" (2005: 45). It is arguable that through linguistic expressiveness, women use language of the body to accomplish the meaning and collective interpretation of their utterances within their specific peer context (Potter and Wetherell, 1987 cited in Blood, 2005: 61). If expressively using language is so important to the construction of meaning, then two questions need to be posed in relation to adolescent males. Do adolescent males fail to construct embodied meaning? This is unlikely. Or does the male interplay which causes verbal limitations in expression, lead to different modes of construction? If so it would be intriguing to know what they are.

Perhaps male youths construct embodied meaning through the type of highly physical sporting activities discussed in Section 2.3, which commentators deem to be so important to males. Is it possible that secondary schooling continues to teach males to self-express though bodily actions rather than bodily emotions? This would certainly tie in with Cleary's findings that "men don't reveal problems because this is not behaviour that is associated with being a man"; revealing difficulties is associated with weakness, while the performance of masculinity is about strength (2005: 160). The young males in Ging's study pointed out this exact process of emotional suppression and physical expression also. She notes that -

> While participants were often critical of the constraints
> imposed on boys to suppress emotion and act hard, they also
> seemed to derive considerable pleasure from the performance
> of tough, blokish masculinity. (2005: 41)

The notion of 'bodies as weapons' (Messner, 2002) and 'bodies in battle' (Frank, 1991) which were used to understand the importance of highly physical, contact team sports in semiformal subsystems, re-emerge. For Cleary the exhibition of strength, "the presentation of a strong masculinity identity, must seem effortless, and must fit seamlessly into one's projection of identity" (2005: 162). Kehily and Nayak make a similar point about the importance of how males are schooled on macho masculinity, within a playground game of 'punch-'n'-run' (1997: 137). They suggest that such games -

> Had the effect of creating heterosexual hierarchies within
> males cultures where 'macho' lads were sees as 'proper' boys
> and other males were subordinated. (ibid)

An embattled manhood is, thus validated through shows of strength, while vulnerable, emotional males are often rendered invalid and rejected.

It is arguable that adolescent males must constantly negotiate the complex practice of concealing any latent bodily concerns with displays of tough masculinity. Simply for males, talking about the body, and particularly bodily concerns, may appear feminine or gay and therefore risks peer rejection. In Cleary's findings -

> Disclosure of difficulties was viewed as un-masculine, as
> implying weakness and this was associated with feminine or
> homosexual type behaviour. (2005: 155)

In terms of the physical structure of the body, while the homosexual man and the heterosexual man both appear to equate embodied capital with the 'aesthetic-athletic' body, it is possible that Ireland remains a particularly homophobic society, with Irish schools remaining particularly homophobic institutions (Lynch and Lodge, 2002; Norman et al, 2006). The overtly heterosexual body is still dominant in schools, according to Swain's research.

> The dominant bodies were inevitably heterosexual bodies, for masculinity and heterosexuality are entwined and to be a 'real' boy is to be heterosexual. Thus, boys at the bottom of the pupil hierarchy were often positioned and controlled by feminising them, and by using the strategy of homophobic abuse. (Swain, 2003: 309)

Young males are often given an inferior status if deemed to be overtly gay by other males (Lynch and Lodge, 2002). According to Mac an Ghaill, the identity of gay adolescent males is synonymous with a deviance from hetero-normative culture (1994). By the same token, if talking about bodily concerns appears gay then this also deviates from hetero-normative culture. Given that the actual physical type for the heterosexual and homosexual body are largely similar perhaps it is not the body image which is complex, but rather the male interplay which interprets body image. For Connell it appears that "masculinity' represents not a certain type of man but, rather, a way that men position themselves through discursive practices" (2005b: 841). In order to avoid peer rejection, therefore, it appears that male adolescents may be constantly considering what they can and cannot do and what they can and cannot say to achieve male validation

This section has focused on a complex reality which adolescent males may find themselves in. The literature documented in Section 2.3 of this Chapter, pointed to the importance of activities which facilitate displays of male strength and ability, for male validation among peers. However, this section has suggested that male adolescents may feel that any revelation of a more vulnerable and emotional maleness might lead to peer labelling, rejection and abandonment. I propose that this reluctance may exist in relation to bodily concerns. If this is the case then the peer interplay that exists among adolescent males places them in a more complex situation than adolescent females. This is because males may come to fear the consequences of expressing bodily concerns more than they fear living with undisclosed bodily concerns.

## 2.7 'Invalid' Embodiment as a Cause of Rejection

Within this section I look at the complexity of peer interplay which leads to the rejection of adolescents who are seen to project an invalid embodied identity. Therefore, while the last section discussed the possible rejection of those who talk about feelings of invalid embodiment, this section is concerned with rejection on the basis of the visually 'invalid' body itself. This perceived 'invalidity' may come from falling too far either side of what is said to be a 'valid' and acceptable body form, for example, for having a body which is

unacceptably smaller or unacceptably larger than the 'aesthetic-athletic' body. In this section I use Goffman's notion of 'stigma' (1963b) to provide a theoretical understanding of why certain individuals are rejected and how this process of rejection might occur.

I have also acknowledged that expressing embodied concerns may act as a collective focal point for females but may act to exclude males. It is now necessary to develop an understanding of the way in which males and females who lack embodied capital are actually rejected and perhaps stigmatised, particularly within their school settings. According to Goffman our every day interactions inevitably present to us people who possess attributes which we believe to be undesirable, even bad, dangerous or weak (1963b). As opposed to the intermediary who communicates popular embodied capital, Goffman holds that we make a downward estimation of the 'imperfect' individual. They are "thus reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" (Goffman, 1963b: 12-13). A stigma "constitutes a special discrepancy between the virtual and actual social identity" (ibid). Goffman continues by stating that stigma may arise from what is deemed to be an 'abnormal' social practice, personal characteristic or abomination of the body. As Chapter One outlined, some form of the 'aesthetic-athletic' body; a combination of Baudrillard's body of phryneism and athleticism (1998), appears to have attained a status of truth within dominant discourses such as advertising. This is the body which is communicative (Frank, 1991) by virtue of its disciplined and sculpted perfection. However, falling too far either side

of the 'aesthetic-athletic' body may be sufficient to become classified as stigmatised. This is particularly the case with the body because unlike some stigmas relating to an individual's personality, practices or past experiences, bodily stigmas are highly visible.

> Visibility, of course, is a crucial factor. That which can be told about an individual's social identity at all times during his daily round and by all persons he encounters therein will be of great importance to him. (Goffman, 1963b: 65)

Although Goffman wrote about a male context, this research asks whether both male and female adolescents who deviate too far from the socially valid body are tormented by this deviation? It is possible the literature actually underestimates the extent to which they are and this will be explored in detail in the findings of this research.

Individuals in general are highly reflexive, aware through interaction of any differences which they embody. For Goffman, the standards the stigmatised individual has "incorporated from the wider society equip him to be intimately alive to what others see as his failings" (1963b: 17-18). Surely those young male and female youths who possess unacceptable embodied capital are aware of what their peers think of them? Thomas is of the belief that "cultural reactions to bodies that have something permanently 'wrong' with them range from disgust and abhorrence to heartfelt pity" (2003: 64). Individuals may be viewed by peers as entirely responsible for the possession of such an 'invalid' body form. Goffman has stated that their failure to achieve a goal of embodied acceptability may cause others to "impute a wide range of

imperfections on the basis of the original one" (1963b: 15-16). According to

Frost's interpretation of Goffman -

> Because the opinion formed by those making the judgements does not stop at immediate presentation, but inevitably imputes certain characteristics and personality features on the basis of initial presentation, the discrediting of the person is not limited to the superficial but takes in the whole identity. (2005: 80)

It will certainly be interesting to examine whether the adolescents in this study feel that those who are deemed to have an inadequate body, are responsible for such inadequacy and if further inadequacies are related to their entire identity on the basis of their body. A recent study by Monaghan suggests that being labelled 'fat' targets the whole body and even indicates the character of the individual. According to Monaghan -

> Fat is not a four-letter word, but it is often intended, and received, as a term of abuse. This is compounded by what I call *bodyism* – the cultural belief that the whole body, perhaps more so than the face (Synnott, 1989), reflects individual character. The 'f' word is therefore less than ideal. (2005: 83)

Whether labelling a person as 'fat' is intended as a form of abuse or not, there is some intention involved in even using 'fat' as a form of description. The word itself suggests a deviation from what is normal and divides 'normals' and 'abnormals' into two groups on the basis of their embodied differences.

If those who possess an invalid body are seen to be responsible for their own 'invalidity', then Goffman also makes them responsible for their acceptance. Goffman places much responsibility for integration on the stigmatised and asks them to remember the following -

Normals mean no harm; when they do, it is because they don't know better...Slights, snubs and untactful remarks should not be answered in kind. Either no notice should be taken or the stigmatised individual should make an effort at sympathetic re-education of the normals, showing him, point for point, quietly and with delicacy, that in spite of appearance the stigmatised individual is, underneath it all, a fully-human being. (Goffman, 1963b: 141)

Goffman goes on to suggest that at other points the stigmatised should try to break the ice with normals and may even refer to their 'difference' as a serious topic of conversation as a means of doing this (1963b: 141-143). Again full responsibility is placed on the stigmatised individual for their own 'integration' into normal groups. It is arguable that in the present day context, 'integration' should be replaced by 'inclusion', which places more responsibility with normals to accept the stigmatised rather than expecting the stigmatised to justify their inclusion. Goffman places little responsibility with normals for the process of stigmatisation through his suggestion that they intend no harm. However, whether the word 'fat' be used as a form of description or abuse, there is an intention present and as Monaghan suggests this intention is often 'received' as abusive (2005: 83), such is our perception of the fat body as deviant. Conner and Armitage point to an early schooling in bodily stigmatisation and to the level of stigmatisation that the overweight body actually encounters.

[This prejudice] begins in childhood, with children preferring not to play with overweight peers and assigning negative adjectives to drawings of overweight individuals. In adulthood, overweight individuals tend to be rated as less active and athletic, but also less intelligent, hardworking, successful and popular...Such negative views of the overweight individual appear to be particularly common in

individualistic cultures where individuals are held responsible for their own fate. (Connor and Armitage, 2000: 77-78)

Lynch and Lodge note they way in which small, thin and particularly overweight boys are teased and bullied in school, with a superior masculine status given to those with strong and powerful bodies (1999). In this research, I will investigate whether Goffman has underestimated the overt, vocal, intentional and confrontational nature of stigmatisation in some instances. Goffman recognises that, "'mixed contacts'- the moments when stigmatised and normal are in the same 'social situation'" (Goffman, 1963b: 23) can often be the cause of much tension for those on both sides and "the very anticipation of such contacts can of course lead normals and the stigmatised to arrange life so as to avoid them" (ibid). This gives rise to a number of questions which I propose to answer during the field investigation. Firstly, is it possible for adolescents with perceived 'normal or abnormal', 'valid or invalid' bodies to avoid contact with one another when they share a localised setting such as a school? Secondly, do 'normals' want to avoid contact when the stigmatisation of others may be useful in detracting from their own inadequacies? Thirdly, do adolescents who are rejected on the basis of their bodies really want to remain excluded or do they try to implement measures which may lead to contact and inclusion? Indeed, in his study on young males Swain indicates the prevalence of the stigmatisation of overweight youths and suggests that these boys try to compensate for this in other ways in an attempt to be included.

The major material bodily difference came from the impression of being overweight, and my data is littered with disparaging references directed to boys and girls being 'a big

83

fat blob', 'fat-boy', 'so fat', 'really fat', and so on. It was a
serious handicap to boys' (or girls') attempts to establish peer
group status, and boys needed to use other strategies and
resources in order to compensate for it. (Swain, 2003: 310)

It will certainly be interesting to see if this study of the Irish context reveals similar findings to Swain's UK study.

It is quite credible that adolescents, who are rejected within 'normal' peer groups, feel more comfortable forming peer groups with other stigmatised adolescents. Whether the stigmatised individual chooses to stick with those of like stigma or to remove the self from social contact altogether, such steps may emerge from the fact that for the stigmatised individual "the immediate presence of normals" may cause "self-hate and self-derogation...when only he and a mirror are about" (Goffman, 1963b: 18). Just as Bourdieu describes the new petite bourgeoisie as incessantly self-analytical and self-critical of their presentation (1984), I have suggested from Chapter One that so too are adolescents. Failure to self-evaluate and alter accordingly can have huge consequences for acceptance within subsystems. Adolescents, therefore, are highly reflexive and aware of their embodiment. Stigmatisation and even the possibility of it must be seen to augment this self-reflexivity even more, making the type of 'latent' or disappearing body which Leder (1990) talks about almost impossible. Leder's self can periodically forget that he or she is embodied. However, according to Shilling even Leder identifies stigma as a reality which makes individuals truly conscious of their embodiment.

If the properly functioning body recedes from our
consciousness, however, Leder also recognizes that pain,
illness or the embarrassment caused by 'slips' or 'gaffes'

84

(Goffman, 1956) can make the body *reappear* with a vengeance. (Shilling, 2003: 184)

If Goffman is correct, then it is worrying that even those who actively work on the body, turning invalid embodied capital into valid embodied capital may still fail to attain embodied validation and peer acceptance. Therefore, attempting to 'pass' as a normal (Goffman, 1963b, 1967) can be somewhat pointless. Such is the nature of stigma that even when self-reflexivity and self-hate have driven the repair of stigma, this is insufficient for acceptance.

> Where such repair is possible, what often results is not the acquisition of fully normal status, but a transformation of self from someone with a particular blemish into someone with a record of having corrected a particular blemish. (Goffman, 1963b: 19-20)

Thus, this reality points to the fact that blemished, invalid adolescent bodies may have two problems with fitting into peer groups. Firstly, the self may face problems with being accepted within groups on the basis of their embodied capital. Secondly, society may have such a problem with the unregulated body and its significance for entire self-identity that even regulating the body may be insufficient for social validation.

### 2.8 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the peer interplay which characterises adolescence. Acceptance within independent peer groups may be seen as a vital part of certifying one's identity during adolescence, but it is possible that the complexity of this process is largely underestimated. Furthermore, it is possible

that the extent to which acceptance within a wide range of activities and groups is actually dependent on embodied capital is also significantly underestimated. Therefore, a number of questions have emerged with regard to the sufficiency of some present analyses of peer interplay during adolescence.

I have suggested that adolescents may be equated with Bourdieu's 'new petite bourgeoisie' or 'cultural intermediaries' (1984). Both groups can be seen to be highly self-reflexive and self-conscious. They are greatly concerned with being schooled on the presentation and representation of popular forms of culture capital and communicating this to others. However, this asks us to question exactly how important acceptance among peers is during adolescence and how does their communication of cultural capital lead to peer acceptance? I have also suggested a reality whereby one form of cultural capital, either 'institutional, objectified or embodied' (Bourdieu, 1984) may be less desirable than another. In this instance, is it possible that there is a complex process of balancing cultural capital for adolescents and can one form of cultural capital neutralise another?

This chapter has outlined the importance which social commentators have placed on sport as a highly communicative and popular activity for teenagers, and especially young males. If this is true then it immediately elevates the importance of embodied capital for young men. It also calls into question the degree to which sport can lead to embodied validation and simultaneously social validation and whether females also rely on sport for validation?

I have proposed that if maintaining one's place on a prestigious team is largely dependent on embodied capital, can this be true of adolescent relationships also? It is possible that possessing a valid and desirable body form allows certain adolescents access to relationships, but does this in turn mean that the relationship becomes fragile if embodied capital lessens? Finally, I have suggested that it is not only in romantic relationships, but within friendship groups that adolescents may encounter rejection on the basis of having an 'invalid' body or perhaps simply for expressing concern about having a perceived 'invalid' body. Is it true that adolescents are rejected on the basis of having an undesirable body? If so, what desperately needs to be answered is: what are the emotional consequences of such peer rejection?

This chapter has outlined the peer interplay which surrounds adolescent acceptance, and which demands that they are constantly balancing, estimating, implementing and communicating very precise forms of cultural capital. Social validation is attained on the basis of peer acceptance within certain activities and groups and this in turn acts as a form of embodied validation for youths. Embodied validation, above all else, may be communicated via the harsh reality that those with undesirable bodies are rejected as 'invalid'. Thus, Chapter Three focuses on the lengths which adolescents go to to obtain a 'valid' body. While this chapter has looked at embodied validation through social validation, the subsequent chapter focuses on the magnitude of self-validation through embodied validation.

# Chapter Three: The Complexity of Contemporary Contradictions and Physical Regulation

## 3.1 Introduction

This chapter is primarily concerned with the complexity of contradictions which adolescents face. Chapter One has identified how youths are schooled on the 'valid' body within consumer culture and this is presented as a slim and sculpted form. Chapter Two has highlighted the importance of displaying a 'valid' body for social validation within adolescents' secondary school and peer networks. In this chapter, I discuss how attaining a 'valid' body and the process by which it is attained may lead to self-validation. However, the foods that adolescents meet in contemporary consumerism present them with complex contradictions, whereby it has never been harder to be overweight, yet it has never been easier to become overweight.

I propose that the process of physical regulation may be an attempt by adolescents to school themselves in ways to overcome social contradictions. In spite of the present popularity of new foods and eating patterns, therefore, this chapter focuses on the problem which society has with the unregulated body and the problem which the unregulated body faces within society. Physical regulation and possibly, 'modification' may be seen as a solution to societal and individual demands.

The physically regulated body may be said to carry a status of embodied validation. Thus, on the basis of this body form and the disciplining process undertaken to achieve it, I suggest that this may impute a sense of control, achievement and self-validation within adolescents. I focus on exercise, and

specifically individual exercise regimes, as a regulating route for adolescents. However, I also propose that physical regulation is not without its complexities because the corporeality of the body ensures that it is not an object that can simply be regulated and transformed over and above the body's own corporeal capabilities and limitations.

## 3.2 Food as a Contemporary Contradiction

Chapter Two has clearly outlined the possible peer rejection which overweight adolescents may be confronted with. In light of this, this present section focuses on a complex contradiction which youths encounter within the food industry. Inviting and enticing foods appear to surround adolescents' worlds. In addition to this, I discuss eating as a social occasion for adolescents and as a method of attaining self-validation through control of their own food intake. However, the over-consumption of certain foods is likely to create adolescent bodies which physically deviate from the disciplined 'aesthetic-athletic' body.

Fast food companies have spread out to cover almost every corner of the world at this point in time (although to a lesser degree in the majority world). No one can deny that one of their most striking features is the way in which they target the younger population. Schlosser is of the opinion that from a very early age food companies target children, schooling them in the attractiveness of their products. He believes that "the aim of most children's advertising is straightforward: get kids to nag their parents and nag them well" (Schlosser, 2002: 43). For parents whose time for domestic chores is scarce and who possibly feel guilty for spending less time with their children, fast food may act as a treat which aims to keep everyone

happy. For fast food companies such as McDonalds and Burger King, the fact that such little effort has been spent on children's recreational facilities especially in Ireland, offers them a niche in the market where the establishment of play areas and the distribution of toys provides adventure within a secure setting. While such toy promotions may not rate highly among most adolescents, it is in the early socialisation of the child that such promotions encourage young children to develop a taste for the products and a loyalty to the company which carries into adolescents and far beyond.

Even outside of the actual restaurant, fast food companies are attempting to associate themselves with schooling youths. Apparently unable to obtain adequate sponsorship from other bodies, the GAA's Cumann na mBunscoil 'Life and Strike' programme in 2004, for example, was funded the old reliable fast food empire 'McDonalds'. GAA equipment was sent to youths all over Ireland with the McDonalds logo embezzled on it. For a State which is supposedly taking steps to prevent the advertising of fast food by companies without adequate warning of its dangers, its blatant permission of the association of such companies with sport seems an obvious hypocrisy. Teen idol Justin Timberlake was used in the advertising campaign for this GAA and McDonald's programme. This is contradictory for youths who clearly see how both the athletic GAA body and indeed, Justin Timberlake's fit and toned body, lie in total opposition to the body which experts suggest will emerge through excessive eating of fast food.

Fast foods and junk foods have also made their way into school canteens. While Irish schools have not yet adopted the same trend as in the United States where McDonald's, Pizza Hut and Domino's are now supplying food for over a

quarter of cafeterias in public high schools, certain literature suggests that it is similar types of food which are largely supplied within Irish second level schools.

> The canteens of secondary schools are depressingly similar. They all serve huge portions of junk food. I estimate that a typical child consumes more then 2,000 calories during the school day. The calories come in the form of chocolate muffins and fizzy drinks bought from the school canteen, and in chocolate bars and crisps sold in the school vending machines. (Childs, *Telegraph Weekend,* 2003)

For youths who like sweets, bars, crisps and cakes and who are perpetually surrounded by just one more encouraging reason to consume them, the equally prevalent message of their effects, declares a juxtaposing war between euphoria and despair within many adolescents. It is possible that it is at this point that 'guilty eating' emerges among adolescents as it appears to among the population at large. Bordo has given an invaluable account of the dynamics involved in guilty eating, yet fails to address this as a male as well as female phenomenon, particularly where perceived over-eating is concerned. Bordo portrays male eating as shameless. In her description of a quite patriarchal setting, men are predominantly served, waited on and expected to consume "Hungry Man Dinners" (Bordo, 1993: 108). Men shamelessly eat man-sized foods, while the guilt and shame of such eating prompts women to greatly restrict their eating. Given the labelling and social rejection which the unregulated body may face, however, isn't it possible that both genders experience a love-hate relationship with food? This is an issue I intend to explore.

Far from promoting a cultural ideal of health and beauty, over-consumption of certain foods has created a disease, which ails the self physically, psychologically and socially. The over-fed body lies in complete contradiction to the 'aesthetic-athletic' body which holds a status of truth and validity within popular discourses. Nonetheless, the general expansion of the food market

92

encourages adolescents to try more, enjoy more: live a little. For the adolescent population, the localisation of global food choices and the cultural capital associated with eating out as a cosmopolitan practice, accompanied by increased autonomy and financial independence, has made lunching and dining with friends an essential exercise. Nowadays in Baudrillard's view "people want to accept everything, eat everything, touch everything. Looking, deciphering, studying doesn't move them" any longer (1982: 10). Within this 'hypermarket of culture' (Baudrillard) the adolescent as 'new petite bourgeoisie' negotiates the cultural symbolism attached to an array of foods and eating patterns. The self is schooled on which should be incorporated into one's social practices. For Shilling "the consumption of food is connected to one of the most basic needs of human beings, the need to eat, yet it is also a major *source* of sociality" 2005: 153). Adolescents attain independence through responsibility for their own food intake yet this must be done within a regulated framework.

At many points in this dissertation I have suggested that adolescents are highly self-reflexive and constantly aware of the imperfections of their own bodies. Therefore, is it possible that adolescents passively continue to consume food, unaware of the consequences for their embodied capital? The possibility of peer rejection, social humiliation, as well as personal guilt means that youths may at any given moment be negotiating how to create a positive body image. If this is the case might youths be intensely aware of their bodies given that the social schooling of the body confirms the undesirability of the unregulated body and associates it with personal failure? This study will explore participating adolescents' answers to such complex questions. Perhaps they will confirm Gill, Henwood and McLean's study which found that –

> Discourse sets up the individual to discipline their own body, and finds them morally culpable if they fail. They are deemed not simply to look unattractive, but to be moral failures, and are censured for their transgression: they let themselves go. This was seen most clearly in relation to getting fat, which attracted great disapproval. (2005: 55)

Thus, regardless of food intake, adolescents are expected to be able to regulate their own bodies.

In this section I have identified the growth of the food industry and the promises it may hold for adolescents. Eating provides youths with enticing, enjoyable foods. It can provide self-validation through independence over one's own food intake and social validation through eating as a practice which unites peers within a particular cultural setting. However, I have suggested that the reality of becoming overweight and the consequences which this may bring, also presents eating as a guilty pleasure for adolescents. Physical regulation offers a solution to the contradiction between over-eating and valid embodiment among an adolescent population who are most probably well aware of society's condemnation of the unregulated body and of the condemnation facing the unregulated body in society.

## 3.3 Society's Problem with the Unregulated Body

This section focuses on the status of worth which social institutions apply to the regulated body. Equally, it examines society's problem with the unregulated body and its condemnation of it. I use theories provided by Foucault, Turner and Bordo to attempt to provide reasons why the unregulated body faces condemnation and to offer accounts of social measures to regulate the body in the interests of society.

Worked upon by discourse, each and every regulated body has social meaning inscribed upon it, according to Foucault (1977). The monitored and

controlled body becomes a display, invested with certain properties and inserted into regimes of truth through the operations of power and knowledge. As Foucault himself puts it -

> One must be concerned with the 'body politic', as a set of material elements and techniques that serve as weapons, relays, communication routes and supports for power and knowledge relations that invest human bodies and subjugate them by turning them into objects of knowledge. (Foucault, 1977: 28)

The unregulated body is a problem for social institutions in Foucault's work. Foucault holds that individuals normalise regulatory practices of their own bodies as a result of being constantly schooled in such practices through surveillance. However, once the feeling of being watched has been internalised and individuals begin to discipline themselves accordingly, the practice of disciplining simply becomes normal. In this sense the mind almost becomes decentred from a complacent body which simply regulates itself out of habit. According to Foucault the complacent, controlled body was extremely obvious within schools in the 1700's.

> At the last stroke of the hour, a pupil will ring the bell, and at the first sound of the bell all the pupils will kneel, with their arms crossed and their eyes lowered. When the prayer has been said, the teacher will strike the signal once to indicate that the pupils should get up, a second time as a sign that they should salute Christ, and a third that they should sit down. (La Salle, 1783: 27-28)

After 'normalisation' of regulation becomes standard behaviour, according to Foucault, and the body almost instantaneously polices itself without any need for conscious instruction. Foucault truly describes the body as a social construction, where social discourses normalise their power within bodies. It may be suggested, however, that Foucault neglects two essential elements for understanding body regulation among adolescents and indeed, all individuals.

Firstly, it must be stressed that bodies do not regulate themselves. Even the most habitual tasks demand instruction from the mind. Therefore, adolescents' bodies do not simply regulate their eating or exercising without mindful instruction to do so. Normalisation of regulation can only take place when the agent, constituted by mind and body, view such normalisation as advantageous for their social interaction and not simply because they have been schooled into doing so through an authoritarian gaze fixed upon them. Secondly, although Foucault focuses predominantly on elevating the politics of the body within social thought, his normalisation of regulation tends to neglect the body as a materially subjective, natural or deterministic entity in its own right. For example, Foucault identifies military training as one of the principal sites from which arose normalising "techniques for regulating the body, not by external threat or coercion, but by acquired, internalised modes of operation" (McNay, L, 1992: 35). While Foucault once referred to the soldier as someone born with certain attributes -

> By the late eighteenth century, the soldier has become something that can be made; out of a formless clay, an inapt body, the machine required can be constructed; posture is gradually corrected; a calculated constraint runs slowly through each part of the body, mastering it, making it pliable, ready at all times, turning silently into the automatism of habit; in short, one has 'got rid of the peasant' and given him 'the air of a soldier'. (Foucault, 1977: 135)

It is, however, almost impossible to view the body as an object of discipline which simply complies with regulation, without reference to its own unique makeup and diverse desires.

As with the account of Foucault given in Chapter One, it must again be stated that Foucault's inclusion of agency and a more holistic notion of the body does emerge to some degree in his later work. However, while -

> Foucault's position changes in his later volumes... in which individual agency and the material body come into view...

96

problems of discursive reductionism characterize what have been
the most popular developments of Foucault's analysis. (Shilling,
2005: 72)

Despite some of the shortfalls of Foucault's work, the notion of the unregulated body as a problem for society has been widely adopted, particularly by Bryan Turner and Susan Bordo.

Turner does not refer specifically to either institution or discourse but rather formulates his own unique structure through which 'the problem of the body' (1984, 1992) can be understood. According to Turner different social sub-systems target the internal and external regulation of the body. Here the body is regulated by culture and for culture. Bordo follows a similar social constructionist Foucauldianism in suggesting that, "our bodies, no less than anything else that is human, are constituted by culture" (1993: 142). For Turner, in Western societies "the site of desire is the internal body which is controlled by the rationalized practices of asceticism (such as religious fasting and medical regimen)" (Turner, B, 1996: 67). The primary focus is that "the body of the individual is regulated and organised in the interests of population" (ibid). Concern for the regulation of populations was stimulated by the expansion of urban centres and the increased occupation of females, as well as males, within industry, the marketplace and the public arena in general. Shilling holds that such regulation -

Has been accomplished by what Foucault called 'panopticism'. This
has been defined by Turner (1984: 92) as a mode of control
involving a general increase in societal surveillance, record keeping
and population control which has entailed the bureaucratic
registration of populations and the 'elimination of vagabondism'.
(Shilling, 1993: 91)

For Turner the representation of the external body within social space has largely to do with control of the internal body. For adolescents, for instance, in order to exhibit the 'aesthetic-athletic' body externally, this demands a certain control of

internal desires and natural urges. As far back as the reformation, the threat of projecting an aura of idleness or lack of will power was counteracted by the attainment of a controlled, 'dieted' body. "Dieting, especially among the rich, was the main guarantee of health, mental stability and reason" (Turner, B., 1996: 167). Turner notes how by the eighteenth century George Cheyne became a popular London Physician; a popularity which owed itself to the schooling he offered on dietary regimes for the British elite. For Cheyne, in order to sustain external status, internal regulation was required.

> If a Man has eat or drank so much, as renders him unfit for the Duties and Studies of his profession, he has overdone. Once a proper, regular diet has been established, the professional man has only two further requirements for sound health – (1) 'A Vomit, that can work briskly, quickly and safely' by cleaning, Squeezing and compressing the knotted and tumified Glands of The Prima Viae', (2) 'Great, frequent and continued Exercise'. (Cheyne, 1724: xlviii)

Turner is of the opinion that "practices of the eighteenth-century professional classes have gradually percolated through the social system" and came to "embrace all social groups in a framework of organised eating, drinking and physical training" (Turner, B, 1992: 190). Hence, adolescents who recognise the negative meaning which society places on the unregulated body and wish to overcome this through regulation are simply newcomers to an old social problem.

What has changed over time, however, are the reasons the adolescent may have for attaining a regulated body. I have very briefly outlined these changes in Chapter One by way of explaining changes in the target of discourses of truth over time. It is important to quickly recall this development for this section also. Rather than reading this from the perspective of changes in the authorities controlling discourses of truth, it is necessary to look at the similarities in how bodies have been schooled on the importance of regulation.

To examine the notion of restraint of the internal body Turner turns to the work of Weber, 'the theorist of asceticism', to demonstrate some manifestations of the call for social control over natural bodily desires. In his writing of *'The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism'* (1965), Weber delineates how Protestantism prompted a rational ordering of the body which "was thus protected from the disruptions of desire in the interests of continuous factory production" (Turner, B, 1984: 100). European industrial capitalism, accompanied by a staunch Protestantism, was resolute on the maximisation of production efficiency and so any natural desires with the potential for overruling efficiency had to be controlled or denied. Even prior to this, dating back to a monastic Christianity, the natural flesh was a "symbol of moral corruption which threatened the order of the world" (Turner, B, 1996: 64). In an effort to avoid the social problems which liberated flesh might give rise to "the flesh had to be subdued by disciplines, especially by the regimen of diet and abstinence" (ibid). Protestantism and industrialisation, however, began to see the uncontrolled body less as a problem for society with regard to religious righteousness and more as a problem for industrial production and utility.

> Foucault recognizes that the disciplines of the body in the Benthamite panopticism were anticipated by the monastery. However, there is an important difference since, while monasticism required a renunciation of the body, the modern disciplines of capitalist society requires utility. (Turner, B, 1996:164)

Within both contexts unregulated bodies where condemned, while the regulated body could be validated. Individuals who were able to regulate their bodies for a greater goal could experience self-validation.

For adolescents in the present day context, regulation arises more out of the problems which secular discourses have with the unregulated body. Foucault

recognises that consumerism is the modern equivalent of the monastery and acts as a powerful discourse schooling individuals to "get undressed – but be slim, good looking, tanned!" (Foucault, 1980: 57). According to Turner also -

> In a consumer culture, the body assumes a new social and individual significance. It becomes the site of personal strategies of health. Jogging, slimming and keep-fit programmes are designed to promote health as the basis of the good life. (Turner, B, 1996: 170-171)

Bordo looks at how consumer culture persistently teaches individuals on how bodies should be viewed, where any "softness of bulge comes to be seen as unsightly – as disgusting, disorderly" (Bordo, 1993: 57). "Of course, the only bodies that do not transgress in this way are those that are tightly muscular or virtually skeletal" (ibid).

While both Turner and Bordo, examine regulation of the body through exercising, their main focus is on the dieting body. For Turner it is through the imposition of certain restrictive rules which reject temptations such as food that individual self-esteem is enhanced (1984: 180; 1996: 23 & 170). Turner believes that regulatory regimen are prompted by cultural expectations to fight fat and that they are primarily a protest against consumer temptations. Bordo largely concurs with Turner in suggesting that the goal for women is to overcome the body's natural desire to be tempted. Being able to deny food is a central micro-practice in the education of feminine self-restraint and containment of impulse (Bordo, 1993: 130). Females, she believes are tempted to indulge in forbidden fruits and given the enormity of new foods within which they can indulge, there is only one way to win the game.

> The only way to win this no win game is to go beyond control, to kill off the body's spontaneities entirely – that is, to cease to *experience* hungers and desires. (Bordo, 1993: 146)

100

For Turner and Bordo the regulation of food intake is a 'rebellion against' or 'rejection of' natural desires. However, this gives rise to an important question. Doesn't the notion of adolescents rebelling against food, contradict the literature in Section 3.2 of this chapter, which looks at the growth in the food industry and the possible value of independent eating patterns among adolescents? It neglects the fact that eating -

> Food continues to be used as a way of cementing and maintaining social relationships, and of demarcating certain relationships and identities as distinct and worthy of recognition and others as being low status and morally suspect. (Shilling, 2005: 172)

Hence, this research investigation seeks to examine how exactly the adolescents involved deal with regulation.

Turner gives a detailed examination of the anorexic body as an experience on a continuum with a modern dieting culture which views fat as a social problem (1984, 1992). Bordo holds that anorexia offers a 'crystallisation' of wider regulatory practices in Western society (1993). In addition, both theorists make reference to the work of Bruch (1977) who views body regulation through dieting, as primarily affecting middle-class girls from over-protective families (also Chernin, 1983; Orbach, 1988; Gordon, 1990, 2001; Frost, 2005). The rejection of food, in political terms is seen as a rebellion against maternal care and a quest for autonomy. However, this is a rebellious protest which ultimately leaves such young girls trapped and powerless. This may be credible, yet it fails to account for eating as a social occasion, as pleasure, or as simply a fulfilment of natural desires. The complexity for adolescents arising from such fulfilment, however, is that social condemnation of the unregulated body is always likely to give rise to guilty eating. The question that needs to be answered, therefore, is how adolescents respond in regulatory terms to guilty eating? Perhaps Bordo's account of the

bulimic body is more in line with adolescent responses in that they may not totally reject food. Rather they may consume food and enjoy it, but guilt and a process of compensation follow this.

> Bulimia precisely and explicitly expresses the extreme development of the hunger for unrestrained consumption (exhibited in the bulimic's uncontrollable food binges) existing in unstable tension alongside the requirement that we sober up, 'clean up our act,' get back in firm control on Monday morning (the necessity for purge – exhibited in the bulimic's vomiting, compulsive exercising and laxative purges). (Bordo, 1993: 201)

It is unfortunate that both Turner and Bordo focus primarily on the rejection of food as the means most frequently used, by women in particular, to resolve social problems with the unregulated body. Hence, although Turner and Bordo advance the work of Foucault in conceptualising the body within a modern consumer context, they may be accused of disproportionately focusing on regulation through dieting and on the female body. I have suggested in Section 3.2 that men cannot be excluded from a love-hate relationship with food, such is the lack of social validation given to the overindulgent body. According to Monaghan, men are increasingly showing signs of damage in the war against fat. He notes, "the rise of eating disorders among boys at the same time obesity is rising" (Monaghan, 2005: 83). For these reasons, this study explores adolescents' diverse responses to possible guilty eating and the responses of both boys and girls to such guilty eating.

In this section I have suggested that certain social authorities school on the condemnation of the unregulated body and that this is not a new phenomenon. Self-validation through the regulated body has stemmed from the monastery, to the factory, to the shopping mall. According to theories by Foucault, Turner and Bordo, unruly flesh has long since signified a lack of will power, where the only

102

means of attaining validation is to overcome the body's natural desires. However, I have proposed chiefly in this section that theories which advocate the suppression of desires, fail to account for the possible importance of eating among adolescents. Therefore, the main question which needs to be addressed within a society, which clearly condemns the unregulated body, is: how exactly do adolescents deal with the contradiction of indulging yet regulating?

## 3.4 Adolescents' Problem with having an Unregulated Body in Society

While Section 3.3 has examined society's problems with and condemnation of the unregulated body, this section looks at the need to regulate from the perspective of the individual, rather than society. In terms of the structure and agency debate, therefore, the last section was concerned with a structural perspective on physical regulation, while this section is concerned with the agent's perspective on physical regulation within a structural setting. Theories from Goffman and Frank are helpful for understanding the complexities which the individual with an unregulated body faces within society and how they attempt to overcome these through regulatory practices.

It may be suggested that Turner does not successfully develop a true sense of agency within his framework of 'the social problem of the body' (1984, 1992, 1996) at a structural and social system level. Bordo does allude to a form of agency, but keeps her primary focus Foucauldian and structural. Goffman, on the other hand, is less concerned with the structural aspect of dualism which emphasises society's problem with the unregulated body. He attempts to forefront the agent some degree in his examination of the problem of the unregulated body

103

for the individual within society. Through an examination of 'stigma' a significant account has already been made of Goffman's understanding of the problems individuals face in society when they have an unregulated or 'invalid' body. However, the way he incorporates agency into body regulation is worth addressing briefly.

According to Frost, unlike much work on the sociology of the body, Goffman's work does not focus on the body as "the intersection between the self and society, but on the interactively produced social self as a presentation or performance" (2005: 65). Goffman might propose that bodies are not schooled through imposed structures but through interaction. For Goffman, individuals use their schooling on the body to enhance their social status and social performances. It must be noted that Goffman does not remove the body from social constructionism, in that self presentations and performances are influenced by a social 'interaction order' or 'shared vocabularies of body idiom' (1963a, 1967). However, like Giddens' notion of language as enabling (1991), so too are shared vocabularies of body idiom. They provide a medium through which individual bodies are enacted and validated. In short, Goffman's focus is on how individuals manage their bodies in an attempt to overcome the problems which they face in society. They are never 'invested' with regulatory discourses from authoritarian structures. For Goffman, physical regulation is not demanded by structures such as the monastery, the factory, or the shopping outlet, but rather by the individuals so that they can validate their embodied schooling within social interaction. Within Goffman's work, adolescents may wish to regulate their bodies to improve their everyday presentations and performances among peers and acquaintances. Regulation is for the betterment of the individual within the population, rather than

for the good of the population itself (Foucault, Turner). Frost looks at Goffman's theory of the body as a means of understanding agency among young women. Within Goffman's framework -

> She is neither the victim of, for example, consumer capitalism and/or patriarchy and/or media pressure, not the wilful perpetrator or 'own worst enemy' within the beauty system, but engaged in an interactive social process essential to identity formation, which she *must* engage with. (Frost, 2005: 66-67)

Goffman includes a form of agency later neglected in a focus on consumerism, patriarchy, the media and self-repression (Foucault, Turner, Bordo). Goffman gives an invaluable sense of subjective agency to the body which is essential for comprehending the regulatory actions of adolescents carried out by them to overcome complexities such as 'guilty eating'. However, he may also be criticised in terms of his disregard for the corporeal nature of the body. Each individual body is uniquely constituted with limitations and capabilities, therefore making the agent dependent on the natural and deterministic body in a way which Goffman fails to explore.

Arthur Frank achieves agentic bodies by spinning Turner's framework for bodily order within structure on its head to emphasise the embodied agent rather than structure. Even Turner acknowledges Frank's criticisms and writes –

> I moved theoretically downwards towards the body from the level of the societal, whereas an alternative and perhaps prior orientation would be to start with the body's problems for itself. He (Frank) argues that 'I propose instead to begin with how the body is a problem *for itself,* which is an action problem rather then a system problem, proceeding from a phenomenological orientation rather than a functional one'. (Turner, B., 1992: 59)

Some of Frank's 'action problems' for the body in society have already come to the fore in Chapters One and Two through his 'mirroring', 'communicative' and

'dominating' bodies (1991). However, Frank's 'disciplining' body is most applicable to this discussion on body regulation.

Frank also adds a sense of corporeality absent from Goffman's notion of agency. The individuals in Frank's work as truly embodied, in that agency is as dependent on the body as it is on the mind. Frank speaks of agents who depend on the body to carry out tasks.

> Bodies alone have '*tasks.*' Social systems may provide the context in which these tasks are defined, enacted, and evaluated, but social systems themselves have no 'tasks' (see Haines 1988: 164). The theoretical problem is to show how social systems are built up from the tasks of bodies, which then allows us to understand how bodies can experience their tasks as imposed by a system. (Frank, 1991: 48)

Frank is of the opinion that the 'disciplined' body carries out tasks of making itself predictable. Through regulatory regimen the body undergoes a self-schooling in it's own corporeal limitations and capabilities. For adolescents, therefore, physical regulation such as exercising, for example, may help them to cope with the sense of embodied 'lacking' which they feel within society. It may help them to cope with the lack of self-validation which arises from 'guilty eating'. Frank holds that disciplining regimes do not attempt to remedy the problem of lacking but to "forestall total disintegration" (Frank, 1991: 55). For example, adolescents for Frank may view their bodies as somewhat lacking in relation to 'valid' embodiment and the body copes with this through making itself predictable.

> With regard to control, the disciplined body makes itself *predictable* through its regimentation. So long as the regimen is followed, the body can believe itself to be predictable; thus being predictable is both the medium and the outcome of regimentation. (Frank, 1991: 55)

Frank's bodily regimes give a sense of control and order to the body. Through the body's own tasks it shields itself from the instability of total disintegration and

deregulation. Within Frank's work the corporeal body is given credit for its work as an agent in protecting and producing itself. Agency is not given over to the mind as it ultimately is with Goffman and Giddens, but the body is recognised for solving its own 'action problems' (Frank) and working towards the validation of the whole embodied self. Hence, even though Frank views bodily tasks to be imposed by the system and therefore embraces the social construction of the body, he ultimately points to a situation whereby true 'embodiment' (i.e. a co-dependent mind and body), can be witnessed.

In this section, I have focused on the problems which individuals face with being unregulated within society. The section has also looked at the theoretical perspectives that address the tasks of physical regulation which the body schools itself in how to cope with such problems.

### 3.5 'Exercising' to Create a Physically Regulated Body

This section examines 'exercise regimes' as a task used to create a body which is physically regulated. I draw on the work of Crossley to establish a way of looking at exercise regimes, which sees adolescents as both 'mindful' and 'corporeal' agents. I view exercise in the context of individualised exercise regimes and will locate these within the gym or gym like settings. It is arguable that it is necessary to question the type of interaction that takes place within gym like settings and the implications of this for individual physical regulation and uniquely embodied adolescents.

It is necessary to view physical regulation among adolescents as an action which is truly 'embodied'. In this sense bodies are objects of mindful intentions

and social influence and also subjects of their own materialism and physiology. According to Shilling, while the body itself has been largely absent from the sociology of the body, Crossley has resurrected it.

> Crossley's call was timely as it coincided with a growing feeling that while theories of the body illuminated the *Korper* (the structural, objectified aspects of physical being), they had yet to come to grips fully with the *Leib* (the living, feeling, sensing, and emotional aspects of bodily experience). (Shilling, 2003: 204)

Crossley's 'reflexive body techniques' (2001, 2004, 2005) may be an appropriate way of looking at physical regulation or modification among adolescents, in their attempts to achieve a valid form of embodiment.

In certain respects Crossley's 'reflexive body techniques' resemble Connell's 'body reflexive practices' (1995). Connell holds that within 'body reflexive practices' "bodies are seen as sharing in social agency, in generating and shaping courses of social conduct" (Connell, 1995: 60). Crossley's 'reflexive body techniques' are also focused on agency within a concern for the lived experience of being embodied. Both theorists tend to give a more holistic view of embodied agents as constituted by the mindful and the corporeal, than do structural approaches. However, both also give significance to structural influences in their respective practices and techniques. For Connell "body reflexive practices... are not internal to the individual. They involve social relations and symbolism" (1995: 64). Likewise Crossley believes that each society or social group has its own repertoire of body reflexive techniques (2005: 10). However, Connell's 'body reflexive practices' appear to take place through the embodied self reflecting on the body's gendered practices. They are practices "of gender" (Connell, 1995: 66). Crossley's 'reflexive body techniques', on the other hand, are less focused on gender politics and more on the general actions which are carried out by the body

to modify itself. Therefore, it is arguable that Crossley's 'reflexive body techniques' are more applicable to understanding exercise as an intentional task used by adolescents to regulate and modify their bodies.

Crossley is of the opinion that his concept of reflexive body techniques, advances upon Mauss's ideologies.

> RBT's, as I define then, are those body techniques whose primary purpose is to work back upon the body, so as to modify, maintain or thematize it in some way. (2005: 9)

According to Crossley, these techniques where the body works back upon itself may involve two embodied agents. Firstly, one agent may work upon the body of another, for instance in hairdressing. Secondly, RBTs can involve one single body working back upon itself (2005: 10). For instance, adolescents may carry out tasks of jogging to burn fat or lift weights to tone up.

Bodro, 1993; Mansfield and McGinn, 1993; Fussell, 1994; Wacquant, 1995; Monaghan, 1999; Sassatelli, 2000 and Crossley, 2004, 2005 all point to the gym as the most popular environment within which the body carries out tasks of regulation. The official age at which youths can access gyms appears to be somewhat unclear and for many it is not so tightly implemented. Where it is, adolescents may often resort to the creation of their own personal mini-gym. Producers ensure that the purchasing of certain pieces of exercise equipment is no longer beyond the price range of most individuals. For Christmas 2005, some of Ireland's leading consumer outlets were inviting parents to purchase gym toys as Christmas delights for their children. Such toys included "mini-treadmills and even weightlifting benches" with some of the equipment "recommended for children as young as **FOUR** years of age" (Byrne, *The People*, Nov 2005). In a move somewhat counter to present legislation, therefore, a new franchise is presently

making its way to Europe from America, where adolescents and children can have equipment which has been created right down to size and can also work-out within a gym environment. Eight-year-old Luke, a member of this new 'Next Generation Club' in Britain confesses "I come to the gym after school and at the weekends. My favourite part is the weights. I exercise for 40-50 minutes and I think I'm getting fitter" (quoted by Hill, *The Observer,* Oct 2003). Whether striding in the gym, running on the track or doing push-ups in his own bedroom, Luke represents a reality of individualised exercise programmes no longer reserved for the adult population.

The regulated body, not only signifies 'valid' embodiment within consumer culture, but it is also that which the literature suggests is most likely to attain social validation among peers. Adolescents may be seen to be schooled on specific types of reflexive body techniques which lead to valid embodiment within gym like settings. However, question marks lie over whether this takes place through social collectively or self-isolation and through verbal or non-verbal interaction? According to Crossley, sometimes agents are totally fused with the exercise, while "at others they are more concerned with catching up with gossip or a joke" (2004: 56). Indeed this leads Crossley to conclude that the "intentional mode of the workout is more often akin to a snooze than a sleep. Agents drift in and out of it" (ibid). Crossley is of the opinion that coming together to exercise can create bonds, friendships and intimacies among individuals who would otherwise remain strangers. However, it must be noted that Crossley predominantly focuses on circuit training, which is comparable to Sassatelli's 'gymnastic exercise' (2000) where collective groups focus on the directives of a trainer. She holds that with machine training, on the other hand -

> Time is individualised... The continuation of the exercise relies on
> the capacity of each client to isolate from others and to focus on a
> personal sequence of movements. (Sassatelli, 2000: 232)

Thus, Crossley's account of the exercising environment may be more indicative of the team sports outlined in Chapter Two. If adolescents partake in individual exercise programmes, however, is it characterised more by self-isolation and non-verbal interaction? This research will investigate.

Similarly Crossley holds that collective exercise environments require agents to relax their self-consciousness and to switch off the tendency for embarrassment (2004: 53). Within individualised exercise regimes, however, self-consciousness can be viewed as fundamental for the task in hand. Embodied regulation demands that the agent must be conscious of the body at all times. Indeed through aches, pains and pressures the corporeal ensures its consciousness within the mind at numerous moments. Similarly, the mind must constantly direct its focus to the continuation of bodily achievements. Within physical regulation, individuals are expected to "concentrate on the exercise of his or her own body, moving it, observing it", while also "exposing it to the gaze of others as prescribed by the demands of the exercise" (Sassatelli, 2000: 235). Gyms are settings where individuals are surrounded by the embodied regulation of other agents. The frequent use of mirrors within such environments allow for a shared schooling on the type of body reflexive techniques necessary for the construction of a physique which is assured of embodied validation. In this sense knowledge on the construction of valid embodiment is shared, either through corporeal nonverbal interaction or as Crossley suggests (2004) through collective verbal interaction.

Embodied individuals construct themselves through a co-dependent process between mind and body and each mind and each body is entirely unique in its own

111

right. It is Crossley's elevation of the co-dependence of the mindful and the corporeal within embodied agency that makes his argument on RBTs for understanding body regulation and modification so convincing. Firstly, Crossley argues that RBTs entail that 'bodies' are maintained by bodily effort and embodied competence. Thus, Crossley avoids a structuralist type demotion of the significance of the physical body in its own construction. Secondly, for Crossley, RBTs encourage the identification of the 'mindful' and the social aspects of embodied actions, without "subordinating these aspects to the symbolic meaning bestowed by representations, discourse" and without "reducing embodied activity to mere mechanical behaviour" (2005: 11). Thirdly, Crossley holds that RBTs are sufficiently concrete to facilitate ethnographic and phenomenological investigations which examine diverse bodies within diverse contexts. Crossley appears to integrate some degree, of all of the primary and most significant theoretical contributions on the sociology of the body. Social constructionist approaches (e.g. Foucault, Turner, Bordo), phenomenological approaches (e.g. Goffman, Frank, Mauss) and structuration approaches (e.g. Bourdieu, Giddens). It is this diversity of theoretical inputs which allows Crossley to arrive at an embodied diversity despite ideals of 'valid' embodiment and the body reflexive techniques implemented to achieve them, being the same.

Monaghan emphasises bodily diversity, with reference to bodybuilding. He contends that while a bodily construct may fall into a homogenous category of being 'built-up' or 'toned' for many, such homogeneity can never exist (1999: 272). Adolescents, therefore, may partake in gym activities or individualised workout activities in the aim of attaining the 'aesthetic-athletic' body. In spite of the fact that the activities of working back on the body may be the same, the bodily

112

construction which emerges will differ with regard to each diverse and unique individual. Hence, adolescents may receive the same or similar types of schooling on reflexive body techniques but embodied subjectivity and materiality ensure the continuation of diversity in the body forms that emerge from such schooling. The 'aesthetic-athletic' body, for instance, may not only vary in light of gender, therefore, but also among groups of males and females where each embodied self is ultimately different. According to Monaghan the muscular body is a -

> Variegated and thus heterogeneous entity rather than an undifferentiated object... Academic writings on bodybuilding, offering a reading of the singular 'muscular body' at the level of cultural signification, therefore ride roughshod over complex social reality. (1999: 272)

Crossley's point that 'one size fits' all explanations which come from single theories are deeply problematic in their failure to recognize this embodied diversity (2005: 15), is essential for understanding the physical regulation among adolescents.

In this section I have looked at Crossley's concept of 'reflexive body techniques' as a means of understanding how adolescents construct regulated bodies. I have suggested individual exercise regimes as a means of implementing tasks of physical regulation. I have proposed that adolescents may be schooled within gym-like settings on how to attain a regulated form that signifies embodied validation. This section has also highlighted the importance of maintaining an awareness of embodied diversity as Crossley suggests. Despite actions to attain the 'aesthetic-athletic' body, for example, there will always be some variation in agents, such is the unique constitution of mindful and corporeal embodiment. One question remains in relation to this diversity in Crossley's account, however: what are the diverse motives which underline physical regulation? Therefore, while

Crossley's RBT's provide a way of understanding how embodied adolescents mindfully direct the body to work back in itself in tasks of regulation, he does not acknowledge deeper reasons for why they need to regulate the body and what this means for them. It is arguable that Crossley expands upon Frank's notion of the 'disciplined' body (1991), in that he provides a detailed account of the tasks undertaken by the body to make itself predictable. However, is it possible that such predictability is demanded for psychological as well as physical reasons?

### 3.6 Physical Regulation as a Solution to Social Problems and Self-Validation

Exercise may be viewed as a possible adolescent solution to many of the complexities addressed earlier in this chapter. It is arguable that exercising the body maintains physical regulation, in the face of contradictory messages to 'enjoy food' yet 'look good'. I have outlined a longstanding social schooling on the condemnation of the unregulated body. It is possible that exercise can construct a body which is socially validated rather than socially condemned. I have also suggested that the unregulated body may carry out tasks to overcome the problems it faces in society. Perhaps exercise regimes are a method of implementing such tasks. After all the body which is given a status of 'embodied validation' is said to be the exercised, 'aesthetic-athletic' type body in much of the literature already cited.

However, perhaps all of these complexities and contradictions point to body regulation and modification, being desired not simply to create a valid body, such as the 'aesthetic-athletic' body. Rather, this regulated body and the regulated process by which it was attained, may afford adolescents with self-validation on the

114

strength of their embodied achievements. I will refer to some theorists, who even suggest that the creation of a regulated and valid embodiment may be one of the few ways that adolescents can achieve self-validation within Western society.

Crossley affirms that reflexive body techniques are techniques which act back upon the agent, in terms of "modifying him or her, and which are employed specifically for this purpose" (Crossley, 2004: 38). Within Crossley's work therefore, we know that regulatory actions of the corporeal impact back upon the construction of the corporeal to regulate it, but less about how actions of regulation impact back upon the sense self-worth and self-value of the entire embodied individual. Is it possible adolescents' reflexive body techniques emerge out of a purpose to obtain self-achievements and self-validation whereby body modification facilitates this purpose, but is not the sole purpose per se? I will investigate this possibility in the field research of this study.

The very process of regulating the body and the work this entails, perhaps indicates a pursuit for a personal or social goal which is deeper than simply attaining a 'valid' body or alternatively which is achieved through the 'valid' body. According to Sassatelli, there is a temptation to see the exercise tasks which take place within the gym as simply an attempt to create a 'vaild' consumer body.

> Not only has the toned body become a commercial icon, but also the gym has become highly visible as the site where this body is produced. Gym scenes are increasingly portrayed and glamorised in an ever-widening range of adverts. There is thus the temptation to understand what happens in the gym as the direct result of consumer culture, as the obvious response to normative injunctions which have been described as inviting individuals to joyfully take responsibility for their bodies, to work on them as plastic matter and to invest in body presentation for their self-constitution. (Sassatelli, 2000: 227)

115

However, the body is not a plastic matter, but a feeling, thinking, sensing matter. Exercise machines may feature in discourse as constructors of bodies, but it is always embodied agents who construct bodies. For Crossley -

> The purpose of these machines is only ever accomplished with the compliancy of the agent... The body must 'understand' the machine in the practical and embodied sense of enjoying mastery over it, so as to subordinate it to the purpose of exercise. (2004: 50)

While Sassatelli alludes to the body as a machine (as do Foucault and Turner), Crossley notes the tasks which the body carries out to attain mastery over the machine. Crossley provides a detailed account of actions on machines and how this acts back upon the body in terms of its modification and this is very useful. However, once again, he offers no insight into what this means for the entire individual self. For Crossley, embodied construction is correctly co-dependent on mindful intentions and bodily actions. Having said this, he only discusses how bodily actions impact back upon the physical aspect of embodiment and not on the mindful intentions which drive reflexive body techniques. With regard to adolescents, therefore, Crossley indicates how the body schools itself in it's own know-how to attain mastery over machines, but does not expand on the personal effects of this mastery. Even when Crossley describes points of pain and fatigue for the body, he places his emphasis on how this causes the reappearance of the corporeal body and not on how pain, and particularly overcoming such pain, may lead to increased self-validation among agents on the basis of their valid embodiment. It will be interesting to see if valid embodiment and the disciplining process by which it is attained, has significant implications for adolescents in dealing with social and personal complexities? Perhaps it is a type of personal solution to social problems, which Elliot and Lamert speak of in their account of a new individualism and the emotional cost of globalisation? They state that "people

116

seek personal solutions to social problems in the hope of shutting out the risks, terrors and persecutions that dominate our lives" (2006: 9-10).

Sam Fussell suggests that exercise for him, was a way of gaining control and stability over social complexities and problems.

> The gym was the one place I had control. I didn't have to speak, I didn't have to listen. I just has to push or pull. It was so much simpler, so much more satisfying than life outside. I regulated everything...It beat the street. It beat my girlfriend. It beat my family. I didn't have to think. I didn't have to care. I didn't have to feel. I simply had to lift. (Fussell, in L. Wacquant, 1995: 165)

Engulfed into a world where the pursuit of fitness and firmness is paramount, exercise may offer an escape from the pressing unpredictabilities of the outside world. Is it possible that within individualised exercise practices embodied adolescents, mindfully focused and physically active, find a type of predictability and control which is scarcely attainable in other areas of their lives? I will explore this notion among the youths participating in this study.

Giddens is certainly of the opinion that processes of physical regulation can offer personal solutions to problems through their stability and predictability, as well as through the regulated form that they create. For Giddens, the process of "regularised control of the body is a fundamental means whereby a biography of self-identity is maintained" (Giddens, 1991: 57). Routine brings with it an element of trust and confidence that "the natural and social worlds are as they appear to be, including the basic existential parameters of self and social identity" (Giddens, 1984: 375). Hence, the regulated body is "not simply an 'entity', but is experienced as a practical mode of coping with external situations and events" (Giddens, 1991: 56). Regulating and disciplining the body, through schooling in exercise techniques for instance, may afford adolescents with the sense of predictability which Frank talks about and this practical mode of coping which Giddens refers to. "Routinised

117

control of the body is crucial to the sustaining of the individual's protective cocoon in situations of day-to-day interaction" (Giddens, 1991: 56).

Firstly, therefore, routines which control the physical body bring with them a sense of trust in the predictability of their tasks and self-achievement in overcoming difficult tasks. Secondly, exercise may allow agents to work back upon certain areas of their bodies as Crossley suggests. Thus, regulation through exercise may allow adolescents to target specific bodily areas and overcome specific bodily problems. It is possible that this facilitates a definite sense of self-validation because the 'valid' body is so physically evident to the self and others.

> Regularised control of the body is a fundamental means whereby a biography of self-identity is maintained; yet at the same time the self is also more or less constantly 'on display' to others in terms of its embodiment. (Giddens, 1991:58)

Routines of the corporeal body, therefore, have a dual importance in that they may instil a much sought after feeling of ontological security in the individual. In proving one's capacity for control to the self, body regulation impacts back upon the emotional well being of the adolescent, as well as the physical body. Routines may also project a self who displays all the characteristics of personal and social coping, competence and control, through a controlled bodily structure. Hence, the adolescent can prove their ability to construct a body which can clearly cope with the contradiction of indulging yet regulating which was discussed in Section 3.2 of this chapter. They can clearly create a regulated body that can escape the social condemnation which the unregulated body was said to face in Section 3.3. They also display a physique which can avoid the problems faced by individuals with unregulated bodies in society which was witnessed in Section 3.4. In short, exercise may help adolescents to experience self-validation and to receive social validation, both on the basis of their embodied validation.

## 3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have given examples of some of the contradictions and condemnations which adolescents face in contemporary society and how physical regulation may be viewed as a means of coping with these. I have suggested that the food industry presents adolescents which a particularly complex situation. Youths appear to be perpetually targeted by food companies who educate youths to indulge in desirable foods. I have suggested that responsibility for one's own food intake and eating as a cosmopolitan practice may also be desirable for the creation of an independent identity. However, Section 3.2 has examined certain powerful authority's long established histories of condemning and invalidating of the over-indulging, unregulated body. The question arises, therefore, as to how adolescents cope with such contradictions in their social schooling on the body?

Frank (1991) proposes that embodied agents cope through making the body predictable. I have suggested that to make their bodies predictable and regulated adolescents may use individualised exercise regimes. I have looked at exercising through the framework of Crossley's 'reflexive body techniques' (2001, 2004, 2005). Here the body schools itself in its own predictabilities and capabilities. In this process Crossley's theory allows the mind to be an agent which directs the body in action and the body to be a corporeal agent in its own right through its working back on itself for modification purposes. However, I have proposed that Crossley fails to explore whether regulation and modification impact back on the mind of the agent as well as the body. The questions emerges, therefore, as to how physical regulation impacts back upon adolescents and whether it has the power to

119

offer adolescents the social and self-validation which comes through embodied validation.

## 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I outline the research process used to obtain an insight into how adolescents are schooled on the body and the complexities which encounter in the pursuit of embodied validation as a result of this schooling. A qualitative approach was adopted to gather data for this research and I will outline my reasons for this. I point to the need for reflexivity in the research process throughout this chapter. I identify how participants were sampled and the research methods they participated in. To enhance the reliability two methods of gathering data were used in two different phases: Phase One involved Open-Ended Question and Answer Sheets and Phase Two involved Semi-Structured Interviews. I follow each of the sections discussing sampling and research methods with an outline of my reflections on the respective process. The final elements of this chapter examines data analysis and how the validity of the data was maintained during that process.

## 4.2 The Qualitative Investigation

As far back as Aristotle, philosophers and theorists recognised the virtues of 'empiricism'; the invaluable method of making sense of the world by simply watching it and listening to it. All ideologies are derived from social contact with happenings, objects and individuals. Since all social contact occurs through the premise of the body, it is particularly appropriate that the researcher should follow in the footsteps of Aristotle in seeking to understand this phenomenon by truly

121

listening to what embodied individuals have to say. This of course reflects my ontological position on what Mason might call my intellectual puzzle (2002: 18). It is a position which questions why much of the emerging literature on childhood and adolescents is characterised by facts and figures, rather than by narrative and emotion.

It is not the intention of this research to generate laws or 'universal verities', that is to generalise from the research sample to larger populations. When trying to understand the intimate and unique experiences of individual adolescents in their quest for embodied validation, it is not a generalisable, predictive law which should be sought, but rather, an interactive understanding of the subjective world of each adolescent. Informed by the body of theory which weaves through the first three chapters of this research investigation, it is my view that this intellectual puzzle can only be comprehensively known and interpreted through a qualitative framework. The qualitative researcher seeks to understand primarily the uniqueness of situations, contexts and interactions.

> This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting – what it means for the participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what's going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting...The analysis strives for depth of understanding. (Patton, 1985: 1)

Qualitative research is not about finding an objective single truth, since what value would such a revelation be to understanding the experiential plight of adolescents? Knowing, for example, that 80% of adolescents in a given sample are currently on diets or alternatively that one in every four children in Ireland are obese, does not help to explain the dichotomy that exists between these two figures. Neither do

these figures serve to explain the life experiences of children within the Irish context nor how they personally deal with these dichotomies.

### 4.3 The Reflexive Researcher

Reflexivity is one of the most important goals of qualitative research. While Popper (1959: 36) believes no form of research should aspire to autonomy from self-reflection, particularly on one's shortcomings, such self-reflection is an intrinsic part of the qualitative inquiry. As well as recognising one's own fallibility and thus remaining open to flexibility within a particular research context, reflexivity is also simply about recognising one's active presence within the research process.

> There is no way in which we can escape the social world in order to study it. Put simply, a relationship always exists between the researcher and those being researched. (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983: 15)

In setting out to make sense of the intellectual puzzle which asks adolescents to unravel the complexities that they face in their pursuit of embodied validation, I must recognise that seeing a need for this research presupposes my relationship with this phenomenon and subsequently with the adolescents whom I will encounter along the way. Even the very title of an investigation opens the door for the personal presence of the researcher. The researcher, after all, is the primary instrument in the process of data collection and analysis.

Scientific and positivist methods of inquiry have long since been trying to eliminate the human instrument for fear of biasing studies. To imagine, however, that an understanding of the social world can be achieved without the responsiveness and adaptiveness, which only other human beings possess, appears

quite unnatural. It is arguable, therefore, that while subjectivity may be construed as 'non-science' this certainly does not mean that it is 'non-sense', but quite the contrary. In allowing the researcher to have full interactive access to those being investigated, the researcher alone, as a human instrument, has the capacity to -

> Expand his or her understanding through nonverbal as well as verbal communication, process information (data) immediately, clarify and summarize material, check with respondents for accuracy of interpretation, and explore unusual or unanticipated responses. (Merriam, 2002: 5)

Within the qualitative inquiry it is the task of the researcher to obtain access to the insider views (emic perspective) of participants. It is the task of the 'reflexive' researcher, however, to acknowledge, and subsequently assess, how their outsider views (etic perspective) shape their understanding of the insider. According to Rossman and Rallis while a full representation of the subjective experience of participants (the emic perspective) is an unattainable aspiration, the qualitative researcher must strive to clearly and richly represent their understanding of the views they have accessed (the etic perspective). "What they write is interpretations (their own) of participants' understanding of their worlds (the participants' interpretations)" (Rossman and Rallis: 2003: 48). Indeed both commentators believe, that given the fact that all research requires an author, the notion of representing the emic perspective alone, devoid of the researchers interpretations (writing) is both impossible and irrelevant (2003: 49).

The topic I chose and the material I selected from theory and literature inevitable means that at I arrive at the research process with certain pre-established standpoints. Rather than eliminating these standpoints, however, it is important to identify them, reflect on them, monitor them and to understand how they might shape the collection and interpretation of data. Personal standpoints imply a certain

interest in a given reality, without which the research inquiry might gradually lapse into a state of dullness and detachment. Peshkin goes so far as to say that such subjectivities are certainly positive since they are -

> The basis of researchers making a distinctive contribution, one that results from the unique configuration of their personal qualities joined to data they have collected. (Peshkin, 1988: 18)

Hence, it is my own belief that while my feelings of personal connectedness to understanding adolescents' quest for embodied validation are something that should be monitored throughout the process, I believe this also leads to an enhanced passion for exploring this puzzle and to a more rigorously conducted enquiry within the field. Smith and Deemer believe that "it is impossible to imagine a person leading life without making judgements or without making discriminations" (2000: 888). I have obviously made judgements on the type of knowledge which already exists in relation to embodied adolescents and hold that this can be improved upon through the investigation being undertaken. However, without reflexivity upon my judgements, the entire reliability and validity of the study are called into question. According to Delamont the researcher must be -

> Constantly self-conscious about (the researcher's) role, interactions, and theoretical and empirical material as it accumulates. As long as qualitative researchers are reflexive, making all their purposes explicit, then issues of reliability and validity are served. (Delamont, 1992: 8)

## 4.4 Reliability

I will turn to 'validity' towards the end of this chapter through the premise of data analysis. In the meantime, however, it is important to remain conscious of the fact that the 'reliability' of a study is a primary indicator of how the audience will value its validity.

According to Seale reliability is not well served when the researcher presents a personal interpretation of data and simply decides that the audience are free to disagree if they so wish.

> It requires a much more active and labour-intensive approach towards genuinely self-critical research, so that something of originality and value is created, with which, of course, people are then always free to disagree, but may be less inclined to do so because of the strength of the authors case. (Seale, 1999: 6)

Seale is undoubtedly making a similar argument to that of Delamont, in that reflexivity implies that the researcher has truly engaged in understanding the intellectual puzzle in a rigorous way. To ensure the study has been conducted in a rigorous fashion the researcher may engage in certain practices such as using multiple data sources and methods, remaining in the setting for an adequate period of time, asking participants to validate the researchers interpretations, asking someone to act as an intellectual watchdog over the inquiry, keeping an account of the entire research process, seeking out and exploring diversity and using rich and clear descriptions for conceptualisation. With regard to understanding adolescents' embodied realities, an employment of any or all of the above practices would indicate to the reader an enhanced trust and reliability in the research being presented. Many suggest that using methods of self-checking and cross-checking, leaves the reader more inclined to concur that the analysis of the inquiry is consistent with the data collected, and hence, that it is dependable. According to Lincoln and Guba dependability and consistency are what conceptualise reliability in qualitative research (1985: 288). Unlike quantitative inquiry which bases reliability on replication (i.e. if the study were repeated would the results be the same?), qualitative inquiry does not seek replication and indeed holds that such replication is impossible given the ever-changing nature of society and the

subjective nature of the researchers and participants involved. Merriam is of the opinion that -

> Because what is being studied (in qualitative research) is assumed to be in flux, multifaceted, and highly contextual, because information gathered is a function of who gives it and how skilled the researcher is at getting it, and because the emergent design of a qualitative study precludes a priori of controls, achieving reliability in the traditional sense is not only fanciful but impossible. (Merriam, 1988: 171)

Bearing in mind, therefore, the level of subjectivity, fluidity and diversity which the literature suggests exists in the schooling of adolescents' bodies, I sought to prove the reliability of their narratives and my interpretation of them through the use of a number of research methods.

Using a number of methods increases dependability and consistency through enabling researchers to check the reliability of data from one source or method against another. I did not use all methods to the same degree, interviewing was the primary method used in this current inquiry, with open-ended question and answer sheets providing additional data. I also used multiple sources of data and therefore adolescents within various educational institutions were selected through a process of sampling.

## 4.5 Sampling and Selection

Many ethical issues must be addressed when the participants of a study are under eighteen years of age. Access was a major ethical issue for it was not possible to simply contact adolescents directly. In order to ensure a youth's well being, access must be negotiated through what Hammersley and Atkinson refer to as 'gatekeepers' or those who control "avenues of opportunity" within certain settings

(1983: 38). It was obvious to me that educational institutions acted as ideal settings for accessing participants. Hence sixteen educational sites were contacted by letter towards the end of 2003. To ensure the representation of diversity and affirmation of reliability such schools were chosen on the basis of varied locations, student sex composition and social categorisation. Letters forwarded to the Principals of the respective schools outlined details of the study, including a copy of the research proposal sent to the body funding the research (the National Children's Office) in 2002. Letters were also included from Dr. G. Honor Fagan (supervisor NUIM) and Dr. Sinead Hanafin (National Children's Office) which verified the legitimacy of the research. My correspondence requested permission to access one class of first years and one class of transition years in each school for the purposes of introduction to the topic and the subsequent selection of three students from each year who would be interested participating in interviews. Having worked in secondary schools myself, I was aware of the difficulties which gatekeepers, in this case Principals and parents, may have with students taking time off in what are deemed to be the important, 'exam years'. It was for this reason that first years and transition years were chosen, in that they are categorised by many as more 'relaxed' academic years. I anticipated schools and parents would be more inclined to grant permission to speak with students in these years. In addition, choosing a group who are just embarking on their adolescent years and a group well established within the transition of adolescents allowed for a variety in the ages and perspectives, hence enhancing the data reliability. With regard to the size of the sample Mason holds that a sample should be -

> Large enough to make meaningful comparisons in relation to your research questions, but not so large as to become so diffuse that a detailed and nuanced focus on something in particular becomes impossible. (Mason, 2002: 136)

It was important to me, as to any researcher, to be able to make what Mason terms 'meaningful comparisons' and I decided that for interview purposes, six participants from five different schools (a total of fifteen males and fifteen females) would allow me to do this adequately.

While the initial letters to schools stated that I would make further contact by telephone at the beginning of the new semester in January, prior to such contact three schools responded to my letter expressing a desire to allow pupils to partake in the project. Located within the Dublin suburbs the aforementioned three schools consisted of one single-sex boys, one single-sex girls and one mixed school. The location of these schools, and the private status of one, meant that they served students from more peripheral counties also such as Meath, Kildare and Wicklow. This had excellent implications for the study in that the views of adolescents from quite different social communities and backgrounds could be accessed on the one site.

As the research proposed that thirty adolescents in total be in-depth participants in the study, a further two schools out of the sixteen initially contacted were subsequently contacted in January. These were handpicked to provide access to adolescents from disadvantaged backgrounds and more affluent settings. The population of these schools and their inner city location, could provide an additional diversity in relation to socio economic background.

Once parental consent had been received, I presented an outline of the research to a total of two hundred and forty-two students across the five sites. This might be referred to as a type of 'convenience' sampling, in that school authorities decided on the first year and transition year class in each school which would be convenient for me to see on the dates in question. On the basis of data returned by

129

these two hundred and forty-two students, through open-ended question and answer sheets, thirty were chosen for interview through 'purposive' sampling. Fifteen male and fifteen female participants was selected for a particular perspective or quality, which their initial data suggested they would bring to the interview process. Mason refers to this form of sampling under the alternative name of 'strategic sampling', which is at the essence of building convincing arguments in qualitative inquiry.

> If we sample strategically across a range of contexts, we increase our chances of being able to use that very detail not only to understand how things work in specific contexts, but also how things work differently or similarly in other relevant contexts. From there we may be able to develop cross-contextual generalities which are very well founded because they are based on the strategic comparisons of sensitive and rich understandings of specific contexts, whose significance in relation to a wider universe we can demonstrate. (Mason, 2002: 125)

All of the participants selected for interview were chosen on the basis of expressing an interest in talking about their embodiment. Hence while some wanted to discuss satisfaction with their bodies and others dissatisfaction, all individuals articulated an interest in talking about the body in some way in their open-ended question and answer sheets.

*Researcher's Reflections*

Much opportunity for reflexivity arose in the sampling and selection process of the research. Obtaining initial access to youths was extremely time consuming, yet the duration of access was extremely limited due to extracurricular activities and examination commitments within the timetable of the academic year. Parental consent had to be processed before accessing students and this posed further time constraints. In some settings attaining two interview slots with participants took much negotiation. For me, this confirms the fact that the quantity and quality of

research, which emerges in the areas of childhood and adolescence, is extremely dependent on adult decisions rather than youth needs.

The fact that my familiarity with schools led me towards first years and transition years and away from the more 'serious' years, was something which I acknowledged as limiting the scope of the research. However, difficulties with accessing other years, was a hunch which was confirmed by gatekeepers on entering educational sites. If those in the 'serious' years are generally more under pressure, including more under pressure to attain embodied validation, then 'gatekeepers' suggest that it is almost impossible to access these youths through educational institutions.

Although generalisable sampling is not characteristic of qualitative research, I felt that in representing a variety of schools, within a number of locations, with diverse social categorisations, I was remaining open to the plurality of the contemporary context. Including both male and female youths was an intrinsic part of understanding this intellectual puzzle. In selecting an equal amount of both sexes and from different age groups, I was again attempting to include a relevant range of contexts or phenomena, which in turn might enable me to make cross-contextual comparisons. I am not claiming that my chosen participants are representative of all typical adolescents, yet through strategic sampling I can ensure and demonstrate that they are not atypical either. How representative they emerge to be in the analysis is largely down to descriptive accounts combined with the reader or consumer's empathy with such accounts.

### 4.6 Open-Ended Question and Answer Sheets (Phase One)

Following a general introduction of the main themes of this research to classes of students in each of the five schools, students were asked to comment on some basic relevant questions. I shall refer to this data as 'Phase One' and will now explain how it was generated in further detail.

On entering first year and transition year classes in each of the five schools, I prompted a general discussion on physical image. The use of visual images of individuals with various shapes and styles, evoked much enthusiasm and discussion among each audience, with many expressing very passionate views on issues of fatness, thinness etc. Both males and females alike conveyed a great interest in the topic. Students were fully informed on the purpose of the study and about what possible participation would entail. They were assured of the importance of confidentiality and anonymity and their queries were fully answered. I then asked each individual to complete an open-ended answer sheet (see Appendix 2) in relation to themselves and the topic. Students were reassured that they were not obliged to fill in the sheet and, therefore were not being forced to participate, even at this level. Out of the total of two hundred and forty-two students addressed, however, everyone returned some data on the sheet. I informed students that they would be selected on the basis of the information sheets and on their written consent to participate. Students were asked to give information on a number of topics, such as daily routines, exercise regimes, dietary practices and self-satisfaction.

While topics within the open-ended question and answer sheets were standardised, this could not be construed as a quantitative technique, as students

were at liberty to answer as they pleased on the topics. Participants were asked to 'explain' or 'describe' their thoughts and feelings on topics and were provided with a sizable amount of page space in order to fully communicate this. I felt this level of freedom would not only serve well for the purposes of selecting adolescents for further participation but would also provide a strong source of descriptive data in itself. The use of such information sheets was also extremely beneficial for the ethical issue of consent. The final question on each sheet asked students if they would be willing to participate further in the research and if so, their reasons why. Providing reasons for one's interest adds to the reliability of the study for it proves that participants have had to truly contemplate why they think their contribution will be advantageous. A small minority of students expressed no interest in partaking in the study. I would certainly have been interesting to obtain their views on why they had no interest in talking about the body. While I acknowledge this as a limitation, I could obviously only select youths who gave their consent. The question remains as to whether those who did not wish to participate based their decisions on a genuine lack of interest in embodied issues or on an unwillingness to talk about embodied issues.

### *Researcher's Reflections*

On entering each site I felt it essential that gatekeepers realise the degree of confidence which I had in my own strategic research framework and my ability to approach adolescents on a proficient and professional level. I strongly believe that having mentioned my qualification and work as a secondary school teacher in my initial letter of contact greatly influenced the amount of trust which gatekeepers had in me. They also allowed me to address the classes alone. I felt this worked very positively in giving students the freedom of expression which they might feel

inappropriate or feel unable to put into words under the watchful gaze of certain teachers. Such apprehension was indeed confirmed when on one occasion the primary gatekeeper failed, due to time constraints, to inform the teacher in charge of the class that she would not be required to sit in on my introduction of the topic. Her presence created an aura of silence absent in all of the other class contexts and also left me under added pressure to control conversation as opposed to stimulating it. Her inability to locate an overhead projector also hindered conversational stimulation, as I was unable to entice discussion through the use of visuals. I believe that both of the above factors partially influenced the enthusiasm for further participation in this instance.

One's willingness to participate in a study is undoubtedly affected by the amount of approachability and trust which one feels towards the researcher. Participants need to feel that the researcher is competent and professional yet relaxed and understanding. Thus through this combination researchers, either knowingly or unknowingly, offer a sense of reassurance "that no harm will come to the participants as a result of their participation in the study" (Rossman and Rallis, 2003: 77). Having only an average of forty minutes in which to introduce the research to each class and complete the open-ended answer sheets, I believe limited the amount of time that I had to convey this necessary reassurance. The level of discussion which arose in the respective classes, however, left me feeling confident that there existed a general feeling of trustworthiness and approachability towards me as a researcher and my open-minded acceptance of participants' views.

134

## 4.7 Semi-Structured Interviews (Phase Two)

According to Silverman

> Qualitative researchers, with their in-depth access to single cases,
> have to overcome a special temptation. How are they to convince
> themselves (and their audience) that their 'findings' are genuinely
> based on critical investigation of all their data and do not depend on
> a few well-chosen 'examples'? (2000: 176)

In relation to speaking to adolescents about the possible complexities which they encounter in pursuing embodied validation, this problem of what Silverman calls 'anecdotalism', would imply simply going out and picking a few well-chosen examples of adolescents with concerns regarding their embodied identity. Such accounts would certainly backup the primary contentions of the study that many adolescents find the pursuit of embodied validation very complex and all encompassing. However, should such accounts, reveal after critical investigation that even those who initially stated that they were content with their bodies, also encountered complexities or that they must constantly overcome complexities to attain satisfaction, then the inquiry has strengthened its reliability through its incorporation of what Popper called 'critical rationalism' (1959), or more simply, 'self-testing'. It is for such reasons that it was necessary to include a sample of those who expressed in answer sheets feeling positively about their bodies, as well as those who felt negatively.

Having analysed the open-ended responses received from students on their answer sheets and their consent to participate further in the research, I chose thirty adolescents for interview. Three first year and three transition year girls were chosen from an inner Dublin city, single-sex, disadvantaged school. Three first year and three transition year girls were chosen from a suburban, single-sex,

private school. Two boys and one girl from first year and one boy and two girls from transition year were selected from a mixed, suburban community school. In relation to single-sex boys schools, three first years and three transition years were chosen in a suburban secondary school and the same was selected from an inner city private school. Letters outlining the content of the research and a list of the possible topics which may arise in interviewing were sent to the parents of each student. Parents were also requested to sign a consent form allowing their child to partake. On the return of all consent forms interviews were set up in each school. Each participant was interviewed for an hour on our first encounter and from a half an hour to an hour on our second encounter.

I have chosen to use qualitative interviewing because I have -

> an epistemological position which allows that a legitimate or meaningful way to generate data on these ontological properties is to talk with people, to ask them questions, to listen to them, to gain access to their accounts and articulations, or to analyse their use of language and construction of discourse. (Mason, 2002: 63-64)

It is the very notion of 'construction' which Crotty uses as a point of departure when discussing qualitative inquiry. Meaning "is not discovered but constructed. Meaning does not inhere in the object, merely waiting for someone to come up with it". Alternatively Crotty suggests that "meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting" (1998: 42-43). What better way for a researcher to attempt to understand how adolescents construct a meaningful embodied identity than to engage in the world of the adolescent through the medium of conversation. Through in-depth conversation the researcher can access the meaningful realities to which the participant verbally allows them. As a result both parties may simultaneously partake in a process of co-constructing the meanings being verbalised. What is important for the qualitative interviewer,

however, is that it is often all too easy to get carried away within the intriguing and meaningful world of the participant and to loose sight of the fact that while qualitative interviewing should never be a highly structured question and answer session, it is "a conversation with a purpose" (Burgess, 1984: 102).

The subjective nature of qualitative interviewing, and in fact all qualitative inquiry, does not mean that it is not systematic. While day to day conversations may be free to flow in their own self-determined direction, the qualitative conversation is deliberate and purposeful, conscious at all times of the intellectual puzzle which the conversation is attempting to give meaning to. Semi-structured interviewing allows the researcher to explore themes relating to the intellectual puzzle but not to be strictly confined to them.

Having developed themes (derived predominantly from existing theory and literature) which I thought adolescents could relate to, I turned these themes into questions. This purposeful establishment of related topics is what gives semi-structured interviewing its 'structured' dimension. Remaining conscious of its 'semi' structured dimension, however, is an even more demanding intellectual process. This calls for the researcher, not only to remain open to the reordering, rephrasing and reconfiguration of standardised themes in each individual interview situation, but, also to remain open to recognising appropriate topics which participants bring up. Adolescents, or any participants, need to feel that I as researcher am engrossed in listening to, and responding to their narratives. This rather than reciting a list of standardised questions. Structured themes should be confined to invisible mental notes within the interview context. Mason provides a very detailed account of the level of intellectual and social skill required of the qualitative interviewer.

> At any one time you may be: listening to what the interviewee is currently saying and trying to interpret what they mean; trying to work out whether what they are saying has any bearing on 'what you really want to know'; trying to think of new and creative ways about 'what you really want to know'; trying to pick up on any changes in your interviewees' demeanour and interpret these;...reflecting on something they said 20 minutes ago; formulating an appropriate response to what they are currently saying; formulating a new question which might involve shifting the interview onto a new terrain; keeping an eye on your watch and...keeping an eye on your equipment. (Mason, 2002: 74)

Carrying out semi-structured interviews with adolescents, therefore, meant that I needed to be highly aware and responsive at all times. In each context it was necessary for me to juggle listening, remembering, reacting, observing, interpreting, encouraging and accepting at all times. I will now look at these necessities in varying degrees of detail.

By listening, truly listening, to what each participant was saying I could derive meaning from both what was being said literally and what was being said more covertly through tone and language. Remembering is largely correlated with listening. Should I, as an interviewer, have unintentionally repeated the same question to a participant, they have may become very disheartened by feeling that their initial answer was neither listened to, or worthy of being remembered. Reacting is also related to listening to a large degree. Reacting with interest and enthusiasm to solicited and unsolicited views and meanings offered by the adolescent proved to the participant the value and benefit of their contribution. Of course reacting to what is observed as well as to what is heard is equally important. Body language, demeanour, environment and particularly in this instance, style, are all intrinsic to how the interviewer should react to the situation and interpret the situation. Through the medium of conversation, I could ask participants to comment on the possible accuracy of my interpretations of their narratives and of

the data given by others. Merriam refers to this process as 'member checking' and holds that its incorporation throughout a study lends a great deal to the reliability and validity of the inquiry (2002: 26).

According to Rossman and Rallis interviewing youths is "fun and frustrating" (2003: 193). They may be either too shy or too lively. Either way encouragement to engage in the topic can help to alleviate these problems. Therefore, I used themes which adolescents could identify with to encourage unity with the topic and enhance its appeal. Further engagement and interaction was encouraged through the use of visual images. At one point during interviewing participants were asked to examine a silhouette outlining various body shapes (see Appendix 1) and asked them to rank those shapes in relation to each other, in relation to their own shape and in relation to an ideal body shape. At another point the adolescents were asked to look through a contemporary magazine and identity what they liked and disliked about the images of individuals pictured in the magazine. Looking at bodies proved to be a wonderful way of stimulating thought and talk about them. Furthermore, Mason believes that "visual materials … can be a very creative way of accessing aspects of your interviewees' lives and experiences which are … difficult for them to verbalise" (2002: 77).

Difficulties with verbalising information, or a fear of expressing genuine feelings, behaviour or language were occurrences I sought to eliminate, using non-judgemental acceptance as my vehicle for doing so. Rossman and Rallis hold that -

> The participant reacts to you …By your mere presence, you become a part of their social world; therefore, they modify their actions accordingly. The more you appear to be like the members of this social world or the longer you stay in it, the less your presence may affect the everyday routines. (Rossman and Rallis, 2003: 50)

139

While appearing like an adolescent would not have served well for the purpose of instilling confidence in me as a researcher, accepting and empathising with their youth language, often complicated feelings, and, sometimes, controversial behaviours, I felt led to the naturalisation of conversation. Open communication assisted in participants feeling more comfortable in my presence, by virtue of my willingness to allow them to speak in their own youth narratives without feeling a need to behave in a restricted fashion or limit their language or information in the presence of an adult. Openness and acquiescence inevitably lead to relationships of mutual trust, thus unveiling a more reliable and credible co-construction of meaning.

### *Researcher's Reflections*

A certain amount of reflexive challenges within the interview context have been sketched throughout the above account of the qualitative interviewing process, yet there are a few more worth mentioning. Firstly as noted earlier, selecting adolescents who have a positive self-perception was paramount to the reliability of the study and to my ability to be open to diversity and self-testing. This selection, however, also had a more covert impact on participants. Inevitably the confined nature of classes meant that fellow students were bound to find out who was partaking in interviews for the study, even without being told directly. Having clearly informed students in their general address that the investigation was seeking participants who did not want to change their bodies as well as those who did, meant that once a participant was selected he or she did not need to feel that their classmates would automatically know how he or she felt about their body.

I felt that much of what was demanded during semi-structured interviews with adolescents required me attempting to put myself in their position. Again this

is not about acting like a teenager but rather being able to offer them the assurance that their views were being understood. Many adolescents had a very heightened sense that much of their views and behaviours will be frowned upon in the adult world. The assurance of acceptance and trust is what was essential here. I also came to discover that reassurance played a vital role in this investigation. If, for example, a participant declared during the interview, a statement like "I know I'm ugly" or "I know I'll fail all my exams", then I automatically felt compelled, not only to question the reasoning for such thoughts, but to try to instil some reassurance about how they may completely lack substance in the eyes of another. The declaration of feelings and emotions are not uncommon within the qualitative interview setting, and are in most instances, encouraged. Punch refers to this process as seeking solidarity in the field, on the part of both researcher and participant. What follows, however, is something which I was extremely conscious of. The researcher must "depart and start writing up their experiences for academic consumption" (1994: 94). In other words "you are deeply interested in people's stories, but that interest is conditional and bounded" (Rossman and Rallis, 2003: 78). This is an ethical issue which undoubtedly arises in all qualitative interview settings and there are no guidelines that one can follow to avoid it. An exploration of innermost thoughts and feelings and a rich description of these are what elevate qualitative inquiry over and above other forms of inquiry. By the same token they are what give qualitative inquiry one of its most challenging dilemmas. I sought to control the level to which participants might feel this sense of 'seduction and abandonment' (Siskin, 1994) by clearly outlining from the onset how long the research relationship would last. Informing participants unambiguously about the duration of the research relationship, meant that participants did not expect more

than what was clearly stated. The fact that all participants gave strong reasoning for wishing to partake in the research prior to becoming involved meant that I knew they truly wanted to express themselves on the research topic. This, in addition to the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity and a vivid understanding of the purpose of the research meant that disclosure was not inhibited, or at least less inhibited, by an awareness of the brief nature of the relationship.

From a researcher's point of view, the way in which interviews had to be structured in accordance with the timetable set out by gatekeepers was both efficient and exhausting. While absenteeism on many occasions meant that I had to revisit sites to interview certain participants, in some instances I was carrying out six interviews in a row in a given site. This was extremely intensive. It is also exhausting from the perspective of maintaining concentration and stimulating encouragement. Some gatekeepers were quite flexible about the amount of participants I wished to see in any one visit, yet on the whole, there was an unquestionable sense that the research procedures cause as little disruption as possible to class routines. On a positive note, conversing with a significant number of participants on any one day meant that the whole process of gathering data moved along swiftly and without the hitches or delays which one might expect in less structured settings.

On a much more personally reflexive note I felt it necessary to be aware of the possibility that uncontrollable variables such as my own age and gender and even my physical appearance might have had on participant's willingness to uncover information. With regard to age I felt that being quite young was probably a positive factor. As students later commented with regard to teachers, they felt

older age groups were less able to understand their outlooks and lifestyles, while younger teachers were more in tune with these. I was also conscious that being female might influence how comfortable participants felt about revealing personal issues to me. I was particularly concerned with male participants, yet as the inquiry progressed it became apparent that many males provided more detailed accounts than females. With regard to my own physical appearance, I was conscious of the fact that this might impinge on how freely participants would talk about issues such as fatness and thinness, depending on their positioning of me within this range, as well as where they position themselves.

## 4.8 Data Analysis

I initially examined the two hundred and forty-two question and answer sheets which were submitted by first year and transition year youths. These proved to be extremely valuable in recognising trends in body regulation and variations in embodied perceptions.

The majority of data in this investigation, however, was obtained through semi-structured interviews. Given that thirty youths were interviewed twice, this generated a vast amount of descriptive and informative data. Each interview was recorded with participant's consent. Each was then fully transcribed by myself. This was an extremely time consuming process, yet it allowed me to gain a strong familiarity with the data presented by each interviewee. I made a decision to transcribe all of the data obtained, however tentative the link appeared at the time. As the level of analysis progressed, some of the data, which I thought only had a tenuous relationship with existing theoretical contributions, proved to be the most

143

insightful into these adolescents' interaction with such theory in a living, embodied way.

Once transcribed, I examined the data rigorously and repetitively, identifying themes and cross-contextual similarities and differences. I interpreted the data through the theoretical arguments outlined in Chapters One, Two and Three. For instance the data was analysed in such a way as to construct an argument around adolescents' negotiation of the body within consumer culture, around the role of the body within peer interplay and around the tasks of the body in physical regulation. The data was then constructed into arguments which provided insights into why participants arrived at certain assertions and claims and what they felt gave rise to certain experiences and feelings.

I proceeded to formulate four analysis chapters on the basis of these adolescents' own interpretation of theoretical themes around embodiment and social realities of being embodied. Within these chapters, I remained conscious of the need to identify and attempt to make sense of alternative views presented by participants. Although the analysis chapters emerged out of structured themes, they also emerged out of issues which were presented by participating youths as being important to their quest for embodied validation. Hence, many of the titles and contents of subsections in these chapters are driven by participant's independent opinions and interpretations.

## 4.9 The Validity of Data Analysis

The essence of enhancing validity in qualitative data appears to be largely based on what Popper calls 'critical rationalism' (1959). He proposes that any argument should be able to stand up to a process of criticism and testing. For Popper, what "characterises the empirical method is its manner of exposing to falsification, in every conceivable way, the system to be tested" (1959: 42). Unlike quantitative research, testing in qualitative research, is not achieved through a process of repetition and generalisation. Rather validity comes from lengthy submergence within the field and the culmination of various sources and methods of collection, so as to create thick, rich descriptions. Such descriptions "convey a sense of what it is like from the standpoint of the natural actors in that setting" (Schutt, 2004: 241).

My use of two methods served to increase the richness of the data which was received. Testing the validity of such data comes from asking whether the level of data I have provided and my analysis of it does justice to the voices of the youths involved. Therefore, I have provided an immense volume of data in the analysis chapters of this dissertation, to do justice to the descriptive and in-depth accounts obtained. The richness of the data being analysed helps to determine "whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of the account" (Creswell: 2003: 196).

A test of validity also questions whether I have coherently interpreted their interpretations of the quest for embodied validation and built a rational argument of such interpretations in relation to existing theory. While in the field, I used what Merriam calls 'member checks' (2002: 26) to test the validity of my interpretations of participant's narratives. I frequently asked interviewees to comment on my

understanding of what they were saying and also on what other anonymous participants had said. For instance, I had conceived that adolescents who fail to achieve a certain level of embodied validation may be socially excluded and I had explored this notion within existing theories and literature. However, I had not anticipated the level to which this occurs nor the severity of its consequences. Therefore, I would ask participants to confirm or falsify my understanding of the vastness and severity of the phenomenon of rejection. As a consequence, I constructed an entire analysis chapter around the notion of embodied rejection, in order to adequately represent the degree to which it featured in respondent's narratives. Such a decision, serves to enhance the validity of the study, by sufficiently representing what these adolescents' voice as a huge complexity within the quest for embodied validation.

Another strategy that was used to test the validity of data analysis was that of 'peer review' (Merriam, 2002: 26). Merriam holds that all graduate students have peer review built into their dissertation, through supervision (ibid). Two Doctors of Sociology supervised this research investigation over a four-year period. Hence, the validity of arguments and analysis in relation to the data presented was constantly being reviewed and assessed. Furthermore, this research was funded by the National Children's Office, which required me to continuously produce reports on my progress. In this capacity also, the validity of the data analysis was monitored and reviewed. Finally, this study will be examined by 'external auditors' (Creswell, 2003: 196) who will review the validity of the data analysis from a fresh and objective standpoint. Once I have show that I have used valid research methods to attain data and been rigorous within such methods and that I have presented a justified representation of rich, thick data and have

explained relationships between this and existing accounts within comprehensive arguments, a final decision on the validity of the argument is largely dependent on the reader of such a qualitative study. After all within the qualitative inquiry, a final decision on the validity, reliability and generalisablity of a study lies with its consumer and their assessment of its accuracy in relation to the social world as they know it.

## 4.10 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the research process which was implemented to gather data on adolescents' embodied experiences. I have explained why a qualitative approach was needed to obtain accounts, in-depth embodied insights, and experiences. I have outlined how participants were selected and described the two research methods which were used to gather data from contributing teenagers. In each case I have given a lengthy account of my reflections upon the actual research process. This chapter has explained how the use of a number of methods, adds to the reliability and validity of qualitative studies. I have suggested that validity also comes from exhausting the data and constructing it within a comprehensive and rational argument of analysis. The subsequent four chapters of this investigation will present such an analysis.

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the complex processes which are used by adolescents to deliberate on forms of valid embodiment. The first section of this chapter looks at this as a dual process as described by Bourdieu and Giddens. Adolescents clearly demonstrate how are schooled on forms of valid embodiment in advertising and the media, but their narratives suggest that such embodied forms are not truly validated until they exist among adolescents' peers and daily acquaintances. Contributions to this section display an unavoidable sense of agency, whereby discourses of idealism are normalised for very practical reasons of increasing their status and acceptance among peers.

In Section 5.3, I add to Foucault's notion of discourses of truth. I offer an account of the rather complex journey adolescents make from discourses of idealism, to their normalised implementation. Bodies that are seen to hold a status of truth or validity, are not simply accepted by adolescents but I show how they constantly reflexively negotiate body forms, through what I call 'dialogic-deliberation'. Again much agency comes to the fore in this section. Participants appear to be never totally dominated by schooling authorities supposed ideal discourses of truth but decide on which elements of this schooling they will accept as true in light of the complex interchange of individual subjectivism and social interaction.

Section 5.4 describes the emergence of a gendered dimension to dialogic-deliberation. A dimension neglected by Foucault. This section discusses how

148

adolescents' verbal descriptions of their own embodiment, including negative descriptions, came with greater ease to females than males. However, this is not to suggest that female participants are less assured about the validity of their bodies than males, but that their practices of deliberation are reflective of the very gendered forms of deliberation which they participate in with peers, particularly within their secondary school contexts.

Finally, I describe the gendered forms of dialogic-deliberation which male and female peer interaction gives rise to. Discursive deliberation regarding the pursuit of embodied validation and their sense of approximation to it, is incessant among female respondents. This is so, even to the point where it can be seen to act as a form of constant surveillance. Conversely, this section explains how such open discussion is completely rejected by males. However, through forms of activity based dialogic-deliberation, male peers can be seen to place one another under the same embodied pressures as females.

## 5.2 The 'Validation of Idealism'

This section examines how the 'validation' of powerful discourses takes place via the dual process which Giddens and Bourdieu speak of. On the one hand, these adolescents refer to the way in which they are constantly overrun by schooling on the ideal body through the vast and visual nature of consumer culture and the media. Such images appear normal and thus validated through their constant presence and may be seen to act as a form of surveillance over adolescent bodies. On the other hand, however, I wish to argue that consumerism and the media do not have the power to validate this idealism, only active agents have that power. In

the second part of this section I also explore how possessing the body which is validated, appears to heighten youths' chances of social acceptance among peers (i.e. social validation). Therefore, actively choosing the ideal body can be seen to be more complex than simply a reproduction of powerful social representation. Rather adolescents actively choose body forms from their overall schooling on the body which offer a medium through which they can be accepted. It is this agentic intent which is absent in much of Foucault's writing on the body. Individual's normalisation of a body form is what validates this form and this normalisation may emerge from a number of agentic motives in the quest for social validation. Furthermore, it appears to be a form of Buadrillard's bodies of 'phryneism' and 'athleticism' (1998) or what I have termed the 'aesthetic-athletic' body which participants describe as being the valid body within consumer culture and also the one which they believe can lead to social validation among peers.

The data presented in the first part of this section describes where interviewees feel the ideal body comes from. When asked, all thirty interviewees stated that they are schooled on the ideal body through magazines, television, models, sports stars, actors, singers or advertising. For one respondent such ideal discourses are something that she is always looking at.

> Magazines, looking at models and film stars and people like that. I'd
> have loads of magazines and I'm always looking at them. (Chloe, 13)

For others there is more of a sense of Foucault's panoptic surveillance in that discourses of a form of the 'aesthetic-athletic' body are always looking at them.

> It's the media. Even if you're on a bus and there's an advertisement on
> a bus, and it's a girl, she's going to be skinny like perfectly skinny. You
> never see anorexics or anything overly skinny but you see people who
> are just skinny enough. (Shauna, 16)

Another concurs with this unavoidable nature of ideal discourse.

150

> In all the shopping centres and in the ads everywhere it's always good-looking people you see. (Rob, 16)

For one participant, individuals are schooled on the ideal body in an ever-abounding way.

> Magazines, TV, music videos, the radio even talking about new diets. Everywhere it's just bombarding you from day to day. It's drummed into us everyday that we need to be skinny, like diet magazines and 'get a body like Britney'. It's somewhere back there drummed into you that you should look like that. (Gillian, 16)

The notion that discourse has got inside an individual's mind, inserting itself in their thinking patterns and on their bodies, is very much indicative of the type of power which Foucault presents in his earlier and more descriptive work on the body. This implies the notion of following the discourse because of what it represents for the self and what the self aspires to be, as another participant suggests:

> People all want to look like the people in the magazines and they want to look perfect. (Amy, 13)

A further interviewee describes being schooled on the body through looking at people we aspire to.

> It may be from watching TV or from just other people who are better at stuff than you. (Darren, 12)

While the adolescents in this investigation indisputably identify the gaze of consumerism and the media as having targeted their minds and their constitution of the ideal body, there is no sense that this has occurred behind the backs of docile bodies. Adolescents are actively aware of the dynamics of why certain images are used to school on the body. Although these adolescents believe the discourses displayed in advertising are discourses of idealism, they are very much aware of the production motives for using such bodies. When respondents were asked, why they thought a particular type of body was used, they were all very reflexively

aware that this has to do with increasing the profit margins and publicity of certain companies and artists.

> They'd have to be models to be on an ad or else no one would want to buy what they're selling. It's 'cause they're skinny, they wouldn't put big people on their ad or they wouldn't make money. (Eve, 13)

Others gave similar responses.

> Celebrities get loads of money out of saying they have a new diet or whatever. (Anna, 16)

Participants do not give the impression that they are fooled by institutional motives.

> Magazines and famous people get publicity. (Kevin, 13)

For yet another participant there is a distinct awareness of the intentions of consumer culture when targeting the public with a particular type of body discourse.

> Naturally you're going to see sexy, good-looking people on TV and in shop windows or else they wouldn't make any money. Nobody would want to buy the product if the models were big fat people. (Mark, 12)

These adolescents are very much aware, therefore, of why certain bodies are validated by consumer society and the media, while others are castigated to the peripheries.

The data presented so far in this section certainly indicates a social constructionist view of the body, in that it is through received social discourses within advertising and the media that these adolescents' meaning systems with regard to valid forms of self-projection are established. Through participants' descriptions of the omnipresent nature of ideal discourses, it might indeed be suggested that individuals feel that they are under endless surveillance to reproduce the ideal discourses they receive. However, discourse surveillance is only one side of a dual process of validation. Bourdieu acknowledges this through the notion of

habitus, Giddens through his 'structuration theory' and Connell through his insistence that embodied adolescents are actively engaged in the construction of social processes (2005a, 2005b). It is not only the schooling body images of external popular discourses which validate a certain body, but it is these adolescents themselves who do this, together with the active bodies which surround them in their daily interactions. Thus, the second and vital aspect of this process of validation of idealism, takes it from its external, macro position of power and gives power to social agents on a micro level. For Bourdieu and Giddens, it is only through such micro actions that macro power can ever be sustained or even firstly obtained.

On describing what they thought was an ideal body for males and females, twenty-two of the thirty interviewees made reference to the terms 'normal', 'in between' or 'average' in their descriptions of idealism. When participants were subsequently questioned on what they believe the average size of males and females their age is, their answers certainly served to affirm the type of dualism which features so strongly in the work of Bourdieu and Giddens. In terms of the sizes indicated by respondents, the validation of idealism is undeniably played out predominantly in the physical embodiment of their peers. This means that discourses of idealism are not only to be found in the images of celebrities and stars but vitally are embodied in these youths' school peers and daily acquaintances.

> Even twenty years ago girls...would have looked quite different even from girls in the nearest large town; they would have had an unmistakable small town rustic air; but now they are almost indistinguishable from girls in a dozen different capitals, they all have the same models, from Hollywood. (Priestley, J.B. in Featherstone, 1991a: 180)

Without adolescents actively choosing discourses from Hollywood and mediating them in their daily lives, the power of such discourses would be dramatically reduced. Furthermore, discourses may influence individual's thinking but they do not dominate and govern them. Individuals dominate and govern themselves, with discourses providing them with modes of expression. They are 'enabling' as Giddens proposes (1991). Ultimately, therefore, valid bodies may be received through a form of external, mediated schooling, but embodied validation happens within interactive settings such as secondary schools, where the body acts as an enabling agent.

Following on from participants' descriptions of the ideal body, they were also asked to explore what the projection of this body would mean for them. Their answers certainly could not justify the reduction of the body to an item of material objectivity, constructed by an external power via decentred individuals (Foucault, 1977). For these participants discourses of idealism do not influence their actions because they necessarily want to be on consumer advertisements or in the media but because they offer increased social validation in a number of complex areas. For respondents, the display of a valid body represents enhanced acceptance among their school peers, enhanced attraction to the opposite sex and the enhanced ability to overcome intentional stigmatisation and oppression. The implementation of discourses has very practical and purposeful implications for the social survival of these participants on a daily basis.

Participants describe the ideal body for their sex, they state what having the ideal body would mean for them and they identify the average size or shape of people their age. For 13-year-old Kevin the ideal male body is broad and muscular. He believes the agentic motive behind having this body is to be strong and fit. This

154

exact shape may not be normalised among peers his age just yet but he holds that it is among the older lads in his school, and therefore validated within his general peer setting.

> I like a rectangular shape. Muscular on top with big shoulders. Tall enough and not too skinny. Wouldn't want to be the same shape the whole way down, it's like a different shape. Kind of square head, strong neck, broad shoulders, long arms. Long enough legs but not different shapes, the same width the whole way down, not fat or not thin but in between....The lads on the senior cup team in this school would be built kind of like that, that's why they got picked. (Kevin, 13)

The body described by Kevin, therefore, has very real implications for acceptance onto the most desirable school teams. For another participant muscles are associated with strength and he also believes girls see them as impressive. He holds that the majority of boys his age are a 'normal' shape and weight.

> Muscular, you have to be strong and have a muscular body. For me it's to impress girls....most fellas would be concerned about having muscles and would be a normal shape and about eight or nine stone. (Mark, 12)

Participants continue to refer to muscular ideals and cite validation among peers as their reason for this choice. Evan believes the average weight of boys his age is lower than that stated by Kevin, but he adds that it depends on what one looks normal at for their height.

> Broad shoulders, strong chest, kind of not fat thighs but big enough thighs. If you're not overweight and you're not underweight, if you're just the right shape and stature for you're height, you're perfect....Everyone would want to be with you. You'll have loads of friends both fellas and girls 'cause part of it is for girls....Most boys are between six and seven and a half stone but if you're tall you'd be more, just whatever makes you not overweight and not underweight, just normal. (Evan, 13)

For yet another participant there is no hint that embodiment of the ideal is to replicate a powerful ideal found among celebrities but, again, it is practically related to acceptance and to being taken seriously in everyday life.

155

> Not fat and not really too thin, in between but big enough so you'd be good at sports. Maybe tall, I'd like to be tall...then people might start taking me more seriously. Being an in between weight and tall just means you're normal. (Evan,13)

For 13-year-old Daniel, while some specific characteristics relating to the ideal body may not be visually normalised among his age group, working one's way to achieving them is certainly a normal and validated practice. The agentic aim for Daniel is to increase strength and popularity.

> The burly look it's really what you want, you know like broad shoulders. They'd want to be thin, like have a thin stomach with muscles and biceps but they wouldn't want huge legs. It's kind of all about definition...They go to training and I know that some of them would deliberately do more laps than others in order to get that. They'd do press-ups in their own time...they're always measuring strengths. Girls like strong guys too. (Daniel, 13)

It appears, however, that while these young males are in agreement that muscles and athleticism have a definite place within male idealism, they are at odds as to whether 'broad shoulders' should feature. Their reasons point to the importance of interactive needs within particular schools themselves in schooling bodies. What is interesting here is that it is the boys who attend a school where rugby is the most popular sport who have so far outlined broad shoulders as being part of the ideal shape. In the other schools where Gaelic football and soccer were the most popular sports, 'definition' but not the 'burly' look is more important. It may be argued, therefore, that while muscles remain a steadfast criteria among both groups, and indicative of the 'aesthetic-athletic' male found in dominant discourses, the degree to which muscles are validated has more to do with the complex process of survival and success within very specific social settings than simply replicating a powerful ideal. Thus images of celebrity soccer players, which can often be quite thin, are likely to be less validated among young males who require a stronger,

156

bulkier and more 'rugby-like' physique for social validation in their specific school setting.

Unsurprisingly, for other participants, the ideal body is sought because it lowers their chances of being verbally and physically stigmatised. The muscular ideal has the ability to place adolescent males within a hierarchy of maleness. Muscles and strength ward off any threatening advances while also encouraging more pleasant advances from the opposite sex, strongly indicating a hegemonic, heterosexual masculinity.

> Muscles say to the girls 'oh look at me, I work out' and it makes the guy proud 'cause he can show off his body more and not be 'oh I don't have muscles'. It'd be great going to the beach with a few friends and a girl and the others wouldn't want to show off their bodies without any muscles, but the guy could go 'yeah look at this'. When you have muscles you can get a bit cocky and say 'you can't stamp on me' and it puts other guys down. That's what I've noticed, if one guy has muscles, they put down other guys who don't have muscles. (Eoin, 13)

For participants like Eoin, having the ideal muscular male body has very real implications for very real situations. There always appears to be a very definite agentic intent involved in the validation of the ideal body. For another participant also the popular males in his school are the ones who display an obvious strength, which allows them to cope in challenging physical situations.

> Being strong, you have to be strong. You can't be weak or be able to be thrown around. The popular people wouldn't be bullies but they would never be slagged obviously 'cause they're popular. They'd be well able to handle themselves. (Andy, 16)

Reducing the risk of stigmatisation plays a vital part in the male display of idealism as Ger, aged 13, points out. Once more the validation of the ideal is played out in daily interaction through adolescents' efforts to embody this muscular form.

> Guys have to be tall, kind of 'muscley', you know bigger. It's like girls like to be slimmer but boys like to be bigger, 'muscley', bulkier. No one wants to be really thin or really big, they just want to be in between, just a bit 'muscley' and bulkier. Basically tall, 'muscley' with a six-

> pack…They don't want to be too big and they don't want to be too small. They might get slagged either way. They might get slagged if they're big and they might get slagged if they are stick thin….Most guys my age don't want big muscle but they're trying to get tight muscle. (Ger, 13)

For older participants the emphasis on shows of strength continues as a route to overcoming possible exclusion. Consequently, the ideal body is seen as a practical solution to complex problems, not an object for which it's sole purpose is to copy what it sees in discourse. For Barry, aged 16, the ideal is again a 'normal' build, which is strong enough to reduce the risk of threat and which is given it's normal status through the bodies of his counterparts in school.

> Most of the guys in my year look strong enough, bit muscley, just normal. The ideal guy is not real thin and scrawny. Well built, not weak and frail. (Barry, 16)

For another older participant, the athletic body is normalised and validated among his friends also.

> Fellas do want to keep fit and tone up a bit. So most of the lads my age would just be a normal shape. (Andy, 16)

According to another interviewee, there is no real ideal because a guy just has to be 'normal'. Perhaps it is due to the fact that the ideal is continuously being normalised that it is more difficult for some adolescents to determine where the ideal ends and where the 'norm' begins.

> You just have to be normal. There's no real ideal, you just can't be a little stick and you can't be a big tub either. (Enda, 16)

The athletic male body is not something which only exists in Nike advertisements and among actors and sports stars, it is the body which is projected by the most popular and most accepted individuals whom adolescents interact with in their daily lives. It is this very real and intimate relationship to the individuals who

'actively' validate discourses of idealism which appears to be of paramount importance to the participants cited above.

The fact that discourses of idealism are normalised in social actor's lives and for their own very practical, agentic reasons, is something which is strongly evident among the female participants in this research also. For Eve, aged 13, the ideal body is indicative of Baudrillard's fit and beautiful consumer body but where it is to be found is in the people she communicates with in school everyday. Once again the ideal is normalised, as it is seen to provide a solution to the threat of social exclusion.

> The ideal girl has nice hair, and nice face and a skinny belly, skinny legs. All girls go on like that saying they want a skinny belly, and most do, like you wouldn't see loads of fat girls going around, they are mostly thin....Even in this school there's not that much big people. You'd always see skinny people. There's only two or three people where I live that are big for their age and they get slagged so everyone would want to be skinny. (Eve, 13)

When the female respondents in this investigation were asked about the average size or shape for people their age, they mainly translated this into clothes sizes. This is something which was not done by the male participants. This, I suggest, is because the males in this study were more likely to relate size to height, while for the females, size remained steadfast regardless of height. For another participant, size is intrinsically related to one's social positioning and level of attractiveness. With the ideal being an ever-present reality among her daily acquaintances.

> I think thin, yeah thin, have a nice smile, nice features on her face. A bit curvy 'cause fellas like curves (laughs). Everyone associates you with the weight of the group you're with. Like say if you were with someone that was fat or else someone that was real skinny, they'd put you into positions in it, like 'she's in between' or 'she's smaller than her' but you'd want to be skinny. Most girls my age are about a six or an eight. (Chloe, 13)

159

For Chloe, therefore, the social positioning of her peers is dependent on their weight. With the majority of her peers taking a size six to eight in clothes, this surely implies much competition for superior positioning within social groups. Molly, also aged 13, largely concurs with Chloe in stating that the ideal body is sought by agents because it determines how they will be received by the opposite sex and also their position within same sex groups. She is very descriptive on what the ideal body should project.

> I'd say any colour hair as long as it suits you. It doesn't really matter what colour eyes. Kind of thin and probably about medium height, not too tall and not too small. Long legs and little feet. Boys don't like girls that are overweight....In adult sizes most of my friends would be a size six. It depends on the label 'cause eight is quite skinny in some shops. In ladies I'd probably be a twelve or a fourteen so I don't really fit in with the others in terms of size. (Molly, 13)

With other younger female participants the validation of idealism continues to be a reality which not only exists within the boundaries of external powerful discourses of consumerism and the media, but importantly within the boundaries of habitual social interaction. The 'normal' body implies health and energy for another participant and once again is embodied in the people she meets everyday.

> I like a toned stomach, toned everywhere. Energetic looking. Not too skinny and not too big, just in the middle, healthy. Most people would be just in the middle, about my height, not too tall or small and around a size eight. (Sandra, 13)

For older participants, it is this 'normal' or 'in the middle' shape which continues to be validated by their peers. Hence, discourses of idealism continue to be normalised through the interactive representation of micro actions. For Caoimhe, aged 16, she wishes to embody the ideal, because recognition by others of this validated form increases her happiness.

> Probably not too thin and not too fat is the best, 'cause you don't want them too thin like with their bones sticking out and all. Like a bit of weight on a girl. A bit of weight in the legs and stomach but definitely

160

to be toned as well. My stomach, 'cause I do dancing, it's toned. People say it to me as well and that makes me feel happy. You wouldn't want big saggy arms or anything but just to be normal. Like most people I know are just normal, about a size eight or ten. (Caoimhe, 16)

It is interesting to note that while there is a three-year age gap between most of the younger and older participants involved in this investigation, and so one would imagine a significant difference in height, the sizes which are validated among both age groups remain largely on a continuum. Participants continue to refer to the 'normal' or 'in between' body as being reflective of the ideal. One respondent believes this is the perfect shape and is embodied in the people who wear a size ten in clothes. The ideal serves the function of alleviating worry, according to 16-year-old Rebecca. The fact that this respondent herself takes a size eight reduces potentially complex worries, as she would still fit into the category of idealism if she were to increase her weight. In spite of her being below her own ideal, however, she does not believe she is any thinner than the average girl her age.

If she's not too thin and not too fat she's okay. She's not too tall and not too small. She has a perfect body. My ideal girl wears a size ten, that's why I don't worry about my weight 'cause I'm a size eight...No I'm okay I don't think I'm too thin or too fat compared to other girls. (Rebecca, 16)

The marriage of the 'ideal' and the 'normal' persists among these female respondents. The following narrative offers a tremendous insight into the level of complexity which is involved in creating the ideal body. Once again this description is indicative of consumerism's schooling on displays of ideal discourses. However, peers have a vital role in schooling bodies, as they are responsible for certifying embodied validation.

I think the ideal size for a girl is a size ten, maybe an eight but not a six because that just looks horrible. From head to toe I'd say nice hair, not frizzy or cheap looking, good eyebrows, a good complexion. Like spots concealed well if you're wearing make-up. Wearing cool clothes. Not too skinny, but that she'd be in proportion and would wear clothes that

161

would make her shape look good and not clothes that try to make them look different from their actual shape. I don't think too top-heavy 'cause if you're really skinny everywhere else then it will look out of proportion. Fellas will like it (laughs) but it looks strange I think. A waist of twenty-eight to thirty is nice. I don't really like big hips. I just think it's really strange when someone's really thin and their hips just balloon out, it looks horrible....They say people are getting fatter because of what they're eating or whatever but the average for my age is thin. Average is an eight or a ten. (Gillian, 16)

16-year-old Shauna, also refers to breast size and a dislike for breasts that are too big. For this interviewee embodying idealism has very direct implications for how one is perceived among peers. Hence, while Shauna states that the average size of her peers is the same as that found in ideal discourses, these adolescents' wish to embody this size is not simply to replicate an ideal, but to take action to avoid social rejection and attain social validation.

I like the shape that they don't have really big boobs but they're okay and they're skinny but not too skinny and a really toned stomach. With the skinny ones you always see people looking at them enviously all the time as if they want to be like them and people who are any bit over what is considered right are kind of ignored... Most people would be eight or ten in clothes. (Shauna, 16)

Another participant of this age group, also points to the fact that the normalised display of the ideal body is intrinsically related to the status one is given in social space. The ideal body increases one's chances of simply being liked.

The ideal is thin, long hair, have lovely bone structure on their face and a great personality. That people like you. I think that's normal though. You see normal people and they're thin and they're good-looking. Most of my friends would be normal. I'd say about an eight to a ten. (Anne, 16)

While powerful discourses may construct ideals, it is again obvious from this narrative that individual agents construct bodies and it is through this construction that discourses are truly validated.

It is apparent from the insights and experiences of these participants in this section that the dualism which lies at the heart of Gidden's structuration theory and

Bourdieu's concept of habitus, is very much alive in the validation of idealism in the social networks of adolescents. Within this dualism discourses of the ideal, which are said to be 'valid' forms of embodiment by schooling authorities like consumerism and advertising, appear to have powerful influences over individuals. By the same token the power of such discourses is only maintained insofar as individuals choose to activate their schooling and thus validate these ideal discourses in their daily practices. It is now necessary to examine the process whereby ideal discourses are negotiated. In this it is essential to follow participants on their journeys from discourse to practice, a journey which seems to be much more complex and critical than Foucault acknowledges.

## 5.3 The Negotiation of Truth through 'Dialogic-Deliberation'

This section looks at the journey from discourses of idealism to their implementation among adolescents. For Foucault, certain authorities attain the credibility to school large populations of individuals on discourses of 'truth' at various points in time, while individuals see the benefits of practicing this truth in their lives. It appears from the previous section that a form of the 'aesthetic-athletic' body has attained a status of truth among interviewees. It is seen to be both 'valid embodiment' and 'socially validating'. However, I am concerned with adolescents' negotiation of the truth, for this process is more complex and agentic than Foucault outlines. What Foucault neglects is the process by which individuals negotiate what is true. Foucault's journey from discourses of truth, to making them functional practices in life is very short and straightforward. The data in this

section takes into account the role of human reflexivity in the active negotiation of truth.

Many consumer theorists have aligned the 'dreamlike' images of sexy celebrities and stars with a status of truth. Their ideal bodies project health, youthfulness, fitness, energy, beauty, power and desire. Grogan (1999) and Frost (2005) hold that individuals see these dreamlike images as valid, and render their own bodies invalid by comparison. In this section, however, I examine a very interesting process which began to emerge when participants in this investigation were given such dreamlike images and were asked to make self-comparisons. I would like to refer to this process as 'dialogic-deliberation', a procedure which gives much more of an individualised and dialectical element to the Foucauldian journey from discourse to practice. There is not a straightforward acceptance of something which has attained a status of truth or validation in external discourses, because these active youths engage with the truth and establish the meaning of truth for themselves personally. They actively identify many falsities within the truth. Hence, with every dreamlike image, they negotiate the truth via a process which I refer to as dialogic-deliberation. This section also looks at participants' identification of discourses of truth more among school peers than among celebrities. As with the previous section, this emphasises the role of peers in the assignment of embodied validation. For these interviewees it is peers whom they compete with for a status of truth and validation, not distant celebrities.

Participants were asked to select from a popular magazine, celebrities they thought to be most desirable, or in Foucault's terms, those who expressed a status of truth. This magazine was selected randomly but like all other such magazines it contained an abundance of images of stars and models leading dreamlike lifestyles

164

within the frame of ideal bodies. Due to the number of images available, however, none of the interviewees could automatically decide on a body image which expressed a clear status of truth. Decision-making appears to demand much active negotiation and individual reflexivity. This process is comparable to participation in a dialogue with the self in their negotiation of what is to be taken as truth. When one participant was asked to identify the male and female body he thought was most ideal, his answer indicated the complexity of this process. He selects certain celebrities' bodies but also reminds both himself and I that human subjectivity makes quite variable the type of discourse which can be accepted as truth.

> Maybe someone like that (Duncan from boy-band 'Blue') 'cause he's not too muscley. Maybe her for a girl (model in advertisement) 'cause she looks friendly and she's not too skinny and she's not too overweight. You can't really find the perfect person 'cause everything varies really. (Darren, 12)

The process by which respondents negotiate their way through these images tends to vary quite considerably depending on individual subjectivity. The celebrities which were identified as offering schooling on the ideal body by some, were rejected by others.

> Not David Beckham, he's a bit thin. Ben Afflick is probably the best 'cause he's not too small and he'd be well built. (Barry, 16)

In spite of Barry's opinion, others believed the David Beckham body to be more symbolic of what is to be taken as the true ideal in society. Even within this choice, however, participants can find flaws and falsities. Andy, aged 16, takes part in a dialogic-deliberation as he gives accounts of the images he is internalising and relates their expressive value to the young males and females around him.

> I suppose Britney Spears figure-wise. You often see girls that are too skinny. You often see people that think they're fat and they're like a stick. Ben Afflick he's big, he's huge, too big. Obviously David Beckham 'cause he's a soccer player he has to be big. I know a lot of girls go for Justin Timberlake, he's skinny but he's not too skinny.

165

> Fellas themselves don't want the long hair David Beckham look. They
> don't say it but they obviously want to be him 'cause he's one of the
> best soccer players in the world. Even though they think he's a bit gay.
> (Andy, 16)

Andy clearly partakes in a dialogue with these images, making the internalisation

of discourse a much more complex, lengthy, reflexive and discriminatory process

than the straightforward route from discourse to practice which Foucault speaks of.

David Beckham and his groomed look may cause him to be described as a

metrosexual male in contemporary times. However, the metrosexual, must display

overt heterosexuality. Characteristics which are perceived as homosexual can be

seen to be excluded within this dialogue. There is a definite sense of the type of

homophobia which Mac an Ghaill (1994), Lynch and Lodge (2002) and Norman et

al (2006) found among males in their studies. For many of the young males I spoke

to, a proclamation of an empowered heterosexual body indicated true masculinity.

> I don't like David Beckham, he's too much of a ponce with the pony-
> tail and wearing skirts. They're all around 5'10 or 5'11 and they're not
> really fat or skinny. I'd say Jonny Wilkinson or Ben Afflick are the
> best, they're the right shape. They have broad shoulders and they look
> strong. You'll always want to be strong and muscles make you look
> kind of tough and like you have a strong arm if you wanted to hit
> someone. You wouldn't want to fight but if someone wanted to fight
> you, looking so strong might put them off. Girls would want a fella
> that's big and strong too. (Josh, 13)

It is evident that dialogic-deliberation not only focuses on the images being

internalised but is constantly deliberating on the implications of such an embodied

form to personal experiences. In relation to Josh, he initiates a dialogue with the

images presented to him in the magazine but this evolves into a dialogue with the

self and what the presentation of such an image would mean for 'you' (i.e. Josh) in

everyday life. Participants clearly talk themselves through which discourses might

hold a status of truth for them in their daily lives. What is interesting is that even

though participants do not arrive at any single individual who projects an ideal

body, it remains the toned and muscular, 'aesthetic-athletic' body which these young males gravitate towards, although to varying degrees. It is arguable that this substantiates Foucault's bio-power in that particular discourses attain a position of truth over wide social spaces. Dialogic-deliberation, however, bears witness to the active engagement of individuals within the subjective internalisation of discourse and the continuous negotiation of truth.

For females in this study also, dialogic-deliberation was a very real experience in interaction with discourse. Participants can be seen to actively talk their way through the process of deciding upon discourse. Once again, however, flaws are identified within the truth. This indicates that micro subjectivity and reflexivity ensure that there is an acceptance of discourse which is not as clear-cut or unequivocal as Foucault suggests. Neither is there a definitive rejection of powerful discourse. Rather there is an evident active dialogue with elements of discourse and a decision as to which are to be accepted or rejected as truth. Another participant actively negotiates her way through this process.

> I'd say Britney Spears and Jennifer Lopez and Jennifer Aniston, it's kind of hard to pick. It's so confusing and then there's Victoria Beckham as well. I'd say Britney Spears is the nicest 'cause she's always been very pretty...The best thing about Britney though is that her figure is perfect, some pop stars are really, really skinny... She's probably got a little bit of extra fat but I think it suits her. (Molly, 13)

For another participant also deciding upon discourses of truth is not as straightforward as definitive acceptance or definitive rejection. Even within acceptance there is a degree of acknowledgement of perceived falsities.

> David Beckham, I'd say he's the ideal man. Everyone likes him 'cause he's just good-looking and has a nice body... he's good looking as well though (Orlando Bloom) and he has lovely muscles on his back (Nigel Harvey). Victoria Beckham has a gorgeous figure. Although sometimes she can be too thin but other times she's nice. (Anna, 16)

167

With yet another interviewee the interaction moves from a dialogue with the images in the magazine to a dialogue with the self in light of such images.

> Jenny out of 'Atomic Kitten' she's nice looking, all of them are but she's lovely. She has a lovely figure, but then she's probably on loads of diets or something but she is lovely looking and has a lovely figure. Now I wouldn't wear any of them (tight top, short skirt). Too short, my mam would kill me. I wouldn't wear anything like that 'cause I have loads of brothers and I'd be scarlet. I'd like to have her figure but I wouldn't like to have my hair like that. (Eve, 13)

This young participant goes through a dialogue where she actively schools herself on the image before her, discusses how this image may have been constructed and applies its implications to her own life context. Certain elements of her schooling on this discourse she views as advantageous, while others are rejected on a very individualised level with regard to her specific circumstances.

Bartly, 1990; McRobbie, 1991; Bordo, 1993; Davis, 1995; Grogan, 1999 and Frost, 2005, are of the opinion that individuals internalise the dreamlike images of celebrities and stars and as a consequence often make unfavourable self-judgements in comparison with these images. The word dream itself implies a certain distance from reality. However, the youths in this research never appear to be so enthralled by the dreamlike images of consumer culture that they are oblivious to any falseness which may lie in the creation of such images. As Budgeon (2003) and De Casanova (2004) state, individuals are able to recognise what is artificial. Reflexive, dialogic-deliberation is used by participants to identify how the dreamlike image is simply a dream. The images selected persist in being largely on a continuum with a general schooling on the trim and toned ideal but there is a very definite acknowledgement by many of these youths of the false or unrealistic aspects of these images. With regard to the following narratives, the presence of dialogic-deliberation is even more compelling, as respondents give the

168

distinct impression they are having a two-way conversation with themselves. I wish to argue that this is an intrinsic component of any decision making process, where the pros are weighed up against the cons, or in this instance, where what is true is weighed up against what is false. For one interviewee not only does choosing the ideal require deliberation on which is most realistic, but once chosen, he participates in further dialogue with this discourse.

> I like Charlotte Church or Britney Spears. I'd say Charlotte Church if Britney isn't really blond. Probably Britney for her body though... She has a good body, but then I think her face can look like a man's sometimes. (Cian, 16)

Another participant also decides upon whether Britney is a dream or a reality.

> She has a great shape but she has people working on her all the time and as my mam says she's been working on that for a long time. (Chloe, 13)

With each of these interviewees a certain opinion is given which indicates how an images like Britney's has had the effect of Foucauldian bio-power. This, however, is followed by a 'but', where it is almost as if their reflexive capacity is actively reminding agents not to become too overwhelmed by a discourse which may not be entirely truthful. This pattern continues with another respondent.

> I think Britney's probably the best woman. She just has a nice shape, even though I know she's probably dieted hard or even had surgery on it. (Evan, 13)

This awareness is the same with male ideals.

> David Beckham has a good shape but so much work goes into him and there's camera effects as well that it's unrealistic at the same time. (Brian, 16)

Individual dialogue with discourse is even more obvious among other participants.

> I think she (Victoria Beckham) has a gorgeous figure. She wears fabulous clothes... But then I do look at her and say to myself if I had all that makeup and all the effort put into me I'd look gorgeous as well. Like I think they're still the same people as us it's just that they have

169

people going around putting makeup on them all the time and top range clothes and have all the money to get like facials all the time. (Lynn, 16)

There is an undeniable awareness among a majority of those who contributed to this study of unrealistic aspects of the celebrity type figures which Grogan (1999) refers to. These respondents can recognise the "photographic illusion" which Frost believes individuals attempt to emulate (2005: 70). While these youths are clearly schooled to interpret such body images and even to admire them, such images are neither simply accepted or rejected. Rather they are assessed and deliberated upon through reflexive individual dialogue. Another participant, also aged 16, takes part in such a dialogue with the 'perfect image'. Here certain parts of this process are concerned with acknowledging what is truly perfect while others are reflexive reminders of the untruths which lie within.

> They (images in magazine) look perfect but everyone knows you can't have the perfect image. You can't have everything but they're gorgeous looking… But then, their hair, like every morning they have a hairstylist to do their hair and a makeup artist to do their makeup and a stylist to pick out their clothes. Like normal people just don't have that and in most posters they're all airbrushed. It's not like their true image. (Sarah, 16)

Incredibly this participant even refers directly to the term 'true' image. Hence, a negotiation process which began with examining the perfect image, journeys through a dialogue where the self weighs up various factors which prevail in a decision on how much of this truth is actually 'true'. Far from being sucked into a vacuum under the regime of a particular powerful discourse which is taken as true by schooling authorities, as Foucault proposes, this process is much more complex. This complexity is guaranteed because of individual-subjectivity. Even when Foucault elevates the position of individual subjectivity and agency in his later work, the notion of 'truth' is scarcely modified. Dialogic-deliberation, on the other

170

hand, does not presume practice will follow so directly from discourse, but that individuals negotiate their way through the true and the false, the reality and the dream. Such is the case with the following participant.

> I think that some of the things that Victoria Beckham wears she has a nice figure in but then sometimes I think that she looks a bit fake... For the facial products you think 'if I wear that I'm going to have clear skin and nice skin'. You think if it does that to her then it's going to do that to me and then you go out to buy it and get it and see how it works. Again you have to cop on that these people have probably been doing a year of that cleansing to have perfect skin like that. As well, some models get the white stuff for their teeth and they smoke a lot. I've heard some say they even eat tissue paper, but you think 'I'm not doing that to look like them'. (Shannon, 14)

The continuous and ever-negotiating nature of dialogic-deliberation is evident from the way in which so many of the narratives make reference to individual dialogue with such discourses in the past. Many participants have used terminology such as: 'but then sometimes I think' or 'but then sometimes I say to myself'. Such references strongly point to the fact that dialogic-deliberation is not only something which is happening within the interview context where participants are explaining their choices to me. Rather the interview context might merely provide a tool through which this ever-active deliberation on bodies can be captured.

It is also arguable, with respect to these narratives that there remains a certain distance between individuals and the dreamlike celebrities referred to by Grogan and many consumer theorists. Individuals may well see themselves in a more unfavourable light than celebrities, but they are still distinctly aware of the unrealistic actions, which contribute to the production of celebrity images. What emerged from the data in this investigation, however, was a much more intimate phenomenon. When participants were asked to explain how they compared themselves to celebrity images in the magazine provided, a vast number turned this around to focus on self-comparisons with peers and siblings. It appears that there

171

remains a certain distance between participants and celebrity idols, allowing them to identify modifications. Peers and siblings, however, are those whom participants encounter in the flesh. Thus, if they fit ideal criteria it is not because they are airbrushed or computer enhanced, it is because they are 'truly' ideal. Participants and their peers and siblings occupy the same social space and thus, compete for the same embodied validation. These youths do not compete with the bodies on advertisements and the faces on MTV in the same intimate way.

According to Grogan "body image is a mental construction, not an objective evaluation. Hence it is open to change through new information" (1999: 101). The respondents in this research often referred to the role of the media and consumer culture in providing information on ideals for embodied validation. However, participants have also witnessed the falsities within this information. On the other hand, information, which comes from the actual bodies, which sit next to them in class or across the dinner table from them at home, are not, modified to the same unrealistic degree. Thus the youths in this investigation appear to spend much more time participating in dialogic-deliberation with the embodied discourses they encounter in the flesh, than with more aloof figures of stardom. This also returns to the focus of Section 5.2, which held that everyday acquaintances validate embodied ideals through their normalisation of such discourses into their daily practices. This is because of the practical purposes of ideal discourses, where they empower individuals within everyday interactions, and not simply because individuals want to reproduce what they see on TV. Moreover, schooling on the fact that the implementation of certain bodily discourses is genuinely socially validating comes from bearing witness to this process being successfully played out by peers and siblings. Again, it is only when discourses that school bodies are

chosen by agents on a micro level that their power can be truly seen. As one participant notes, a youth may not have the time or means to get the body of a celebrity at the age of 13. However, they should have the same abilities and resources as their peers, making comparisons with peers a more realistic practice in schooling bodies.

> Girls do compare themselves to pop-stars but to each other more because to look like Britney Spears you'd have to work out everyday and at our age nobody would be able to, or have time to, do that. (Sandra, 13)

One interviewee points to the process and effects of self-comparisons with models.

> Models sort of put you down 'cause so much work goes into being like that and you might forget that and go out wearing the jeans and then you realise you don't look anything like the girl on TV. Then you leave them in your wardrobe and you wont wear them really. (Shannon, 14)

However, when I asked Shannon if this happened to her, she referred to such unfavourable self-comparisons being made more often with her friends.

> Yeah well not exactly from the TV but if I see one of my friends with a pair of jeans and I think they're lovely and you go home and ask your mam to buy them. She goes out and buys them for you and you try them on and you go 'oh I don't look very nice with them on'. (Shannon, 14)

Here dialogic-deliberation continues to occur with information which is perceived to hold a status of truth being received from friends and being negotiated in relation to the degree of truth one believes their own embodiment projects. The importance of negotiating one's place among the bodies of peers became obvious when participants turned a dialogue asking them to compare themselves with celebrity images, into a dialogue concerning their position among school peers.

> He's (Bruce Willis) very muscular in structure. I'm kind of small. There are people in my school much more musclier than me. (Cian, 16)

For another respondent also the focus in dialogue takes an unsolicited turn from celebrities to peers.

173

> She (Britney) probably really watches her weight and some of my
> friends do, but most of them don't put on weight so if they weighed
> themselves six months ago, they'll still be the same now so they don't
> really need to. Most first years don't have to worry about it and then
> they still eat chocolate and stuff. I don't know it really confuses me
> sometimes though because I try to do as much exercise as I can but
> most of them are still skinnier than I am. I don't know how that works.
> (Molly, 13)

This is obviously a dialogue which Molly has had with herself before as she refers

to the fact that it 'confuses her sometimes'. Talking through such dialogue appears

to have both a confusing and negative impact on this participant's sense of social

validation. Another female interviewee has partaken in an individual dialogue

where she has ranked herself in relation the body images which have attained a

status of 'truth' within her year. She goes on to relay this dialogic-deliberation with

her mother and in doing so partakes in further dialogue.

> I don't think I'm very thin but I don't think I'm really fat. I'm
> somewhere in the middle but before the midterm we had to do a day
> rehearsal for the musical and everyone came in in their own clothes. I
> went home and I said 'mum if you were to divide the year into fat and
> thin, I'd be in the fat side' and she was like 'no you're really thin' or
> whatever but I don't think I am when I look around at everybody in the
> year. (Gillian, 16)

This type of constant negotiation of the position of the self in comparison to daily

acquaintances appears to be much more important to these adolescents schooling

on their own embodiment validity, than any comparisons with the dreamlike

images of celebrities which consumer theorists speak of. One young participant

who has just moved to Ireland from Serbia compares the way she looks now with

the friends she left at home.

> My friends in Serbia are very thin and if I would go there now, I would
> look very fat. (Mary, 13)

For some respondents it is their height which they look on unfavourably in relation

to peers.

I'd prefer to be taller but I can't increase that in any way. I'd like to be taller 'cause I'm only 5'9 and I've been like that since two summers ago. Everyone else has passed me out. (Enda, 16)

For another, self-comparisons with regard to weight are made with reference to his brothers. Again the word 'sometimes' is used, implying that the interview context is not the first time this young male has viewed himself as having a less 'true' image than that of his brothers.

Sometimes I feel I'm not as tall as I could be when I was younger my little brother used to be nearly the same size as me and he's quite tall now but my older brother is always saying 'you're such a munch-kin'. (Rob, 16)

Another male participant is nine stone in weight but would prefer to be less, on the basis that his friend is. This individual hints strongly that schooling on embodied validation is done by the bodily information he witnesses through the physical development of his male and female counterparts.

I know someone who's much thinner than me, well less, they're eight stone. Over nine I think you feel like you're fat and I'd rather be normal weight. I know if you're taller you weigh more 'cause you're bones are longer. I think boys grow for longer than girls, girls grow quicker. (Mark, 12)

Although the whole notion of living with a self-distorted image is something which I will address another chapter, it is worth noting that 16-year-old Rob is over six foot tall while 12-year-old Mark is 5'5. The following participant is only a size six in clothes yet when she negotiates her place among her peers, she believes her body to be 'in the middle'.

Some young ones my age are even skinnier than that (size six). They don't even go up to that, but some do and some even go into a ten that are my age. But I think I'm in the middle, I'm not perfect and I'm not wrong. (Chloe, 13)

175

For others the information internalised via the process of dialogic-deliberation leaves them with such negative self-comparisons that it inhibits their very social movements.

> I stopped going to discos 'cause it's so superficial. You have to be pretty, you have to be thin, it's just unbelievable. (Shauna, 16)

It may be suggested that the intimate nature of self-comparisons with peers has the capacity to create a sense of self-consciousness which power discourses on a marco level do not have the power to do. Again individuals participate in dialogue with the information exchanged from the embodiment of peers and siblings. This appears to be a constant reality for yet another participant.

> My legs, I'd prefer them to be thinner. My friend has really, really skinny legs and she says my legs are grand. I know they're grand but I'd just prefer them to be skinnier… Sometimes you feel self-conscious about the way you look and other times you just don't mind. You might feel conscious about your hair or around your friends, your weight. They might be a lot slimmer than you and sometimes I'd be saying to myself I'd like to look that thin. (Amy, 13)

One young female even goes so far as to suggest that her dislike for school revolves around the negative self-judgements she makes with her friends. For this participant there appears to be nowhere to escape, for she also makes unfavourable self-comparisons with her sister.

> I'm probably happier when I'm not in school because all my pretty friends wouldn't be around me so I wouldn't have to worry about all that… You'd always be thinking I'd love to look like her… My sister used to be really like me and she's really pretty now though. (Molly, 13)

It may be suggested that what makes comparisons with peers and siblings so compounding is that they are so intimate, realistic and unquestionably 'true'. Through dialogic-deliberation adolescents appear to internalise the fact that the images they see before them are to be equated with a status of truth. They clearly see how those who display them attain social validation on the basis of their

176

embodied validation. Furthermore, if some individuals can implement practices to attain such valid bodies, then there is no excuse for others not being able to make the same effort. Their bodies are not unrealistically modified or airbrushed, they are real and truthful entities, who school those around them on embodied validation.

In this section, the data clearly points to a process which makes the Foucauldian journey from discourses of truth, to the implementation of such discourses in daily practices more realistic and comprehensive. Dialogic-deliberation accounts for the way in which individuals actively engage with discourses of truth in quite a complex way. They deliberate with the self upon how much of certain discourses should be taken as true with regard to their own subjective needs. This section has examined truth as a thing of the individual, as well as "a thing of the world" (Foucault, 1980: 131). As a thing of the world, truth exists in schooling discourses such as the 'aesthetic-athletic' body. As the thing of the individual, the degree to which schooling on the 'aesthetic-athletic' body is to be taken as true and implemented depends on individual's deliberations on their own bodies and the schooling they receive from the bodies of those with whom they interact.

## 5.4 Describing the Self through Open Dialogic-Deliberation

This section is concerned with the way adolescents deliberate on their own embodiment through open dialogue with others. So far, sections of this chapter, thus far, have been concerned with respondents' self-comparisons with ideals in advertising and the media, and in comparison with ideal peers. This section looks

at self-descriptions per se, as opposed to self-comparisons. As an opening question in all interviews, participants were simply asked to describe themselves. The responses returned, however, illustrated a clear demonstration of the effects of restricted and unrestricted dialogue with discourse. Foucault clearly neglects the way both genders interact differently with discourse. Females provided immediate and descriptive accounts of their embodiment, often being descriptively self-critical. They displayed how they are schooled to participate in open discussion on the body. For many of the male participants involved it appears that their schooling on the body makes it much more difficult for them to articulate descriptions of self into dialogue. This concurs with Gill, Henwood and McLean's study which found that the males involved displayed a very limited vocabulary of bodily descriptions (2005).

This section, therefore, uncovers the way males are more uncomfortable with dialogic-deliberation with others on their own sense of embodied validation than females. This might lead some to think that male adolescents simply neither think about their bodies nor talk about their bodies. However, this section reveals that when asked to compare their sense of embodied validation to images in a silhouette, male participants generally approximated their bodies to be further away from their ideal than females.

When asked to verbally describe themselves, five males referred to the fact that they had never been asked such a question before. Often after long silences, these young males provided answers which indicated their unfamiliarity with social dialogue concerning embodied projection. Answering proved to be quite a difficult task for many.

It's a hard one, I don't really know. (Andy, 16)

178

Another did not know how to respond to a request for descriptive dialogue concerning his self-identity.

> No one has ever asked me to describe myself, so I'm not really sure. (Barry, 16)

For another it was similar.

> I wouldn't have a natural way of describing myself. I've never been asked that question before. (Ger, 13)

Other males gave almost identical responses.

Although the females in this research may never have been previously asked such a question directly either, their flowing and immediate responses gave evidence of a certain fluency in dialogue regarding embodied discourses. Girls replied in an instant and descriptive fashion, almost as if self-descriptions had been memorised and subsequently when asked, replied with much articulacy. One participant exemplifies such an instant and descriptive response.

> Brown hair, brown eyes, a bit tanned, average height. (Chloe, 13)

Another was equally fluent in the language of self-description.

> I'm quite tall. I have brownie, curly hair. I have blue eyes. (Amy, 13)

Even where males gave self-descriptions after encouragement, they were less likely to engage in a negative dialogue regarding their descriptions of self than females. As much as vivid self-descriptions were at home in the dialogue used by females, so too were negative self-judgements in relation to some aspects of their projection. The following participant provides one example of this.

> Well there are things that I'd like to do to make myself better..like I want to tone my stomach but don't want to go on a diet. I'm not exactly the fittest person in PE or anything like that. (Shannon, 14)

For others the negativity was similar.

> I don't think I'm gorgeous, massive. I don't think there's anything good looking about me, but sometimes I do get a bit of confidence. I do think

179

> I'm fat sometimes and say I'm going on a diet. Sometimes I feel
> comfortable but other times I don't. (Anna, 16)

Pointing to flaws appears to be extremely commonplace in these self-descriptions.

> I have strawberry blond hair, I have blue eyes, I have a chubby face.
> I'm a bit overweight and medium height. (Molly, 13)

This trend continues with yet another participant pointing to embodied inadequacies.

> I'm not too tall, not too small, just right height. I have blond hair and
> blue eyes. I'm not fat. I'm thin in the stomach like but I've fat on my
> arms a little bit. My arms are big like. (Caoimhe, 16)

The data above provides a clear example of the flowing dialogue used by females in this study. Their assured responses and depth of description regarding their own interpretation of their embodiment lies in much contrast with many of the difficulties in articulation and brief descriptions provided by males. Although males can be seen to partake in dialogic-deliberating via self-dialogue in the last section, this is rejected in the form of open social-talk, and this in itself may contribute to the difficulties encountered by males when asked to verbally articulate self-descriptions. Females, however, appear to be much more *au fait* with social, open dialogue regarding discourses and their place within them, particularly unfavourable placements within them. One might suggest, therefore, that the female adolescents in this study are more self-critical and self-conscious than the males. I would like to propose, however, that this might not be the case.

When asked to evaluate their bodies in non-verbal way, males show more self-criticism than females. I presented interviewees with silhouette images of body sizes ranging from one to nine (see Appendix 1). 'One' showed a particularly thin frame, while 'nine' displayed a significantly overweight image. Interviewees were also asked to identify the shape they felt was most ideal. They would then write down the most valid body image, which obviously signified a status of truth for

them. In addition, they were asked to state the image which they felt their own shape was closest to. Some might say the results produced quite unexpected gendered data.

It is important to note that four of the fifteen males and four of the fifteen females chosen to participate in interviewes were handpicked on the basis of expressing contentment with their physical selves in open-ended question and answer sheets. The reality which came to flourish, however, was quite different. In the interview context, all of the thirty participants made some reference to self-dissatisfaction or a desire for self-alteration. This evidences to the fact that very few appear to be able to escape subjection to self-criticism or feelings of embodied invalidation. Indeed many of the eight chosen for their self-contentment transpired to be the least satisfied of all respondents. Once again, however, the expression of their dissatisfaction may be seen to take very gendered forms in terms of dialogue. As it has been suggested, the girls involved showed a type of schooling on the body which permitted them to be much more descriptive and vivid about their unfavourable self-judgements than boys. This vocal, social dialogue has led many to affirm that females are more concerned with body image than males. Conversely, when participating females were asked to identify the silhouette which was most ideal and the one which they were closest to, a total of seven interviewees noted their self image and the ideal image at the same number on the range. On average participants believed image number 'three' to be the most ideal and seven of these respondents placed themselves at 'three' also. It is interesting to note, however, that only four participants believed they fitted the shape which males find most attractive. Most held this to be thinner than that which they themselves stated as being the ideal shape for a female.

Male participants were also given this range of discourses, yet one might say the results were much more unprecedented. Out of the fifteen boys interviewed, only a startling number of two equated their own image with what they believed was the ideal image. With image number 'four' being the most commonly identified ideal for males, most rated themselves either overweight or underweight in comparison to what they saw as the true male body. Furthermore, only one male respondent believed he fitted the shape which girls find most attractive. This reality lies in opposition to Frost (2005) who holds that body dissatisfaction, and body dismorphia, continues to be more common among females. Although this is a limited sample, if this numerical, less discursive form of self-evaluation is to be taken as accurate, then it is essential that the male body is more widely included in discussions on feelings of embodied invalidation.

In this section I have explored how male and female participants cope with deliberating on their own embodiment through open discussion. It seems clear that self-descriptions, including negative self-descriptions came much more fluently to females. Male participants, by contrast, struggled with describing their embodied identities, in either positive or negative ways. When asked to simply write down either self-evaluations, however, males appeared to more self-critical than females. It is arguable that these expressive freedoms and limitations in terms of gender, are largely related to the very gendered forms of dialogic-deliberation which adolescents participate in with peers.

## 5.5 The Gendered Forms of Dialogic-Deliberation

In this section I look at the gendered forms of dialogic-deliberation. The process of dialogic-deliberation can be seen taking place, not only through deliberation with the self and about the self which has been witnessed in the previous two sections, but also through deliberation with one's peers. It is the form of this deliberation with others, which is highly gendered according to the narratives of participants. While female deliberation with peers takes place through verbal communication, male deliberation takes place much more through physical interaction.

I focus firstly in this section on female's open and verbal negotiation of discourse among their school peers. The extent to which these young females seem to encounter dialogue regarding ideal discourses acts as a mechanism of surveillance in itself. The issue of attaining embodied validation is central to female discussions. In this section I discuss how discourses of idealism are a central part of their everyday communication and how this itself increases the power of surveillance. Ultimately, it is not the guards who police the prisoners from a panoptic vantage point. It is the prisoners, or in this case, the adolescents, who police each other through visual surveillance and incessant oral dialogue.

This section also looks at the process of dialogic-deliberation among male participants. I suggest that this may be more complex than the female process. For the males in this study surveillance of one another may be seen to display elements which are both panoptic and pre-panoptic in their nature. It is arguable from the data attained that male participants certainly police each other through glancing and gazing. This mindful surveillance, however, is accompanied by a type of intimidating and forceful policing of the body, which Foucault believes was

183

replaced in the nineteenth century. Rather than discussing discourses of male idealism, many of the males involved point to the fact that it is more important to prove discourses of male idealism through displays of strength. This section will see that the degree to which young males partake in wrestling and tussling with each other, seems to be comparable with the degree to which young females partake in discussion with each other. Male discussion of the body appears to be largely restricted to discussing the faults of other males. It seems that these males are schooled in such a ways that they are not likely to tell another male that he displays a valid body form, but they are quite likely to tell him if he does not. Thus, policing occurs either way. This section looks at the way other forms of open discussion regarding the pursuit of embodied validation are to be avoided. Although males will be seen to care about their embodied appearance, talking about this goes against the type of masculinity they wish to embody.

In order to establish a coherent picture of the gendered nature of dialogic-deliberation, it is necessary to examine the different forms of deliberation which are used by participants to decide on validated discourses. Almost all female interviewees described a form of verbal dialogue surrounding ideal discourses to be both commonplace and pervasive in their school environments. The pursuit of embodied validation appears to be an issue that is raised on an extremely habitual basis. This inevitably exasperates these females self-reflexivity and self-judgements and therefore, one might justifiably suggest that it serves to increase their need to police the body in a similar way to that which Foucault describes as emerging out of surveillance from a central watchtower. According to one youth, her female peers are constantly deliberating on discourses and the embodied validity of one another in a very open way.

> Girls never stop talking about what people look like. It's the one thing that's always a topic of conversation. Whether someone's lost weight or put on weight. Whether someone's too thin or too fat. (Shauna, 16)

For others dialogue concerning individual self-projection is equally incessant and an everyday occurrence in her schooling.

> I know this girl in the year and she'd see a girl and say 'oh my God she's put on so much weight, did you not notice she's put on weight?' And I guess that's one of the bad things about being in a girls school, they're very bitchy. Like they'd talk about you behind you're back... like it's a huge thing and girls make it out to be such a big thing. They're always like 'oh my God I've put on weight I have to go on a diet'. (Sarah, 16)

These narratives indicate the extent to which females school each other on whether to modify their bodies in order to attain a valid shape. Either to emphasise the positive or the negative aspects of embodiment, it appears that girls are continuously negotiating with each other and reminding each other of discourses which are accepted as truth. For one participant it is such dialogue among peers regarding the policing of the body which has caused her to be reprimanded in school.

> I got put in the front row now for talking about my weight (laughs) and my friend that sits beside me she's always saying 'oh I have to go on a diet' and she brings in, you know, those big litres of water. She says she's too fat and there's not a pick on her. And my other friend, that I used to sit beside, she's always saying she's really fat and she's not fat at all. Girls are always on about weight. (Eve, 13)

Another interviewee, Lynn aged 16, is of the opinion that girls talk about weight 'all the time'. She points to the way in which what should be validated is negotiated via dialogue with friends.

> Even when you go out, it's all 'what's she wearing and does it look nice and does she have the figure for that?' They'd be always saying 'she looks too fat in that or she looks too skinny' or if the colours didn't match. (Lynn, 16)

185

Thus, what is to be taken as true is constantly negotiated among female peers. One participant holds that everyday females receive some form of schooling from each other on the body.

> In class it'd be 'oh she's after loosing loads of weight or she's after putting loads of weight on...Everyday there's like a comment about someone. Even if it's their hair or something about their appearance anyway. (Lynn, 16)

Other participants also commented on the way the negotiation of discourse is relentlessly discussed among females. It is arguable that this persistent dialogue undoubtedly places pressure on girls to self-regulate in accordance with what is described as valid and acceptable. After all, previous narratives have suggested that it is those individuals whom adolescents meet on a daily basis that they make most self-comparisons with. In terms of such self-comparisons, while many of the males involved have already identified this as an important reality, their schooling on the body does not allow them to openly discuss comparisons of the self with others or comparisons of others with the ideal in the way females appear to.

Given the female narratives explored above, it is quite obvious that dialogue concerning appearance and particularly body weight, is widely and openly discussed among young females in their daily living. In stark contrast, however, the males in this investigation point to a very different, and perhaps more complex, scenario. Therefore, there is a significant contrast between the boundless female dialogue and the very limited male dialogue regarding valid forms of embodiment. This affords Foucault's notion of discourse with a definite gendered dimension. In short, girls constantly negotiate with the self and with one another the meaning of prevailing embodied discourses. Boys, on the other hand, have already described a distinct negotiation of discourse with the self and even criticism of the self, but it appears that this is rarely, if ever, done with one another.

186

For these young males, therefore, acceptable embodiment is to be thought about but not talked about. Unacceptable embodiment, on the other hand, can be talked about. In the past feminists have suggested that this constant discussion of acceptable embodiment among females implies greater pressure to self-regulate the body. Frost (2005) and Blood (2005) point to the persistent notion in recent research, that women are more dissatisfied with their bodies than men because this is a much more frequent topic of conversation among females. However, even though male policing does not take the form of openly discussing ideal discourses, avoiding physical and verbal stigmatisation can place them under equal pressure to self-regulate the body.

According to all of the fifteen male interviewees involved, boys simply do not talk about physical appearance or self-concerns relating to it. They have been schooled to believe that 'real' men simply do not partake in social dialogue concerning their feelings towards appearance. This corroborates what Connell, 2005a, 2005b; Beynon, 2002; Cleary, 2005 and Ging, 2005, identify as a male crisis of self-enclosure. An open discussion of feelings is simply not done among boys, according to one participant.

> Boys never talk about their feelings, no. They talk about TV, girls, sport
> or something that happened the day before. It's just those four topics.
> (Evan, 13)

It seems to be an unwritten rule that adolescent males do not discuss body image or any associated worries.

> Guys would never say 'I'm after putting on weight'. (Brian, 16)

Another participant makes a concurring remark.

> No never. You'd never say 'oh I have a savage pair of pecks coming
> on' (laugh). (Enda, 16)

For other participants too, it is laughable to even imagine discussing body image with his peers. Self-discussions in relation to physical appearance are certainly a reality but open public dialogue on the topic simply does not sit easily with the carefree expectations of hegemonic masculinity. Again another participant laughs at the suggestion that young males might discuss their sense of embodied validation and holds that doing so would place them in an unfavourable category.

> No never (laugh). Unless they were real vein or something. (Kevin, 13)

This provides another example of the gendered nature of dialogue with discourse in that boys are not supposed to pay too much attention to the way they look. Once more, it is acceptable to think about or partake in self-dialogue regarding which discourses are to be taken as true and even to implement them, but never to talk about them. Another interviewee reinforces this view.

> You'd never talk about your weight. We'd never talk about it, never, ever. (Andy, 16)

The rarity of such dialogue with friends is given an amazingly collective consensus.

> I've never actually had a discussion with a guy over his appearance or anything. (Cathal, 16)

One might put forward the notion, therefore, that while many of these adolescent males are concerned about their physical embodiment and how they compare to the status of truth displayed by some of their peers, this is something that must be kept to themselves. In spite of being surrounded by much rhetoric focusing on the open nature of the 'modern man', a discussion on feelings towards appearance, or even feelings in general, remains greatly limited if the façade of an untouchable masculinity is to remain unscathed.

> None of my friends have ever mentioned anything about the way they look or feel about themselves. (Ger, 13)

188

I proceeded to ask Ger if this is because they are all happy with themselves. However, he did not see this to be the case either but indicated what he felt lay behind the silence.

> No I'd say it's because they think it's macho not to say anything. They don't want to be girlie and talk about being overweight or being underweight. I wouldn't personally talk about stuff like that with my friends. We wouldn't mention it to anybody. (Ger, 13)

Even another participant who feels that he certainly has such concerns regarding his weight, would never tell his friends. Boys simply do not talk about anything which will make them seem vulnerable or sensitive (i.e. 'girlie'). Displays of femininity, may also be construed as a form of 'gayness' which Mac an Ghaill believes is viewed as deviant from hetero-normative culture (1994). Masculinity demands individuality rather than emotional dependence as one participant suggests.

> When I thought I was fat I kept it to myself. Didn't really see it as any of their (friends) business. Usually I just keep stuff like that to myself. I'd say most fellas are like that but yet they care. Guys don't really talk to each other about stuff like that. (Barry, 16)

It is evident from Barry and others that while young males think about their approximation to embodied validation, they rarely or never, participate in dialogue with one another about it. One might conclude that this places less pressure on males than females to self-regulate and self-alter. These males, however, are certainly made aware of any embodied inadequacies, and I will look at this in more detail in Chapter Seven. Hence, what can be witnessed is the creation of young males who do 'care' about negotiating their validation within ideal discourses but who find themselves in a complex social situation where 'open care' opposes masculinity.

These males' schooling on the body bears witness to a form of male negotiation of validity which conjectures up every resemblance to Foucault's 'pre-panoptic' surveillance. This takes its form in displays of physical force and strength. Challenging and tussling with one another seems to be an inevitable aspect of adolescent male collectivism. Without a body of strength and pace one looses out in such wrestling and scuffling. Thus, the body is being policed by the same type of physical force which Foucault describes before the introduction of panoptic or mindful surveillance. Brute force, it may be suggested, is used to distinguish who has a body worthy of male validation and who has not. This points to the same type of 'blockish masculinity' which Ging recently found in her study of Irish males (2005: 41) and the 'strong masculine identity' which Cleary found (2005: 162). Half of the male interviewees made some reference to the commonplace practice of physical policing of one another through attempts to dominate. Here the notion of 'bodies as weapons' (Messner, 2002) and 'bodies in battle' (Frank, 1991) becomes apparent. According to one respondent, his male peers are constantly competing with one another to display a male strength which is aligned with ideals of masculinity. Once again discourses which have attained a status of truth are not discussed among these male youths, but they are nevertheless, demanded.

They're always measuring strengths. (Daniel, 13)

This is simply a part of life for these teenage boys school life.

Physical messing just happens with all the boys. (Josh, 13)

Others speak directly of the way in which this physical policing increases their awareness of their own physical capabilities.

You might get knocked down…you'd be always aware of it. (Evan, 13)

An older interviewee also refers to the heightened awareness of one's own body and its strength and athleticism which this type of pre-panoptic, brute force within the school yard creates.

> It's all about pushing each other and pulling and holding each other in headlocks and stuff like that. You'd need to be able to hold your own. (Enda, 16)

One participant is of the opinion that such physical wrestling and play-acting is one of the primary practices which he and his peers can be seen to participate in on their daily school breaks.

> We stand around talking about TV and sport and pushing into each other messing…It would be just pushing them and then getting them to chase you, it wouldn't be that physical but then I'm not weak myself. I'm not small for my age so it's natural for me to be strong. The smaller fellas would be weaker. (Kevin, 13)

While Kevin proposes that such scuffling would not be that physical, he also hints at the reality that his physically smaller and weaker peers may not view it in such a light. The use of brute force, whether by prison officers in those institutions described by Foucault prior to the nineteenth century introduction of panoptic surveillance or by these present day Irish adolescents against their male counterparts, result in a similar type of reflexivity. There emerges a body which demands self-regulation in order to avoid rejection and abuse and which, if successful, enhances social validation and individual embodied confidence. This body is regulated so that it can self-defend in the midst of much physical strength and agility. A negotiation of discourses of truth is required, but dialogic-deliberation in this instance takes place through physical interaction rather than verbal conversation.

I want to know I can defend myself. Like if someone pushed me up against the wall I want to know that I can push them back. If I'm weak then I'm not going to be confident doing that and then I just wouldn't be happy with myself. (Rob, 16)

It appears to be the body that is successful within such active contests which is awarded embodied validation.

It may be stated that just as these female have been schooled in a way that encourages constant and open discussion on which discourses of embodiment are to be taken as 'true', males are schooled to do this through forceful bodily contact rather than open discussion. In this section I have explained how discursive dialogue regarding any feelings towards one's sense of embodied validity lies in much opposition to the vision of acceptable masculinity which these males have negotiated. There is an overarching and unavoidable gendered backdrop to the type of autonomous or restricted way these individuals participate in dialogic-deliberations with discourse. Therefore, there is an extremely important gendered dimension to discourse as *parole* which Foucault greatly neglects.

## 5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has explored adolescent narratives with regard to how they actively deliberate on valid embodiment. I have suggested that this takes place through deliberation on bodily forms presented by schooling authorities such as advertising, consumerism and the media and also on the schooling offered by the bodily forms which these youths interact with in daily life. Narratives point out much more agency within this process of deliberation than literature would have previously suggested. Through the use of dialogic-deliberation, I have not opposed Foucault's emphasis on the power of dominant discourses but have added to his

account an element of agency, subjectivism and individual description. These participants have been seen to actively negotiate, appropriate or subjugate discourses in a discriminatory fashion, which has been largely ignored in material on adolescents and consumerism in the past.

In this chapter I have also stressed the complex gendered dimension of forms of dialogic-deliberation. Male and female participants have suggested that the process by which they deliberate upon types of valid embodiment among their school peers is particularly gendered, with females negotiating this through open discussion and males negotiating more through physical interaction. Despite a noted avoidance of open-discussion on the pursuit of embodied validation among males, this does not mean that it is any less demanded or desired. If anything, in order to be accepted among peers, embodied validation appears to be more tested and complex for males, than it is for females. This will be the focus of Chapter Six.

## 6.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the complex process by which adolescents achieve greater peer acceptance on the basis of their level of embodied validation. A type of 'aesthetic-athletic' which adolescents deliberated upon as most valid in the last chapter comes to the fore again in this chapter. Chapter Five saw how participants are schooled on embodied validation from their school peers in a vital way and thus compare their bodies to those of their peers as a means of negotiating their own approximation to embodied validation. This chapter shows how there is good reason for this, given the important role the body plays in achieving peer acceptance during adolescence.

In this chapter I look at the way the athletic body and the highly physical activities associated with it, are regarded as being particularly valuable to these adolescents. This is especially true among participating males who can be seen to use 'embodied capital' (Bourdieu) as a neutralising force, against both less desirable forms of cultural capital and also against over-association with one form of cultural capital. In general, I show how the males involved, in particular, appear to be highly dependent on participation within certain activities for forming friendships. The young males in this study are not only highly dependent on achieving embodied validation through sporting activities, but maximum validation and recognition is attained through very specific sporting activities within their respective schools. The fit and athletic body may be seen as a requirement for entry into such sports by both peers and teachers and a continued quest for further

embodied validation must be apparent for youths to retain their places in these sports. I show, therefore, how youths are often schooled to push their bodies down complex routes and to worrying degrees.

I show how these youths describe the way dedication to embodied validation is also important if they are to be accepted within romantic relationships. I suggest that this may be particularly true within Irish schooling. What becomes apparent is that these adolescents require valid bodies for acceptance and by virtue of being accepted they receive further embodied validation.

## 6.2 Male Dependence on Embodied Activities

In this section I discuss how males in this study express a greater dependence on physical, embodied activities for acceptance among peers than females do. When faced with the possibility of rejection, males speak of the complex way they use physical activities to counteract the threat of exclusion. In this way adolescents use popular activities and practices to mediate a valid self and in this sense, may be quite aptly compared to Bourdieu's 'cultural intermediaries' or 'new petite bourgeoisie' (1984). What Bourdieu refers to as embodied capital, appears to be a particularly popular and desirable form of cultural capital. In this section I firstly discuss how embodied capital is used within a complex male interplay to counteract less desirable forms of capital, such as institutionalised capital. Secondly, I discuss how participation in activities based on embodied capital is used to balance any perceived over-participation in activities based on objectified capital.

Throughout this section I point to the gendered nature of pursuing embodied validation. In keeping with the findings of Chapter Five, it becomes clear that girl's ability to more openly discuss general phenomena and general feelings, leaves them less dependent on participation in specific embodied activities for validation and acceptance among peers.

All of the adolescents in this study participated in what Rice (1999) calls 'formal' or academic based subsystems. The main focus of such participation is the attainment of 'institutionalised' or 'educational' capital (Bourdieu, 1984). However, the data suggests that for males in particular, too much attention to academic schooling may jeopardise acceptance among peers unless youths can prove that they are equally involved in schooling the body through highly physical, embodied activities, or that their academic success is simply a result of 'natural' intelligence. Participants clearly point to a reality, which Bourdieu does not discuss. They explain how one form of cultural capital has the ability to neutralise another and indeed indicate the necessity of this neutralisation for successful cultural intermediation.

Too much emersion in the pursuit of educational capital creates an imbalance in what youths are able to talk, as one male participant put it -

> People who study a lot, they don't have much of a social life so they don't have anything to talk about when they come into school except schoolwork so they kind of have their own little group. (Rob, 16)

Another male respondent is of the opinion that his clear display of commitment and care towards his academic schooling has left him disliked by his peers and comments on how others avoid this by not displaying their care publicly.

> I just know an awful lot of people who don't like me. I actually know two who you interviewed today who don't like me. I know they don't particularly like me for different reasons, maybe they don't like my attitude to schoolwork because I consider it to be serious. I do really try

196

> whereas some people don't really care about school and they should or maybe they do care but they don't want to let on. I'm not afraid to let on that I care about school 'cause it is important, but some fellas are afraid to let on 'cause it makes you 'uncool' to care about school. (Brian, 16)

Perhaps Brian has unravelled what lies at the core of educational capital for males. It is not about caring or not caring, it is about a 'display' of not caring. This concurs with the Gill, Henwood and McLean study which found that 'having a laugh' and 'not taking yourself too seriously' are essential to masculinity within postmodernity (2005: 54). It is vital to emphasise that it is the notion of 'display' which makes the male predicament all the more complex, since a commitment to schoolwork is necessary within an individualised and competitive system, but, it is an unacceptable display of this level of commitment that is crippling. Thus, the male adolescent must display his dedication to popular activities such as sport and socialising also. This is where one form of cultural capital is used to neutralise the other. Brian is involved in sporting activities. However, his dedication to schoolwork and his lack of dedication to socialising may cause his involvement in sport to be overlooked. Balancing and neutralising displays of cultural capital is continuously complex.

Daniel, aged 13, outlines the complex position of the young male in the description of certain groups within his class.

> Our class is an honours class so there are about ten, inverted commas 'swats' in my class. Then there are people who do their homework but not very well. Then there's me and three others who do their homework but are, inverted commas, 'normal'. (13)

Daniel's description of his class provides some invaluable insights. Firstly, the 'swats' in his class have displayed such dedication to an accumulation of academic capital that they are now defined by their participation in that type of schooling alone. Secondly, one gets the impression from Daniel that he thinks that those who

197

do not do their homework very well are neglecting their commitments to academic betterment. Thirdly, there is the group which Daniel places himself within, the 'normal' group. This group displays dedication to their schoolwork and so cannot be classified as lacking intelligence. What makes them 'normal', however, is their overt involvement in embodied physical activities and social networking as part of their schooling. Their display of dedication towards such activities makes their academic success seem the result of being naturally gifted rather than being a nerd or a swat. Within this ideology Bourdieu's cultural capital is given a 'natural' dimension which is an intrinsic part of possessing the cultural capital. Another male participant explains how is it easy to talk to such naturally intelligent peers but not to those who are classified as swats.

> If all they want to do is learn and study and do their homework then it's real hard to do anything with them. Whereas, if they're just naturally smart and they like coming out socialising and doing sport then it's alright. (Kevin, 13)

The socialising male and the sporting male undoubtedly rely heavily on embodied capital. According to one male respondent, it is participation in sport which acts as the ultimate neutralising force and increases a youth's peer popularity.

> Some people who are very smart might not get involved in after school activities but just focus on school. Everyone knows they shouldn't take it that seriously. It's good not just to let homework and schoolwork take over your day but to do other stuff as well. You should get involved in activities after school, like all your friends and then you'll become more popular, but if you don't do any sports after school and you're clever, then you probably won't be popular. (Josh, 13)

Participants would seem to indicate that for the male, emphasis on immersion in what Rice (1999) calls 'semiformal' subsystems such as sport can neutralise over-involvement in formal subsystems. This, however, does not appear to be as great a necessity for female adolescents. While one would imagine that neither sex would popularise those deemed to be 'nerds' or 'swats', none of the female participants in

198

this study indicated a strong involvement in formal subsystems as having an impact on acceptance or rejection within peer groups. In fact the only reference to this issue was made by Gillian, who pointed to a distinction between formal and semiformal subsystems when asked how well she feels she does in school.

> Yeah I get on well academically but not in sport. It's either academic or sports, well you could be good at both but I'm not great at sport. (16)

It seems that Gillian can have an overt interest in academia without needing to neutralise this admission, by being equally involved in sport. Within these formal or academic subsystems the way in which educational capital is interpreted and projected, differs greatly between the males and females in this study. Both are expected to have ownership of this form of cultural capital but male adolescents are left with a predicament of how much or how little they can display, an issue not as prevalent among females. Hard work is respected among females just as Ireson and Hallam suggest (2001:184). Hard work is also respected among males in this study as long as they keep it to themselves or work equally hard at extracurricular activities. Male adolescents need cultural capital in the form of educational credentials for future stability, as Bourdieu suggests, but they are limited in terms of how much of this type of schooling they are permitted to project to others in a way Bourdieu does not suggest.

It was also the males involved in this research who discussed a process by which objectified capital is neutralised by embodied capital. This is particularly complex for male participants. Both forms of cultural capital are favourable and male participants describe being highly dependent on a display of both for peer acceptance. Male respondents rely on objectified capital in the form of goods, such as computer games and on embodied capital in the form of activities, such as sport to build friendships in way female respondents do not.

According to one female respondent, girls talk very openly with other girls and this is what forms their friendships.

> We just talk about anything. Girls do talk a lot. We talk about life and what's out there for us. (Shauna, 16)

Similarly Sandra is of the opinion that girls are closer to each other than boys and their open conversations make it easier for them to fit in with peers.

> I think boys aren't as close to each other as girls, they're always slagging each other. Girls slag too but I'd know what would really hurt them and I wouldn't say it. I think fellas have to work to fit in but I don't think girls do generally. They talk more openly and it makes them closer. They talk about boys and clothes and lots of things. It's just lots of chatting and messing around but you can't really explain what it is 'cause certain people wouldn't get it. (Sandra, 13)

Sandra seems to think it could be difficult for some people to understand exactly how girls bond with each other, but what is certain is that they do not place the same weight on sharing common interests to construct these bonds as do their male counterparts. All females contributing to this study placed little emphasis, or no emphasis, on mutual interests being essential for creating friendships, although many recognised how interests in similar semiformal activities can make friendships stronger and more durable. The contributing males, on the other hand, spoke of friendship groups being formed on the basis of mutual interests in various forms of cultural capital alone.

> Everyone's interested in girls so that's one thing that everyone can come together with but there'd be lads that would be into rugby and lads that would be into skate boarding and they generally wouldn't mix. (Enda, 16)

Another male participant points to the role that a common interest in embodied (sport) and objectified capital (computer games) has in establishing peer relations.

> Like you have something that you feel confident you want to talk to them about and you just become a part of that group. Like sport or computer games. They just talk about things they have in common...With my two friends they just enjoy doing the same things I

enjoy doing. I don't really try with anyone else. I'll still talk to them but I wouldn't have much in common to talk to them about. (Barry, 16)

Mark also gives an example of the need to share common interests in his description of the breakdown of subgroups within his class.

> The people who play chess in our class all hang round together, so do the people who play Gaelic and soccer and the people who play hurling hang round together and then there's like the people who have the same interests but they mightn't be other peoples interests, they hang round together. Like those people who like the same TV programmes, who just have the same interests. (Mark, 12)

Another participant even goes so far as to say that two males cannot be very good friends if they don't share interests in the same types of cultural capital. Therefore, much more than these interests determining one's prestige within friendship groups, as Rice suggests, they are a prerequisite for entry into friendship groups.

> If someone likes tennis and someone else hates tennis but likes rugby and the other guy hates rugby then they're not going to be very good friends 'cause they don't share the same interests. If you were talking to your friends and you're talking about rugby or tennis or whatever and the other guy wouldn't have a clue what's going on, he wouldn't fit in so he wouldn't be friends with them in case that conversation comes up. (Josh, 13)

Kevin outlines a similar situation among the males in his school and proposes participation in a physical activity, such as rugby, to gain acceptance within a particular peer group.

> In this school, for example, if there was a whole group of fellas and they were friends before they started playing rugby but then they all started playing rugby and they were all good at it, then they'd have an extra thing to talk about and that person that didn't play rugby wouldn't be able to talk to them because he wouldn't know as much about it but then he'd just start playing it so that they'd notice him more and they'd be able to talk with him. (Kevin, 13)

What is striking here is adolescent males dependence on being schooled in objectified and embodied capital as a means attaining acceptance.

201

Male respondents appear to often go to great lengths to become schooled in objectified capital as a means of augmenting relationships with their peers. Mark tells of how his attainment of objectified capital, through the purchasing of entertainment technology, augmented his informal peers networks. It served as a basis for approaching other male peers, and for being approached, and for forming friendships on the basis of this mutual interest.

> I've got a PlayStation 2 'cause I didn't have a PlayStation 1. And when everybody else was talking about PlayStation 1, I virtually had nothing to talk about so I got PlayStation 2 just when it came out so then you could talk to your friends about playing games. You could ask for the loan of games and you'd give them something. Just get more friends...it would build friendships up. Say if someone had another game that you wanted and you hadn't really talked to him and then you ask 'I'll give you one game if you give me that?' and then you start talking and you might start talking more. Then you get more friends that way I think 'cause like there's one guy I did that with at the start of the year and now I know him quite a bit. (Mark, 12)

It may be suggested that objectified capital in the form of technology offers youths a common platform from which to launch their friendships. Authors in this area (for example, Elwes, 1992; Reimer, 1995; Featherstone and Burrows, 1995; Schlosser, 2002; Childs, 2003) tend to place emphasis on the individualised nature of entertainment technology or its opening up of adult worlds to youths. This research, however, indicates that schooling in objectified capital from TV programmes, films, music and computer games is essential as a common basis on which to base peer networks. For 13-year-old Josh, for instance, most activities are done in the company of friends.

> Most evenings I meet my friends that go to other schools. We'd go out and play or play the PlayStation together and watch a bit of TV. We'd always watch matches together. (Josh, 13)

In this context semiformal activities provide a mutual geographical space and a mutual conversational space. However, as with Bourdieu's 'new petite bourgeoisie'

adolescents must not appear over-dedicated to the mediation of one form of capital and therefore, embodied capital is used to maintain an acceptable balance.

What is so complex for males is the importance of objectified capital, and also the importance of not becoming so associated with it, to the detriment of other forms of capital. Once again, embodied capital can be seen as a neutralising force according to these males. Too much participation in technology-based activities produces a self at odds with the fit and focused self. However, according to 16-year-old Enda most are sufficiently schooled on embodied validation to not allow this to happen.

> Most of my friends would do both, play sport and do that (i.e. watch TV and play the PlayStation). There would be a few lads in the class they're into war-hammer and stuff like that. They're generally big lads, like fat. They'd all be into the PlayStation and stuff as well. There's only a few people who use it in unhealthy amounts. You'd spot someone a mile off who uses the PlayStation. Loads of people just play it before they go to bed. (Enda, 16)

The physical self which emerges from over-involvement in non-physical activities lies totally in opposition to the type of athletic male body which was seen to be most valid in Chapter Five. Hence, even though entertainment technologies have many benefits for adolescents, they remain aware of the reality that too much dependency on these activities will not lead to embodied validation. This extends to females also. One female participant indicates a rejection of the technology junkie body.

> When you see someone walking down the street...you think that they watch a lot of TV, play a lot of computer, that sort of thing where they're sitting up all the time as opposed to getting up and going to the gym...That happens such a lot with both girls and fellas. Like I know some of my friends who are kind of heavy are on the computer all the time or they know everything that's happening on TV. (Gillian, 16)

Both Enda and Gillian make reference to noticing from afar those who dedicate too much time to non-physical activities. For the young individuals partaking in this

research, physical activities seem to be most popular because, according to Gillian, just as agents for technological activities will be noticed from afar, so too will agents for physical, proactive and dynamic activities.

For male interviewees the implications of involvement in sport appear to be twofold. Firstly, sport allows them to work towards the construction of a valid athletic body. Secondly, their embodied capital allows them to enter into a social setting where they can attain and maintain friendships. Although he suggests that he does not play for this reason, one participant describes the dual importance of sport.

> If I didn't play Gaelic or soccer I'd lose a lot of contacts. I don't play for that, it's to be fast and fit, but I would if I stopped playing I'd loose a lot of contacts 'cause most of them play Gaelic and soccer. I'd definitely lose a good bit of contacts if I didn't play sports. (Ger, 13)

Another participant also points to the dual importance of being schooled in physical group activities in that they keep him fit and they provide a common focus on which to base friendships.

> It's fun and keeps me really fit. I don't want to give up any of them 'cause I just enjoy them so much and I get along with everyone on the team as well....Most of them on my team live a good bit away from me. If I gave it up I wouldn't get to see many other people from other classes. It just helps you socialise. There was this guy in my class who had no friends so he decided to take up a sport just so he could make some friends. (Evan, 13)

Even in the more senior years this devotion to sport is an intrinsic part of life, according to Rob. It maintains both one's physique and one's friendships.

> I don't think I will put on that much weight 'cause I will play sport every week. I will always play sport and as well there's a really big social life to it, like most of my mates play a sport or like one. (Rob, 16)

It is this neutralising, bonding and self-regulating power of sport, which places it at the top of a hierarchy of semiformal activities and as something which a significant number of respondents view as essential to the attainment of embodied validation.

204

In this section I have indicated how embodied capital acts as a neutralising force on less favourable forms of cultural capital or, alternatively, counteracts an imbalance in certain forms of cultural capital. I have suggested that this happens particularly with males, as opposed to females, as they appear to be under greater pressure to balance displays of cultural capital. Bourdieu does not delve into the notion of one form of cultural capital neutralising another for a cultural intermediary, nor does he suggest that this is essential for mediation. Furthermore, this research indicates that it is not simply a display of schooling in any form of embodied capital that acts as a force of neutralisation and validation for adolescents, but very specific displays.

## 6.3 Pushing for Validation within Specific Embodied Activities

This section is primarily concerned with a discussion of the embodied activities which adolescents have identified as most significant to the attainment of embodied validation. Rice (1999) is of the belief that some activities hold more prestige than others. He holds that the prestige of the activity which an adolescent is schooled within and their own level of schooling within that activity, will have notable consequences for the status of the individual's identity.

However, we can see here that it is rather more complex than simply choosing a prestigious activity and attaining a place within the group. In this section participants speak of the levels of embodied fitness and training involved in attaining places within these highly valid physical activities. Literature has greatly ignored the lengths to which these teenagers, and particularly males, will go for obtaining their place within a specific activity. It is only those who display

appropriate and validated forms of embodied capital who are likely to attain positions within such prestigious activities. Those who display what is perceived to be invalid embodied capital, are refused access. Those who are lucky enough to attain a position, but whose embodied capital becomes invalid may face a harsh reality. They lose their much sought after positions.

Foley's investigation of Texan schools presents a hierarchical understanding of adolescent activities. Swain (2003) also points to a hierarchical interpretation in the British context. Both studies focus exclusively on young males and both place highly physical activities at the top of this hierarchy within schools. This present research offers an exclusively Irish interpretation of this hierarchy. Nevertheless, it appears that these young Irish males are being schooled in a similar understanding of the importance of highly physical, bodily activities over other activities. Such hierarchies do not appear to be so significant to females in this study, who speak of involvement in practices such as hockey, basketball, football, athletics, gymnastics, dancing, aerobics and acting but do not prioritise one of these over another. For these girls it is clearly the embodied result of participation in activities which is important to peer popularity and not the particular activity they are involved in to achieve it. Females must demonstrate unquestionable schooling in valid body forms, but they do not need to go about attaining such forms through participation in particular activities in order to achieve a high status of embodied validation. Boys, on the other hand, appear to hold more prestige if they are members of very specific embodied activities. Male respondents point to a clear hierarchy of activities for validation among peers. Some male participants point to the way in which physical activities influence one's social standing, with non-physical activities at the converse end of this hierarchy.

> If you're on the soccer team here it's pretty big 'cause if you're on the chess team who cares. Soccer is cool. (Mark, 12)

Similarly Darren identifies the difference between the prestige of physical sports and more mentally challenging activities and even goes on to suggest how the latter are labelled negatively.

> Everyone wants to play soccer, then rugby, then Gaelic and so on. The chess people would probably be known to be like nerds. (Darren, 12)

In the more senior years of their schooling, respondents continued to refer to soccer as the sport demanding most embodied capital and bestowing most prestige.

> Football is probably the most obvious sport that people would want to be in, then Gaelic, hurling, maybe basketball and they're probably the main sports. There's table tennis and cross-country but they wouldn't be the same as football. (Cian, 16)

Likewise another interviewee holds that in his experience there is no higher form of cultural capital than that which soccer can offer. Connell (2005a) and Hook (2006) have referred to the way in which the very best sports players may find a career on the basis of their embodied abilities. This may lead to ultimate peer recognition.

> Soccer is the highest. In terms of popularity you don't get higher. In my experience when people have won in Gaelic and hurling it hasn't been as beneficial to them as winning in soccer has been. Soccer must be the cool thing to be involved in now 'cause they see their idols in England playing for Man United and that, 'cause we're getting' to that age now that if they're going to make it then they're going to go to England in the next few years to play if they're good enough and if they go to England, they're going to be very popular when they come back. They'll be idolised. There are a few teams here in Dublin and if you play for them then you're going to be idolised as well. (Andy, 16)

Youths are schooled to understand that members of successful school sports teams are constantly applauded.

> If you're on the school sports teams you're going to get respect. (Cian, 16)

207

Being good at team sports with a high level of physicality is seen to be highly significant for male validation among peers, for another participant also.

> In a boys school you have to be good at sports. The popular guys are really good at soccer and stuff and are out playing on the Astroturf every day. Strong enough I'd say. Confident....If he's good at sport I'd say would be the main thing, if he's confident, if he's funny, has a good personality and strong. I'd say if you're smart it helps but you don't have to be and good with the ladies helps 'cause you want to be his friend to get in with that group. (Mark, 12)

Being successful within sport and having the athletic physique which accompanies this appears to open up a much wider array of social networks for adolescent males within their schools.

> It's not always the sports people that are popular but generally if you're good at soccer then you're always going' to be popular. People on the soccer teams are never slagged or anything like that. Nine times out of ten. I don't know maybe it's that you're scoring goals for the school. It's just popularity...they're generally good at sport, grew up playing for the schools teams, winning games and scoring goals. (Andy, 16)

Despite an obvious emphasis on the prestige of soccer among male participants, those who attend schools where Gaelic and rugby are held in high esteem state that embodied success in these sports is what leads to social validation. Either way, soccer, Gaelic and rugby are all similar in that they demand bodily schooling in physical fitness and precision. In addition, they all offer sites for male combat and necessitate an embodied masculine armamentarium. For both male and female respondents, sustaining their place within semiformal subsystems demands much dedication and determination. Twenty-two of the thirty participants interviewed made some reference to difficulties they have experienced in their pursuit of embodied validation within prestigious activities and to the further difficulties they have in sustaining such places.

Participants are highly reflexive on the stability of their places within popular activities and teams. Their instability may remind one of Giddens' 'pure

relationships' (1991), although his description refers to the instability of marital relationships and is therefore quite different. Sennet's (1994) broader reference to the world as an airport departure lounge, where all relations are momentary and replaceable, is perhaps more applicable. Adolescents school their bodies to attain validated places within such activities. However, this is a complex pursuit because should other commitments cause youths to lapse in their commitment to a group activity, for instance, then they can be displaced, being immediately replaced by another willing recruit. Alternatively, should the lack of commitment by others involved in the group activity render the individual unable to realise his or her full potential, then he or she is likely to transfer their commitment to more individualised activities. Regardless of the scenario, both group and individualised activities demand competitive individualism if one is to retain their place in the group and remain more validated than others. In order to maintain their places within the activity adolescents appear to turn to their embodied abilities.

For the youths involved in this research, they come to depend on the creation of a fit, fast and focused body to attain and sustain their embodied validation within a given activity. Mary believes this is difficult, as one needs to be the best at all times.

> I play badminton but there are girls who are better than me. I try, but there will always be someone better than you. (Mary, 13)

The need to be better than one's peers in sporting activities ensures constant competition, according to another participant.

> They do compete definitely in sport...In sport guys want to be better than each other the whole time. (Kevin, 13)

An older participant holds that this competitiveness only grows with being schooled on bodily activities, as one's chance to make it onto the more prestigious

teams, and to avail of the social validation which is associated with this, becomes more imminent.

> The older they get the more competitive they get. In soccer at this stage they're either trying their best to get to England or to get noticed by the better teams. They're really, really competitive. (Andy, 16)

In another interview, the male in question went so far as to describe the need to be the best as an innate part of one's self-identity.

> You always want to be the best. It's just a drive you have in you. You have to have ambition. (Mark, 12)

Intrigued at the social operations which might cause a 12-year-old boy to view competition and ambition as essential, I asked him why he would need such things. In response he gave an example of how having ambition helps one to achieve within competition. In turn, victory in competition bestows prestige on the group activity and crucially it enhances the validation of the individual within the group. This simultaneously increases one's feelings of self-satisfaction.

> In PE we do this run around every time, it's like six laps of the Astroturf and whoever does it first you get lined up and if you do it better it's better for your team and if you do it better for your team you get congratulated. It's a feel good feeling. (Mark, 12)

Ultimately, I propose that if Mark sustains this highly embodied level of performance it may result in further acceptance and validation among peers. The 'feel good' factor of peer recognition enhances his self-esteem. In a more complex turn, it may also cause him to learn that he must repeat this superior performance in order to sustain this recognition and validation.

The possibility of being displaced from a prestigious activity is an ever-looming reality for the majority of adolescents in this study. Shauna is just one participant who offers a real life example of this.

> Last year we just did hockey and then there's those who are really good at hockey and really, really competitive. I got hit on the head with a

210

> hockey stick. There are those who are excellent at all sports – football, basketball, hockey, everything and if you're on their team they just want to win, which means they don't want you there. (Shauna, 16)

Adolescents appear to be honest about not wanting those who do not live up to the embodied challenge of the sport on teams. According to one male interviewee someone will tell you that they no longer want you around, if you are not offering enough commitment or ability.

> In sport even if your coach doesn't say you're not playing very well, your team mates are going to say, 'what's the story, what's wrong?'. If you had all your friends giving out you'd try to do your best. (Cian, 16)

Hence, adolescents try to work towards making an impressionable physical performance so that they do not risk loosing their place within activities, diminishing their validation among peers. Without competitive motivation, many youths fear being displaced and replaced. One respondent outlines how this process of replacement works.

> I always turn up to try to make an impression and to try to get into the next team. It's hard to get on sometimes but if a player is your position on the next team doesn't play well, you have to try and play well every week just in case he slips up one week and the coach might see you and put you up. (Josh, 13)

Another interviewee also gives an account of how his schooling through participation in sport has taught him about the expendable nature of the individual. This equates with the competitive predicament Josh has confessed to finding himself in.

> Rugby is hugely competitive 'cause there's always someone who wants to take your place. For the lads on the seniors and juniors there's always a lad younger than them who wants to take their place on the team so they need to work at it and keep it up. (Enda, 16)

Many participants spoke of the lack of regard that is shown to those who do not reach an acceptable physical athleticism for the purpose of the sport. One participant points to the way in which physical activities have no place for those

211

who do not live up to expectations, despite one's utmost efforts. It is not the pursuit of embodied validation which is applauded, but actually attaining it. The embodied validation others receive has only served to lower this participant's self-esteem and self-belief.

> I swim seven times a week so I barely have time to do anything else...Like on Friday I have swimming at half five (am)...on Saturday morning I have swimming at half six...I've been swimming competitively now for five or six years and I'm a good swimmer, like I'd be better than average, but you have to be great and if you're not great people don't care about you. That's what I hate about swimming it's a very, very competitive sport...there's a guy in my swimming club who trains an awful lot and he gets the results. He wins absolutely everything. I train and give it my all but still don't get anywhere; it's kind of a bit disconcerting sometimes. (Brian, 16)

The obvious validation of some creates feelings of inferiority in others. Sandra refers to how her schooling teaches her about inequality, in terms of the lack of privileges she receives by comparison to more physically skilled youths.

> I'm on the last team in hockey so we don't get any matches so that's bad. We don't get as much as the higher teams anyway (Sandra, 13).

Another respondent outlines a similar reality, where her inferior physical performances and perceived invalid embodied capital have resulted in the possibility of being displaced. The lack of validation she is given for the efforts she makes and the superior praise attributed to others has educated her into doubting her own embodied abilities and belittling them.

> She (teacher) always expects too much off me, she expects me to be super fit. Last Tuesday she gave out to me for holding the racket the wrong way and the roars of her at me. She said 'if you hold that racket wrong one more time you're not being on the badminton team'...Only the A team get to practice all the time and get to use the hall...I can't play it. It's not hard, I'm just no good at it. At matches I just feel stupid 'cause I can't play it. I feel left out, 'cause I can't play it and I do be afraid she'd go back to the staff room and make a laugh of me. (Eve, 13)

For others the key was to endlessly push their bodies to decrease their chances of being displaced.

It emerged quite early on in the fieldwork that youths are schooled to train and push the body as a primary mechanism for retaining their positions within specific activities. The findings suggest that pushing the body through complex routines, and to great lengths to attain acceptance and applause within popular activities, deserves much more attention than it has been given in associated literature. As the sample of respondents in this research clearly describe highly physical activities as holding the most prestige, youths undoubtedly depend on embodied validation to take them to their desired social destination. Messner, 2002; Langman, 2003; Swain, 2003; Connell, 2005a, 2005b and Boden, 2006 all discuss the essentialness of sports with a high level of physicality for the construction of hegemonic masculinity. However, there is little evidence of empirical accounts describing the extent youths will go to for recognisable embodied validation. The narratives in this research provide a clear description of just how seriously adolescents take the maximisation of their embodied abilities. When speaking of the recent death of a young rugby player one participant hinted at just what lengths youths are willing to go to to achieve a certain social status.

> He was probably using enhancers like EPO and NESP which basically gets your heart rate up to a hamster's heart rate...every sport uses them. (Enda, 16)

For other participants the determination to excel and, therefore, to achieve further embodied capital was not dependent on drugs but on self-discipline and drive.

> I try to go to training as much as I can and matches as much as I can. I just go out and try, and try real hard, to get a lot better at the sport. (Kevin, 13)

Similarly pushing the body was essential for another participant too.

> I'd have twelve or thirteen training sessions a week. I would go to all of them. (Evan, 13)

For 13-year-old Ger it is important to work towards schooling the body in excellence. Much of his week appears to be dedicated towards this very purpose. Individual training and even additional sports are taken on to improve fitness and thereby to better ensure one's place on a desired team.

> I train, I play football, I go running in the park...I work on it and work on it. I play hurling as well on Thursdays in school. I try to play lots of other sports and get my fitness up and just try and play better than the person I'm marking. (Ger, 13)

Again sport provides access to peer networks and adolescents often fear being excluded from such networks should their fitness drop or their embodied validity deteriorate. This is why Amy suggests you must always give it your best effort.

> I love doing the running and you meet loads of people there and I also need to keep fit. You have to give it your all when you're training or you'll go down a grade for next year. (Amy, 13)

Other participants gave a more psychological narration of how they attempt to push their physical self to attain embodied validation. Enda outlines the complex process, which he undertakes to push his body to guarantee other swimmers do not surpass him.

> I get in in the middle lane and by the time that set is over I'd usually be at the top of the group. If I'm second I push it to make sure that I'm touching the toes of the guy ahead of me. I have to make sure that I'm not giving him any space and that I'm not dragging behind. (Enda, 16)

All additional training is utilised for the pursuit of recognition and status within a given activity. Highly embodied activities are extremely powerful. Psychological determination and physical dedication seem to be essential for those seeking peer popularity through bodily recognition. For a significant number of the participants I spoke to, this process is much more time consuming and self-consuming than the authors cited in this section have described. For two junior year participants the

214

body is undoubtedly used as an agent for attaining validation against competing peers. Both describe this within the structure of PE class and, as with Enda, describe how they become psyched up to attain greater validation and accordingly, push the body to facilitate this. The right results serve to heighten self-esteem and self-worth, but this demands much attention and devotion.

> Sometimes you're in school and you have to do as many sit-ups as you can in three minutes and then you start comparing yourself with other girls. If someone got ten lower than you, you'd be delighted that you got that many more. In one of my first PE classes we had to do sit-ups and press-ups and stuff and then we had to compare our answers and that made me feel good about myself 'cause I got that many more. (Shannon, 14)

As a result of the increased self-confidence which this success appears to have given Shannon, I posed the question of what she would do if someone else had attained the superior prestige. Again her answer shows the largely bodily nature of this quest for validation, as she suggests that she would push the body even further.

> I'd just try harder the next time. Practice and practice at home and then your next PE class you could get higher than that person and you'd feel all good about yourself. (Shannon, 14)

It appears that the answer to peer recognition, is always more work for the body.

Mark's experiences of PE class are greatly comparable to those of Shannon.

> I try as hard as I can at PE and I think a lot of other people do as well. You try to be the best in the class at something. Like we do this run every time, it's as many laps as you can in two minutes. If you get seven and the other guys gets eight you'll try to be as good as him. I'm in the top four but that's all so I try and be better next time. (Mark, 12)

As with Shannon, I asked Mark how it makes him feel when someone else earns more recognition than him. Once more his answer implies his clear dependence on the body as a medium for validation.

> I'd train harder and I'd try harder. I'd try harder in my soccer training and all 'cause I know it all adds up in the end. (Mark, 12)

Youths clearly push their bodies to attain the validation, which gets them desired social positions.

Participants also point to the fact that embodied validation, not only comes from being schooled in validated embodied performances but also from being schooled in validated embodied presentation. All female participants stated that the impact of sport on the visual body was a primary motivator behind their seeking places within activities. 13-year-old Ger was among a number of male participants who stated that his dedication to sport was simply to succeed in validated embodied performances and not because he wanted to create a particular physique.

> When my dad and my brother are playing football I go for a run, but that's just to keep my fitness up, it's not how I look, it's just for my sports. (Ger, 13)

Other respondent suggests that it is not only being fit that bestows prestige, but actually looking fit. For the physically athletic, trim and toned youth, onlookers are left in no doubt as to his or her bodily validity. Looking fit, therefore, is essential for acceptance within specific activities. Andy puts forward the notion that recognition within certain sports is dependent on the display of an obvious physical strength. This recognition, in turn, results in further peer popularity and validation.

> Physically they'd have to be big lads, like you don't get a small soccer player. You have to be strong. Generally, if you were to ask people who the popular guys are they'd pick the same people and they'd be the same big, strong people. (Andy, 16)

One participant holds that this visual display is intrinsic to competition among peers.

> In school sport is really competitive so one always tries to be better that the other, to be captain or something. Boys want to be better than everyone else. They want to be like the people they see on TV like David Beckham and people like that. (Darren, 12)

Being like such an icon is what keeps another interviewee focused. He admits to wanting the same level of embodied validation that is enjoyed by those who are globally recognised. He feels he can achieve this by adopting their embodied capital for himself. This is where Bourdieu (1984) suggests that cultural intermediaries, follow the trends of 'intellectuals' (i.e. popular icons) and become the 'new intellectuals'. However, in both of these accounts, as in Chapter Five, adolescents do not simply want embodied validation because they are following a popular trend, but also because this elevates their agency among their peers and leads to social recognition.

> I always say to myself just keep going, look at Ronaldo and look at Beckham, they would have done the same thing. So "just keep going you're nearly there" I always say to myself. And then just the though of how big they are and getting to their level...and all the girls like the (laughs). I'd say to be a big footballer, you'd actually have to be good looking. Like Beckham you see him in all the ads and posters. (Eoin, 13)

Both the aesthetic and athletic, the performance and presentation based sides of Bourdieu's embodied capital, may be seen to be equally significant for embodied validation within specific activities. It is male participants, once more, who stress specific activities as criteria for acceptance. There is a strong male orientated gendered dimension to the importance of sporting 'intellectuals' and to being cultural intermediaries of 'specific' athletic activities. However, the complex process of mediating the right amounts of aestheticism and athleticism is clearly identified as a mechanism for attaining positions that signify embodied validation.

The importance of visual validity is further emphasised through the rejection of those who are seen to have invalid embodiment for some activities. There are simply not prestigious places reserved for those who fail to display valid forms of embodied performance and embodied presentation. According to a

significant proportion of the participants in this research, those who fail to demonstrate such athletic and aesthetic embodied capital may fall into what Goffman (1963b) has called a 'stigmatised' group. For Goffman this means that individuals are seen to possess a characteristic which deviates from the norm. In Chapter Seven I will look at exactly how common the stigmatisation of individuals is said to be among respondents but for now I wish to look at how those who do not possess the embodied capital necessary for sports are stigmatised. In the next chapter I will address how males and females alike described the ways in which peers who deviate from the norm are stigmatised. However, with regard to sport only one of the fifteen female respondents referred to how her female friend is excluded from participation in a sporting activity. By contrast, nine of the fifteen boys interviewed made reference to how those who are either too fat or too thin are excluded from sport. This is yet another indication of the emphasis males place on involvement in sporting activities. The importance attributed to inclusion makes exclusion all the more unavoidable and all the more obvious. What is also worth noting is that the single female participant who did mention the exclusion of her friend because of her lack of acceptable embodied capital, noted that it was her manager and not her fellow peers who excluded her.

> Like she's very big she is...She joined the football team to loose weight but the manager doesn't let her play 'cause she's not good and she's not fit. (Eve, 13)

For the males involved this exclusion took place primarily among peers themselves. I would like to argue that this points to a lack of tolerance among males towards those who might jeopardise the prestige of the activity. After all, the 'aesthetic-athletic' body assures all involved that it is equipped with the physical credentials necessary to be an asset to the activity. By the same token, those who

fall too far either side of the athletic norm for sport, are likely to be stigmatised or excluded. Whether too fat or too thin, male youths can be stigmatised within sporting peer groups through blatant exclusion. According to Josh, aged 13, fat youths are excluded from teams because they do not have the embodied capital needed to validate either him or herself or the team.

> They're not agile enough to do the things that involve running or that. You'd need to be very fit and if you're really heavy and slow it won't help. (Josh, 13)

For others stigmatisation occurs on the basis of being too thin. For Evan this prevents males from initial inclusion, which itself is a form of blatant exclusion.

> There was this guy in my class...he was very skinny. No one would pick him for sports, no one would hang round with him. They just excluded him. (Evan, 13)

For another participant although he was initially included in sporting activities, he was physically pushed out and intimidated because he failed in his pursuit of embodied validation due to being too small to benefit the team. He has clearly been schooled to acknowledge that there is no place for those with perceived inferior bodies. Some years later this respondent still recalls the physicality of the processes by which he was clearly excluded and points to the emotional impact of the incident.

> When I was in sixth class I got the ball and I was about to pass it to another guy. He ran into me, he rugby tackled me and he was on my team and he punched me in the stomach and then just got up grabbed the ball and walked off. The other time we were playing indoor hurling here and one of the other guys charged at me and bashed me off the wall. I think they just don't like me being in a sporting atmosphere in the first place, they don't think I'm good enough. I'm small and not athletic. (Cathal, 16)

It is apparent that embodied capital in its athletic form is what is continually emerging as essential for inclusion. Being too small or too big seems to perpetually place an individual in a complex position where they risk stigmatisation, yet this is

219

particularly likely for those who are too big. Some are reminded of their stigma and are continually excluded on this basis.

> They may just be excluded from sports but they're called names to their face as well. (Eoin, 13)

Others become aware of their stigma on the basis of their exclusion.

> While fat people might not be slagged to their face, they would be excluded from sport and stuff like that. (Daniel, 13)

Another interviewee describes how an overweight person he is acquainted with is not excluded from the activity in question but as his stigma is jeopardising the objectives of the team, the stigmatisation takes places through the frustration of other group members and their covert discussions.

> There's one guy and we're going on a cycling trip on Tuesday and he's massively overweight and he's got chronic asthma and everything and he's bringing' down the group and we all think it. We can't go as fast cause he won't put the effort in, it's not so much that he can't but he won't try. You know when you're cycling you stand up to go up hills. He will not do that, he gets off the bike and pushes it up the hill...It just really annoys me. (Enda, 16)

Another process of stigmatisation which seems to take place appears to be even more complex in that it allows the individual to remain fully included in the activity but designated to exclusive positions. These positions are even seen to be of benefit to the aims of the group. The places they assume, however, are specific to their physical embodiment. For one overweight youth, although his friends tell him he shouldn't be on the team at all, they have given him a position, but one that demands least physical running and therefore, they never truly validate his embodied presence.

> People just say 'you're so fat that you shouldn't be on the soccer team' but he's only the goalkeeper and he's only the second goalkeeper. (Mark, 12)

While there is no outright exclusion, therefore, he is only given the option of one position and it is in this way that stigmatisation takes place. Another male contributor seems to think that having a stigmatised position is better than having no position at all.

> In this school if you're really skinny you wouldn't be able to play any of the main sports like rugby. Like even if you're fat you can play prop but if you're really skinny you can't play anywhere and you're kind of isolated a bit more. (Rob, 16)

It must be stated, however, that designating a youth to one position only, is equally a form of isolation. It is a huge reminder that their embodied identity is invalid by virtue of the fact that it can only occupy one social space. It is also a space, which lies in contrast to the space occupied by the body of active and aesthetic athleticism.

In this section I have looked at participants' identification of a hierarchy of activities which adolescents may be involved in. Male respondents placed highly physical sports at the top of this hierarchy and spoke of the prestige that is attached to obtaining a position within popular activities. However, this section has also described how acceptance is more complex than simply wishing for a particular position and attaining it. The narratives suggest that youths are schooled by coaches and peers to learn to push the body to attain the embodied validation which sees one worthy of a place within sporting activities. Furthermore, they must push the body to retain this place. I have proposed that the lengths to which youths will go to to attain places within prestigious teams and groups, has been underestimated. This section has also examined the importance of embodied presentation for acceptance within prestigious activities, as well as embodied performance. The significance of this visual aspect, I have suggested, becomes truly coherent through the rejection of those who display a body which is

aesthetically and athletically invalid. Throughout this section I have indicated the way in which sporting narratives are male dominated. This does not mean that sport does not offer females embodied recognition, but rather the data suggests that females are not as dependent as males on participation within very specific sports to attain embodied validation. Quite simply, for these females, peer recognition can come from embodied validation regardless of how the body came to be. For these males it is not so simple, as peer recognition comes more from embodied validation through competitive participation in specific sporting activities.

## 6.4 Validation through Making an Embodied Impression

This section is concerned with the value of embodied validation for acceptance within romantic relationships during adolescence. Through an examination of the data I look at the magnitude placed on embodied capital, over and above other forms of Bourdieu's cultural capital, for acceptance within relationships. As with 'activity' based groups, however, the embodied validity which permitted acceptance, must be maintained, in order to sustain romantic relationships. I reintroduce Giddens' and Sennet's notions of the dissolvability of relationships in modern times. It must be acknowledged that the short-term nature of many such adolescent relationships is certainly an artefact of relationship experimentation during adolescence. However, I am concerned with the way adolescents are schooled to place such importance on embodied appearance within these relationships and the complex way the body is used to construct and deconstruct relationships.

When Rice examines friendship-based or informal subsystems, he is writing in an American context, where co-educational schooling is predominantly the norm. However, there narratives propose that there is a certain unfamiliarity between males and females in the Irish context and that this intensifies the role which the body plays in the establishment of friendships and particularly romantic relationships. Many of the respondents in this investigation reported feeling uncomfortable around members of the opposite sex. A long tradition of segregated schooling has meant that youths are still coping with its consequences. When youths come in contact with the opposite sex, therefore, I propose that this causes interactions to focus on trying to make an impression or 'impressive interaction', as opposed to trying to build friendships. The body, as opposed to conversation, is often used as a tool to speak a familiar language. In short, the valid body has a greater chance of accessing relationships, while acceptance by another into a relationship offers embodied validation in its own right. This is especially the case if the other partner in the relationship displays high levels of embodied capital also.

The majority of respondents from single-sex schools stated that if they went to a mixed school they would make more of an effort with their appearance. This suggests that their intention is to be accepted as someone who is attractive and desirable, rather than someone who might be a good friend. Ironically where youths had attended co-educational schools and were now in more senior years, they were better able to form genuine friendships with the opposite sex and less likely to feel the need to partake in what I will call 'impressive interaction'. It must be noted, however, that the older students I spoke to from the mixed school all saw themselves as part of smaller sub-cultural groups, unwilling to succumb to the usual mainstream practices of self-presentation in terms of clothing etc. However,

they did speak of this among their fellow schoolmates. For junior year respondents in this mixed school, they described the same type of physical impression making as those in single-sex institutions.

What is paramount here is that it is the body, which most interviewees say they would try to improve, had they more contact with the opposite sex in school. For one participant, she would implement self-altering regimes to alleviate concerns about her appearance if she were in daily contact with males.

> I'd be more concerned about the way I look. I'd want to do my hair different maybe and some people would probably put on makeup before they come in to look nicer. (Amy, 13)

Similarly an older male participant acknowledges that if he were in school with girls, it is his physical self that he would try harder to maintain and project.

> I definitely, definitely feel I would care more...I think if there were girls in the school you'd put more of an effort into your appearance. (Cian, 16)

Another respondent has a similar view of how females would better police their physical appearance in the presence of males. She even adds that, although she is in a single-sex school, her peers still implement these self-maintenance regimen, just in case males were to hear back that these females allowed their appearance to lapse in any way. This certainly does not point to schooling that creates familiar, informal friendships, but to peers latent with self-consciousness as a result of their schooling in unfamiliarity with heterogeneity.

> In a mixed school I'd probably wear foundation but not really obviously. So would everyone I'd say, they'd be layering on the makeup, definitely...Even I think that they think they have to look flawless for school. They have to be perfected as much as their friends. Also in case friends would be talking about them to fellas. (Gillian, 16).

For other participants, they spoke of situations where they do come in contact with members of the opposite sex and note how either they or their peers seek to physically impress when this happens.

> I'd say a lot of guys would try to show off if there are girls around and that. They'd probably make more of an effort with how they look. Anytime the girls from Saint Bríd's are coming up to do the plays you'd see people making more of an effort even. (Josh, 13)

Another participant looks at an identical scenario which occurred in his school.

> Some of the lads would be dressed up to the nines and you're going to your school to do a few rehearsals, you're not going out. The girls put in a huge effort. They all wore their best, best clothes. (Andy, 16)

Sandra speaks of how she feels it essential to make an effort with her appearance when in an environment with males.

> There's a youth place we can go to just to play sport and stuff and that's one of the main things 'cause there's fellas there, I'd wear make up. (Sandra, 13)

It may be argued that, where schooling has lead some adolescents to be unfamiliar with mixing with the opposite sex, they are consequently being schooled to feel that where contact is made, the body often takes on the role of interaction. An individual who is aesthetically and athletically embodied can, not only gain success in attaining prestigious positions as we saw in the last section, but can communicate a level of desirability through impression rather than conversation. For one participant when the females in her single-sex school came in contact with males, their first reaction was to turn to their body for 'impressive interaction'.

> I remember we were making the film in fourth year and one of the films was on lads and the lads came up to the school and the girls just freaked. They were like 'oh my God, my hair, my hair, my hair'. 'Has anyone got blusher, concealer?' Seriously like the lads were walking and there was a big group of girls following them. (Sarah, 16)

In Sarah's opinion the fact that there is little opportunity to meet males, causes her friends to see every male as a 'potential boyfriend', whom they must impress. She

225

and three other interviewees suggests that this problem is partially alleviated for youths who attended mixed primary schools and learned to interact in an 'informal' way with the opposite sex from a young age. However, all of the respondents quoted above now attend single-sex schools and this is a reason why Tara, aged 15, believes some youths try harder to look perfect and to impress. Having said this, even in her mixed school this type of perfecting occurs, which suggests that seeing males as romantic partners 'only' may be very common in Irish society.

> In a mixed school you learn to get on better with fellas, make friends with them. If you're in a single-sex school you'd see a fella and think 'boyfriend'. You wouldn't get to know them as friends…There are only girls in all girls schools and that can make them more desperate to get a fella 'cause there's no fellas in the school. But then a lot of the fifth and sixth years I know here always wear makeup and dye their hair and straighten it every day. (Tara, 15).

Males and female interviewees alike identified the body as a vital mechanism for accessing opposite sex networks. Shannon believes her self-consciousness surrounding her body heightened when she came in daily contact with males in her new school. Her self-consciousness, and the routines she introduced to increase her chances of embodied validation, gives an indication of the formal nature of these peer interactions. For Shannon contact with males is enormously self-consuming and requires many formal, embodied routines.

> I was in an all girls primary school and wearing makeup and what way my hair was and how skinny I was didn't really matter to me…On my first day in a mixed school I remember putting on my makeup and doing my hair up and everything. My skirt was down to here (points to her lower shin) 'cause you get a really long skirt and then after a few days I started rolling it up until it was above my knee and that was important to me, how short my skirt was or to open the top button of my uniform shirt. (Shannon, 14)

Impressive-interaction, therefore, is extremely complex and consuming.

A number of participants pointed to the segregation of males and females in Ireland being to blame for the difficulties some adolescents have in forming friendships with the opposite sex. One participant believes this segregation makes friendships with males extremely difficult and leaves Irish youths at a disadvantage by comparison to some other European youths. The body comes to play a role for Irish girls, she believes, in a way it does not for their young counterparts in other countries, as Irish girls are socialised to impress males rather than befriend them.

> It seems in Ireland the only way you can make fella friends is if you know them from primary school or you meet them at discos, where you can't really talk, or they're friends of friends. There's nothing like in Germany where they have youth clubs and dance classes…that was just the way it was so it was much easier for the girls to be around the fellas. When my exchange student came over here to an all girls school, 'the convent', it was such a shock to the system because she was used to sitting beside fellas in class, but there was just girls everywhere. Then when we were over in Germany some of my friends were going around wearing these tiny tops, trying to impress the guys, but the German girls just don't see the need. (Gillian, 16)

Eoin who has just moved to Ireland from New Zealand gave a similar account to that of Gillian, in terms of the intentions that lie behind opposite sex interactions in New Zealand and now in Ireland. Unlike Gillian, Eoin continues to attend a co-educational school in Ireland but believes this does little to reduce adolescent males and females seeing one another in sexual terms as opposed to friendship terms. He believes that there is a clear element of nervousness among Irish girls when he tries to talk to them and seems somewhat baffled by the extent to which the sexes form homogenous groups.

> In New Zealand you can talk to girls as if they were your best mates and over here I find it difficult 'cause when you talk to girls they go a bit icky and a bit nervous. In New Zealand you'd call the girls tomboys 'cause they hang round with the boys and over here it's different 'cause I see the girls hanging around with the girls. You don't see the girls hanging around with the guys… The girls just react differently 'cause they act all nervous around the guys saying 'oh this guy might like me' or 'I'm starting to like him'. Guys seem to be a bit shy too and say I

> better keep quiet or else 'she might start liking me or I might like her'. They mightn't want to say anything in case they'd make a fool of themselves, but it's different in New Zealand you could say anything to a girl and she'd either laugh or not and that would be it. (Eoin, 13)

In a most insightful way Eoin goes on to suggest that this nervousness and self-consciousness which he can see in his Irish female peers, is evident in the way they appear to be in a constant pursuit of embodied validation.

> One thing I've noticed over here is the amount of girls that wear makeup, they just pack it on and they wear fake tan. I looked and said 'are you serious they all wear makeup?' In New Zealand they might wear a bit of makeup or none at all…They wouldn't care what people think but here girls do care and guys do care about what people think. (Eoin, 13)

In light of such comparisons it is possible that in the country where Rice based his theory of informal subsystems, youths may have interacted in a much more 'informal' way than this Irish sample describe their interaction. Another interviewee who lived in Russia before her family moved, points to the same differences mentioned by Gillian and Eoin. For Rebecca, it was once much easier for her to be friends with young males than it is now.

> Before I started travelling with my parents and came here about four years ago I had a lot of boys who were friends. I had only two best friends and they were boys. Now it's different. Maybe it's 'cause I've grown up or maybe it's because people think it's not realistic to be friends with boys here. (Rebecca, 16)

Within an environment where it is seen to be unrealistic for males and females to be anything other than romantically involved an emphasis on being one's romantic fantasy as opposed to being one's reliable friend is likely to continue.

Unlike their descriptions of the familiar interactions among young heterogeneous groups in other countries, over two thirds of the respondents in this sample spoke of the complex reality of being shy or nervous around the opposite sex. Both males and females alike depicted such experiences among their peers.

For one participant this unfamiliarity can cause his peers to assume a completely different embodied performance when around females.

> Some lads are all shy around them (girls) and act completely different. (Enda, 16)

Another interviewee points to this alternative self-project emerging as a result of nervousness caused by unfamiliarity.

> If there's going to be girls in the area, and lads are not used to hanging around with girls the whole time, then they're a bit more nervous. (Rob, 16)

For another male participant this unfamiliarity leads him to act in a different manner also. The confidence he normally has is replaced by self-doubt when in the presence of females. In this instance, he tries to increase his embodied validity. He partially blames his single-sex male schooling for this self-doubting of his body.

> I'd be confident, I don't mind saying anything and I'd keep the conversation going. If there were girls around I wouldn't be that confident. Maybe it's because of going to an all boys school and because of all the time that I spend swimming I don't really have a chance to interact with girls. Like there's two girls on my road that would be in my age bracket and I don't see them much either so my chances of going out with girls are fairly limited so when I do meet up with girls I would act differently. I try to act more charming or dash or debonair or handsome or something. (Brian, 16)

Sarah speaks of her nervous and self-conscious reaction when she is out socialising and a boy comes up to speak to her. What is even more interesting is that, this boy is not coming to speak to her on his own behalf but is acting as a messenger for one of his peers, further emphasising the unfamiliarity and formality which underlines these youth relationships.

> I'm really shy when I go out. I wouldn't be shy with my friends but when a lad comes up and it's all like a teeny disco 'will you meet my friend?' It's all like that or like 'my friend wants to know will you meet his cousin?' I just feel really self-conscious and nervous. (Sarah, 16)

Another participant also relayed such experiences of needing a messenger to facilitate the interaction.

> You go to discos and stuff like that. There would be lots of people together there. If you liked a girl there's usually a person in the middle sending messages from one to the other, that's the way it always was. (Ger, 13)

In the midst of such formality and unfamiliarity, relationships between these young males and females come to be sexualised and romanticised to the detriment of friendship and companionship. An impressive appearance which achieves embodied validation from the opposite sex, appears to be most essential within this framework. Worryingly for these youths, however, their narratives suggest that if 'impressive interaction' forms the relationship, then it is continuing to make an impression, that sustains the relationship.

The type of unstable relationships talked about by Giddens (1991) and Sennet (1994) are in evidence here. On this occasion they have an entirely embodied dimension. For Giddens, relationships may break down if the individualised self-commitments of one party outweigh their commitment to the relationship, yet for the youths in this study, relationships may break down because of a lack of individualised commitment to the self, particularly to the embodied self. These relationships, it would seem, are highly dependent upon the dedication to embodied validation. Such is the dependence of youths on physical validation for attaining recognition and such is the lack of trust evident in these relationships that many respondents believe their partner would end the relationship should their physical maintenance lapse.

For one participant, he believes that it is always what one's partner exchanges in terms of their embodied capital which is most important. The uses

which a good personality, for instance, can bring to the relationship, fall second to this.

> Boys want girls to have a good-looking face and wouldn't want them to be fat or anything. They don't really care what they're like, they only really care what they look like. They don't really care if it's someone to talk to. Most of the time it's just about how they look. (Josh, 13)

For Tara what one signifies physically is what is most important to young females too.

> All my friends are always going on about fellas who are gorgeous and no mention if he's sound. They like muscles and a boy band pretty look. (Tara, 15)

The data suggests that what one signifies and exchanges in terms of embodied validity is not only essential for forming these heterosexual youth relationship but also for sustaining them. Mark, aged 12, affirms this in terms of how he chose his present girlfriend on the basis of her embodied capital and indicates where the 'use value' of the relationship would stand, should her embodied capital lessen.

> You don't want to be going with someone who's not good-looking... If she changed and I was good friends with her, I'd say I'd keep going out with her but if she changed completely obese, I don't think so (laughs). (Mark, 12)

Another participant also emphasises the magnitude of displaying valid embodiment for forming relationships.

> You wouldn't want to be going out with one that was stupid or acted stupid or even looked stupid. If she was fat you wouldn't want to go out with her. (Kevin, 13)

It became apparent that most respondents were willing to accept some change in their partner but not if this change took the form of weight, fat or obesity. I, therefore, proceeded to ask Kevin what he would do if his girlfriend became fat. His answer points to the way in which a relationship is dependent on each partner maintaining embodied validation.

231

> I'd tell her to loose the weight. Tell her she's put on a load of weight and she should loose it because she looked better when she wasn't fat…I might stay with her if she was sound but if she got real, real fat then no (laughs). (Kevin, 13)

Although another male interviewee stated that the use-value of a relationship is important to him in relation to what a partner's personality offers the partnership, once more a great shadow would be cast on this, should the female be overweight. In other words, a commitment to one's physical exchange-value would take precedence over one's commitment to the uses of the relationship.

> Honestly I wouldn't go out with them if they were ugly. For me personality is very important as well so I wouldn't judge them solely on looks. Like I'm not that shallow but in my book they couldn't be very overweight. It's just the way I've been brought up to think about that sort of person. (Brain, 16)

Although Brian knows that it is normally unacceptable to judge an individual exclusively on the basis of looks and he tries not to do this, like the others he has been socially schooled within the normality of judging one group in this embodied way - overweight individuals. One participant holds that he simply could not date a girl with such an invalid body.

> You can't be going out with a dog or whatever. You have to find her attractive. She has to look good and I just don't find overweight girls attractive. Like I know there's personality and everyone's sorta bullshitting on about it. If she is boring as anything you're just going to have to tell her to take a hike. Also you wouldn't want her to let herself go. If she did, I don't know (long pause). I don't know. It's a hard one but I probably would dump her yeah. Yeah, I would. (Enda, 16)

Female participants also pointed to the importance of their partners projecting a socially valid body.

> I couldn't go with someone who was really fat or someone who just let themselves go. (Gillian, 16)

The notion of 'letting one's self go' was stated by Enda as well, indicating the importance of commitment to individualised goals for the avoidance of

abandonment, rather than causing it as Giddens suggests. Throughout my exploration of this topic with interviewees it came to light that these youths' definition of those with invalid embodied capital are those who are overweight. Another female participant suggests that she could not be with someone who didn't care about attaining and maintaining embodied validation.

> I couldn't go with a guy who just didn't care and ate loads. I just think that's totally unattractive...If your fella put on weight you'd just want him to be the way he was before he put it on and I wouldn't be able to get the picture of what he was like before out of my head. (Lynn, 16)

The data presents a notable difference between the perspectives taken by males and females in respect of the possibility of rejection. Although data from the last two female respondents, talks of their rejection of males with perceived invalid embodiment, more females turned this question around and focused on how girls would be rejected by boys. Shannon gives an example of this.

> I don't think fellas would stay with a girl if they changed. With fellas I think it's the looks and the figure that matters to them and how pretty the girl is. (Shannon, 14)

Rebecca mirrors this depiction of the meaning of a female's figure for males.

> Some boys just go for how girls look, with her long hair or is she thin or is she beautiful. Usually boys go for figure. (Rebecca, 16)

For another contributor also, girls require a body, which exchanges validation and dedication to self-maintenance.

> They're (boys) all into thin girls 'cause all of them that are with girls, they're thin girls. You wouldn't see anyone with a fat girl. (Eve, 13)

Chloe, also aged 13, indicates that she probably would stay with her boyfriend if he changed physically. Having said this she states elsewhere that she 'doesn't really like pudgy guys'. However, she is resolute that her boyfriend would not stay with her if she failed to dedicate time to her appearance.

233

> Some fellas don't really care about looks but I'd say most do care about looks, just the odd one wouldn't care as long as you stay yourself. If they only went with you because you were skinny then they're going to find another skinny girl if you get fat and if she gets fat they'll go to another one. (Chloe, 13)

Hence, while Chloe acknowledges that some males care more about 'use-value' aspects of the relationship, she believes that most base their relationships entirely on bodily exchange-value.

This points to yet another reality. I am arguing that this suggests that it was not what Marx calls the 'use-value' which was holding the relationship together, but its 'exchange-value' (1867). Marx's concept of 'use-value' and 'exchange-value' are vital even though Marx refers to the values of a commodity rather than the relations of embodied individuals. Baudrillard's (1998) term 'sign-value' does include the individual and more importantly their embodied capital. 'Exchange value' and particularly 'sign value', therefore, are concepts which can be used to add to the theoretical basis of Giddens' 'pure relationships' in this context. For the youths in this study it is not, or at least not only, the 'use-value' of the relationship which may lead to its termination because of a lack of dedication to the practical processes within it, but what the relationship exhibits to others. If the 'exchange-value' or 'sign-value' of the relationship suggests to others that both parties signify impressive levels of embodied validation, then both parties within the relationship may benefit. They may come to be seen as an 'ideal couple'. Thus, the 'exchange-value' of the ideal couple has distinct advantages for both parties but these advantages are no longer dependent on one individual alone wishing to make an impression but on two co-dependent individuals. For instance, having a girlfriend with a high level of embodied capital, may increase, not only her own prestige but also the prestige of her boyfriend among his peers. His embodied validation may

be augmented or altered through association with her. Her embodied capital can promote his status to onlookers, or alternatively, where she is lacking in embodied capital she could demote his status. While according to Bourdieu, embodied capital is recognised by others, he gives no indication of the ability to attain or dispel embodied capital simply through association with another.

According to one interviewee, good-looking people gravitate towards each other.

> It generally says that you're good-looking to have a good-looking partner. It is a statement. If you have a really good-looking couple they compliment each other, like Posh and Beck, they seem to fit together as a classic example of what you want in a couple. (Brian, 16)

If one partner believes they are involved with someone with significant physical appeal, then they may be concerned with displaying what they have achieved to their peers. Shauna is of the opinion that a previous boyfriend simply wanted to display her to his friends, in order to increase his own validation. This caused Shauna also to feel embodied validation but simultaneously it caused her to question the existence of any use value within the relationship.

> One of the guys I went out with he said 'Oh my God if my friends saw me with you, I'd be so proud' and in one way it's good 'cause it means you look good but in another way it is insulting 'cause it means 'I just want to be seen with you'. I guess it means that they have achieved something. (Shauna, 16)

13-year-old Eoin concurs with Shauna in that having an attractive, slim girlfriend, for him, means increasing his validation among his friends. He fears having an overweight girlfriend, would hinder his pursuit for validation. Within the couple, therefore, 'exchange value' and 'sign value' are not dependent on an individual entity but on the combination of two entities.

> When you're with your friends you wouldn't want to be seen with your girlfriend if she's obese. The first thing any guy would do, if I'm being honest here, I'd probably dump her, just because you wouldn't want to

bump into your friends and they'd be like 'Is that your girlfriend?'
(Eoin, 13)

It is with a most disgusted tone that Eoin remarks on how his friend's would

disapprove of an overweight girl, encapsulating the reasoning behind his need to

find a partner who serves to augment his embodied capital. Another participant

reiterates this need, in suggesting that one could easily lose their social standing

among their peers if they were seen to be part of an undesirable exchange.

It's just the way other people might look at her and say 'He's going out
with a minger or something like that. I wouldn't like to get slagged over
going with someone and that could happen. (Barry, 16)

Having a boyfriend or girlfriend with a particularly valid bodily presentation,

therefore, appears to lead to embodied validation for their partner on the basis of

their acceptance within the relationship.

Acceptance can improve self-esteem on the basis that an 'ideal' individual

has chosen them, and also increase their popularity and prestige on the basis of

being part of this couple.

It means that they are more important than other people. Gives them a
better self-esteem. They feel better because they have a better boyfriend
and they have a higher ego knowing that they can do better. (Amy, 13)

Likewise Shannon notes how participation within an 'ideal couple' enhances self-

confidence and social popularity.

All his friends think he's great, as he's with a good-looking girl. This
means that he'd be more popular and other people would want to be
him. (Shannon, 14)

It means that others are envious of you, according to another participant.

If she's gorgeous other people will fancy her as well and you could be
'oh I got her first'. (Mark, 12)

Another participant also refers to such envy.

236

> It's about how good-looking a guy you can get. They say like 'did you
> see so and so pulled him?' and everyone else would be like 'I know, it's
> not fair?' (Sarah, 16)

One participant describes the feeling of validation, which he attained when he was

the first to go out with a certain attractive girl in his area and other guys came to

envy him.

> I was kind of one of her first so that sets me apart from all the other
> lads. In some ways they would have envied me which was nice. (Brian,
> 16)

Marx and Baudrillard believe that 'exchange-value' and 'sign-value' have become

so important, since their visual nature makes an immediate and effective impact on

others. Both theorists appear to propose that these visual values have taken over

from 'use-values' because they are more advantageous for the individual's

immediate social validation. In this context, however, it is more complex than the

embodied capital of one individual. Status is created through the embodied capital

of the couple, with one offering embodied validation to the other via their

acceptance within the relationship.


## 6.5 Conclusion


This chapter has focused on the importance of the body for accessing school peer

groups and activities. Participants have suggested that the most popular groups and

activities are those which are highly dependent on the bodily performances and

presentations. I have suggested that embodied capital appears more important to

these adolescents for peer acceptance than the other forms of cultural capital

referred to by Bourdieu. Embodied capital is used in complex ways for

counteracting and neutralising other forms of capital; an apparent prerequisite for

237

successful cultural intermediation. Chapter Five documented a reality whereby participants were constantly schooled each other on the body through assessing and policing each other's bodies. Given the importance attached to the achievement of popularity and prestige through the body, it is little wonder that these youths are relentlessly assessing others and comparing themselves to this assessment. This is an assessment of their approximation, not only to other bodies, but their approximation to social acceptance via the importance of the body.

This chapter has outlined the way in which having a valid body, such as the 'aesthetic-athletic' body is extremely significant in accessing both peer activities and romantic relationships and that adolescents' school contexts may serve to promote this. Acceptance within networks, it has been proposed, leads to embodied validation though increased social recognition and self-confidence. However, this chapter has also drawn attention to those who fail to maintain their embodied capital and how they can come to be displaced from peer groups, through often quite complex tactics. I have even suggested that this draws certain parallels with Giddens' 'pure relationships' and adds to them an embodied dimension which is concerned with the bodily 'exchange' (Marx) or 'sign' (Baudrillard) value of the relationship. I have also briefly referred to data on those who are ridiculed and rejected on the basis of having a perceived 'invalid' body. However, a more in-depth exploration of the extent of such rejection and its emotional affect on youths will be the focus of Chapter Seven.

# Chapter Seven: Adolescent Rejection due to Embodied Invalidation

## 7.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the vast existence of what Goffman calls 'stigmatisation' (1963b) in the lives of these youths and their peers. However, I also suggest that perhaps Goffman underestimated the role and frequency of stigmatisation and the calculated process by which it takes place. In this chapter it becomes apparent that any perceived inadequacy can lead someone to be stigmatised. According to these narratives, however, this process of labelling focuses enormously on the body. In this chapter I look at those who are most likely to be stigmatised on the basis of their supposed 'invalid' bodies. Participants appear to be particularly schooled on the stigmatisation of the overweight body. I outline the social meaning that they have learned to attach to the overweight body and the ways in which it is stigmatised. I show how this stigmatisation is directed at the entire embodied individual, since these youths believe an invalid body indicates a somehow invalid self.

This chapter focuses on the emotional affects of embodied stigmatisation. The extent of the negative feelings and emotions that arise from such stigmatisation is emphasised. Finally, I explore the complex strategies which these adolescents believe are used to combat embodied stigmatisation and its potentially crippling consequences.

## 7.2 The Normalisation of Stigmatisation

Attaining social acceptance can be a consuming and complex process for all individuals. Adolescence, however, is a time when this is particularly difficult due to the shift from parents to peers for social validation. In Chapter Six, the role of having a 'valid' body for peer acceptance was addressed. Conversely, youths were also rejected from certain activities and relationships on the basis of having 'invalid' bodies. Goffman describes this type of rejection as stigmatisation (1963b), with some being stigmatised as a result of their social practices and others due to their physical presentation. Goffman is of the opinion that stigmatised individuals are those who possess an undesirable personal biography or an abnormal physical trait. The term 'abnormal' is used in opposition to the term 'normal'. In light of the voiced narratives provided by adolescents in this research, however, I would like to propose that in their school culture, while it does appear to be a question of the 'normals' and the 'stigmatised', it is also a question of the 'normalisation of stigmatisation'. The notion of 'normalisation' has been examined in the past by Foucault (1977, 1979) and Bordo (1993), their focus was on the normalisation of regulation of the body, while in this chapter I am focusing on the normalisation of stigmatisation of the body.

Goffman (1963b) holds that 'normals' need help from the 'stigmatised' to understand their abnormality before they can communicate with them. He also suggests that an acknowledgement of stigma often remains an unstated understanding between 'a normal' and 'a stigmatised'. In order to avoid any possible tension the two groups can simply organise their daily activities so as not to come in contact with one another. In contrast to this, the findings suggest that in

240

schools, clubs and sports it is impossible for 'normals' and 'stigmatised' not to come in contact with each other. In a more worrying manner, it appears that for adolescents in this study, it is impossible to find educational and social environments where one is not publicly stigmatised about some aspect of their embodied identity.

The range of issues on which youths can be stigmatised, through overt name-calling and covert back-stabbing can refer to any personal or physical trait of their self-identity. It appears from adolescents in this sample that no one can escape schooling on stigmatisation, given the vastness of stigmatisation. Hence, there is a 'normalisation of stigmatisation' which creates a population of youths constantly self-checking and self-conscious of any aspect of their self-project which may lead to them being stigmatised. Causes of stigmatisation can be anything from revealing where one lives to letting one's hair grow a centimetre too long, but there is an overwhelming focus on stigmatisation of the body. For the boys in this sample, stigmatisation was often transmitted in the form of very obvious verbal or physical abuse, while for girls it often took place behind closed doors. Rather than creating a milder form of stigmatisation among girls, this leads to constant feelings of impending stigmatisation.

Participants outlined a very broad range of personal information which might lead to one being stigmatised if publicly uncovered. According to 16-year-old Sarah, her friends have labelled her a 'bogger' because she lives in what is perceived to be a more rural area and this is now part of her school experience.

> My friends call me 'the bogger'. I don't have a bogger accent but they're like 'Oh my God, did you hear the way she said that word? They call you a bogger if you're from Derryvale but Derryvale is not a bogger place. They all think I'm a bogger. I'm the bogger of the year".
> (Sarah, 16)

241

Another interviewee tells of how he is stigmatised in a similar way in his school.

> I live in Killtown, so I'm not from Dublin. I get slagged for being a farmer 'cause I'm from Wicklow. I don't even have a farm. (Cian, 16)

It is interesting that even though neither participant sees themselves as fitting the labels they have been given, they still saw fit to inform me of these stigmatised aspects of their identities. It is possible that these labels, albeit undesirable aspects of their identities, have been internalised to become a part of how they see or explain themselves socially. Others too described an internalisation of their stigmatisation, with the vast majority of stigmas relating to 'blemishes' or 'abnormalities' in embodied capital. Tara holds that she is stigmatised because of her physical self-presentation.

> I wear a lot of make-up and black clothes. We're called Goths because of this and because we like rock music and we kind of get the piss kicked out of us. Like two weeks ago I was walking down the road with my friend and I had my hair kind of waxed into little pink dreadlocks, I was wearing white make-up and black eye liner. This gang of townie scumbag bitches walked past and ...they started screaming at us, calling us ugly for no reason. (Tara, 15)

According to Tara this is a problem that she and her friends face most places they go, which points to the normalised nature of the stigma they face. Another participant Rebecca labels herself 'weird' as a result of others telling her this because she speaks with an American accent and because her friends wear funny make-up. For Daniel he has been stigmatised because he didn't get his hair cut over a certain period and ended up being labelled 'scruffy', Darren did likewise and has been called 'girlie', and for Lynn it is on the basis of her red hair and she is now labelled 'redzer'. Ger speaks of how one boy in his class was given a similar stigmatised label as a result of his perceived inferior clothes.

> There was a boy in my class and 'cause his clothes were all cheap stuff from like Tylers and non brand names, he used to get slagged for that 'cause he wore the same kind of runners all the time. People would call

him 'cheapo' because they would wear the newest gear and the newest runners. (Ger, 13)

If a stigmatised group consists of individuals with some form of abnormality or weakness, as Goffman suggests, than every single participant in this study is abnormal or weak. Each participant refers to being stigmatised at some point, with a massive majority relating this stigma to a perceived physical flaw. Perhaps this is because one's body, as opposed to one's personality, is forever exposed to onlookers. It is also likely that knowing there is little one can do to conceal the body, aside from clothing it, may cause those who wish to stigmatise to focus on one's physical traits as a means of causing most upset.

There appears to be quite an intentional element to stigmatisation, whereby certain individuals are quite purposefully singled out. For groups like Tara and her Goth friends, it appears that stigmatisation works to gel this group closer together due to their common experiences, albeit negative experiences. Therefore, while stigmatisation does not lead to complete social rejection, it does intentionally point to differentiation. For example, Tara's friends are motivated by being 'abnormal' yet they are constantly confronted with the stigmatising consequences of their decision, according to Tara's narrative. The intentional nature of stigmatisation is perhaps neglected by Goffman. He suggests that "normals mean no harm; when they do, it is because they don't know better" (1963: 141). Due to the normalised nature of stigma, is appears that everyone has been schooled in some way on stigmatisation because of its prevalence and, therefore, everyone who stigmatises is only too well aware of the harm they are causing.

> Bullying is a big problem. Some are bullied because they are different or they look different or because they like different types of music or because they believe in different things like religion. People don't respect you if you're not in the majority. (Darren, 12)

243

What is interesting here, however, is that not even those youths who were in the 'majority' could avoid being stigmatised at some point, according to other interviewees.

> It happens all the time 'cause boys are always slagging each other to their faces and trying to annoy each other. Most of the time it's only messing but sometimes it is serious, and they get annoyed about it, it might have gone too far. (Josh, 13)

Evan looks at the normalisation of stigma in the physical sense.

> Lots of people worry about being bullied. At break you might get knocked down and then everyone would gather round you and laugh for like a minute. Everyone's going to get laughed at at some stage. You'd be always aware of it. (Evan, 13)

Similarly where female participants fear such overt stigmatisation, they fear it from their male counterparts.

> Say a fella brought a girl down and she was horrible, we (girls) wouldn't say anything but the fellas would be slagging him and putting her down even if she's standing there, they'd put her down...if there's anything wrong with her. Like if she's a bit big or if she has a turn in her eye. They put me down about my hair, they say 'look at the fringe' and they slag me. I do take it as a mess but sometimes you feel as if they are being serious with you and you say 'God I'm going' and you just walk off. You'd feel very low. (Anna, 16)

By contrast, females themselves appear to be schooled to stigmatise in more sly and subtle ways.

> My friends are always bitching about people so I worry what they might say about me behind my back too. It could be really mean and hurtful but I wouldn't know. (Sarah, 16)

It appears that whatever method of stigmatisation youths employ against one another, the process itself is normalised, as is the harm it causes to one's embodied validation.

In this section I have focused on the way adolescents can be stigmatised over any aspect of their identity which is held to be inadequate or invalid. I have suggested that rather than focusing on 'normals' and 'stigmatised' alone, these

youths point to how they are schooled on the 'normalisation of stigmatisation'. Due to the fact that it appears quite impossible to escape stigma in some form, even those who stigmatise must know the impact of stigma. This gives stigma quite an intentional aspect. The intentional direction of stigma towards those who are supposedly too thin or too fat is an example of this.

## 7.3 Too Thin for Embodied Validation

The youths who contributed to this investigation, have described how those who are seen to be either too thin or too fat, often fail to attain embodied validation from their peers. They suggest that adolescents school each other on who has an 'invalid' body through their intentional labelling of one another on the basis of the body. In this section I show how this is not only a labelling of the body, but also of the entire individual, such is the way identity is judged by its physical form. This causes youths to be incessantly aware of their embodied state and of its perceived 'invalidity'.

There is a strong gendered dimension to schooling on stigmatisation; not only to the type of body which is stigmatised but to the process by which it takes place. In this section I progress Goffman's notion of stigma by describing the sociological implications of stigma in terms of the allocation of power and also the huge emotional affects of stigma.

In Chapter Five I explained how interviewees were given a silhouette of various body shapes and sizes for males and females, during the interview (see Appendix 1). Images ranged from one to nine, with one showing a very thin shape and nine displaying a very weighty profile. Respondents were asked to identify

245

which shape they would least like to have and to give reasons for this decision. Extreme thinness and extreme fatness were chosen by all participants, with twenty-six out of thirty interviewees identifying extreme fatness as being least likable. However, the four participants who identified extreme thinness were all male. In keeping with the type of dialogic-deliberation which took place through shows of physical strength in Chapter Five, it is arguable that young males are likely to be at a very obvious disadvantage if very thin. The same is true of the highly physical activities which were so greatly valued among males in Chapter Six. Strength is a primary means of identifying male validation, with those who are extremely thin rendered somehow 'invalid'.

There is also an extremely overt verbal element to male stigmatisation. Chapter Five suggested that males are schooled in a way that does not permit them to tell other males that they had an acceptable body. However, in this chapter it is evident that they are schooled in a way which permits telling others if they have an unacceptable body, and therefore policing took place regardless. Within this section, I suggest that an intentional identification of flaws has sociological implications regarding the allocation of power. Although Goffman tells the 'stigmatised' that 'normals' who stigmatise mean no harm and when they do harm it is because they know no better (1963b: 141), these youths appear to be constantly surrounded by very deliberate and public stigmatisation where harm is intended and harm is achieved. As Goffman does not see the way 'normals' stigmatise to be intentionally harmful, he does not address why stigmatisation might be so deliberate. I wish to propose that when one individual directs attention to the invalidity of another individual, they are engaging in a complex process whereby they are attempting to make themselves seem more worthy of validation. I

am asserting that this is a defence mechanism which results from the normalisation of stigma urging youths to be continuously alert to the failings of others and to defending their own. With the subordination of one, comes the domination of another. In this instance, educating 'normals' on stigma, which Goffman suggests would allow the 'stigmatised' to pass as normal (1963b: 143), is quite unlikely. When the quest for power is involved, those who stigmatise may not be willing to be schooled on the nature of another's stigma, since it is their intention to keep them excluded and subordinate.

The physical dynamics of stigmatisation, as well as its overt verbal element, and the very obvious quest for superiority, are all evident in the stigmatisation of thin males by fellow males. One interviewee believes that a number of males in his school are stigmatised through physical domination simply because of their thin physique. He believes that this very intentional subordination leaves such youths feeling vulnerable and threatened. For one peer in particular, although others accept him, his thin body is seen as something that they can dominate, perhaps in an attempt to prove their own physical strength and robust masculinity.

> I know three guys like this who can't put on weight. One guy can actually suck in his stomach so much that you can see his lungs... One guy is eight and a half stone and about six foot tall. I can pick him up and put him over my shoulder and he can't do anything about it. It does get them down. They feel threatened by the fact that people feel they can knock them down just because they're so light and they see that as a problem. They'd prefer to look more masculine and have a bulky look to them. One guy always talks about how frail he feels because of how thin he is. He has a good personality and gets along with people, but, at the same time, he's broken his sternum three times just from people messing around with him. (Cathal, 16)

Another participant describes an almost identical situation in his school.

> One guy isn't terribly small but he's really, really skinny and I'd say he weighs about eight stone. He does be thrown around the class... He

247

loves wrestling too and playing around but he's usually the dummy 'cause he's so skinny and they just lift him up and throw him around. (Andy, 16)

In both of these contexts, those who are 'messing around' with the boys in question accept them, but their bodies are used to make them feel subordinate and lacking in the masculine strength which appears to be a prerequisite for embodied validation among males. Another interviewee of the same age states that in his class at school, he is the one who is thrown around. Enda holds that this constant stigmatisation does not bother him, probably because he is dominated but not rejected.

> In class I just get thrown around the place. I'm only nine stone, eleven pounds so I'm like way too light and I get thrown around the place. If there's any messing in the class I'm the first one to get thrown out of the place. (Enda, 16)

Although Enda states that this domination does not bother him he also admits that he prefers to play sports where he doesn't have to make physical contact with others, as this would cause him to feel a lack of control over the harm that might come to him.

> In sport I prefer to do things where I can control whether I'm going to get hurt or not, if I'm climbing a mountain or something like that. I have no problems going off a twenty foot cliff but if I'm going up against a big guy on a team I'd be cacking myself because you don't know what he's going to do, whereas if I'm going off the edge of a cliff I know that I'm in control, if I fall it's my fault like. I don't find things like that scary but I don't like when someone has control over my fate I suppose. (Enda, 16)

Therefore, while the peer group has not excluded Enda, the fact that others constantly school him on his physical weakness makes him feel less vulnerable falling off the edge of a cliff than being dominated by another male. His fear of contact sports may be said to exemplify the impact which the reality of physical domination has had on him. Once again, in all of the above instances there is a

248

definite intent attached to the stigmatisation, as one does not accidentally throw another around a room. In addition, the fact that all of the aforementioned participants attend different schools, points to the normalisation of stigmatisation in their schooling no matter where one situates their embodied self.

This stigmatisation through domination has emotional consequences which highlight the enormity of being deemed to have an 'invalid' body. Eve describes how stigmatisation, and its extension to bullying, had almost fatal consequences for her brother.

> He (brother) doesn't like the way he looks 'cause he's small. Well all my brothers are small but he doesn't have any muscles or anything. He wants to be bigger so that's why he's joining the gym. When he was in third year he was getting bullied. One night he locked himself in the toilet and went to kill himself. I was sobbing. I know I'm always saying I hate him, but I do love him... He was slitting his wrists and that night my mam had to bring him to the hospital. He still has the scars there today. It's horrible. (Eve, 13)

The incessant manner of bullying caused this young adolescent to believe taking his own life was the only way he could ease the pain as quickly as possible. To make an academic criticism of the way in which Goffman neglects the very real, intentionally motivated heartbreak which stigmatised individuals experience, seems insignificant in light of Eve's frightening narrative. This stigmatisation has not only left physical and emotional scars on her brother but also on a then twelve year old girl and her whole family, who have suffered because a group of supposed 'normals' decided to school this boy on his 'invalid' masculine body.

Aside from two female interviewees who suggested that very slender girls can be called 'anorexic' or 'matchsticks' by boys, there were no detailed examples given of girls being physically or verbally abused because they were too thin. The females who did say extreme thinness was the shape they would least like to have from the silhouette said that this is because very thin people simply look unhealthy

and unattractive. Shannon believes that her friend looks unattractive because she is so thin.

> I don't like when you can see the bones sticking out 'cause I've got a friend and she's not anorexic but she's extremely skinny and you can see her hipbones sticking out and her elbows sticking out. (Shannon, 14)

Out of a total of 123 females sampled in this study through open-ended question and answer sheets, only one stated that she wanted to participate because she felt she was stigmatised for being too thin.

> If you were with a group of friends they'd be saying 'oh my God you can see her ribs' or 'you can see her collar bones' or something and they'd talk underneath their breath and then you get really self-conscious and you're like 'oh my God, can you?' and then you'd get all paranoid and it's just like a snowball, it just keeps going. (Sarah, 16)

The type of stigma these girls experience appears to take place in hushed tones, either behind their back or unintentionally to their face. This places females in a complex position where they are never absolutely sure if they are being stigmatised, but their schooling on the normalisation of stigmatisation teaches them that this is a constant possibility. Thus, the mechanism by which one girl stigmatises another takes a much different form to the way in which males stigmatise one another. Where girls were overtly called names because they were seen to be too thin, it was male peers who did this.

In this section I have looked at how the thin body is stigmatised, particularly among males. I have suggested that there may be a strong power dynamic attached to this stigmatisation, whether through physical or verbal means. It is arguable that pointing to the embodied 'invalidity' of another may be an attempt to increase one's own worthiness of embodied validation. However, whether through physical attack and verbal abuse, or surveillance and whispers in the case of females, both mechanisms indicate the normalisation of stigma, where

youths school each other on the reality that any flaw can merit being stigmatised covertly or overtly. The stigmatisation, which is directed at those who are said to be too thin, can lead to vulnerable and self-conscious youths. Having said this, even participants such as Sarah, who spoke of feeling stigmatised and paranoid about lacking the structure required for embodied validation, admitted that she would rather be underweight than overweight, such is the harsh and hostile way overweight individuals are treated.

## 7.4 Too Fat for Embodied Validation

In this section I examine the way the overweight body is treated, according to this sample. I continue to refer to the intentional nature of stigmatisation and the gendered way it is undertaken. It becomes obvious in this section that being labelled fat is indeed internalised as a form of abuse as Monaghan suggests (2005). I look at why overweight people are said to be the target of such abuse, through examining the social meaning of 'fat' for these youths. The data confirms Goffman's (1963b) assertion and more recently Gill, Henwood and McLean's (2005) findings that stigmatisation of the body may not only be a labelling of the body but it is a more complex labelling of the entire individual, such is the power of the body for individual identity. I look at how overweight youths are stigmatised and how this results in them being relentlessly schooled on their own embodiment, and more importantly on their supposed 'invalid' embodiment.

The very visual nature of the thin body can make it easier for those who are extremely thin to pass as normal. With the right clothes one can get away with being 'normal', according to some participants. This is much more complex for

> I'd say both fat people and small and skinny people would get slagged
> 'cause people would slag them 'cause of their shape. But I'd say the fat
> would get more probably 'cause it's more natural to be thin at our age.
> (Josh, 13)

It is for a similar reason to this that Barry states he would date someone who was extremely thin but not someone who was extremely fat. Someone can simply be very thin naturally.

> If they're absolutely scrawny but had a nice face you'd still go with
> them. If they were absolutely obese but had a nice face, I don't think so
> 'cause it's not natural. (Barry, 16)

It may be suggested that Barry believes it is natural for one to be underweight but being overweight does not happen naturally, it is the individual's own fault. One participant even suggests the consequences of being fat are so extreme that any one she knows would prefer to be anorexic than obese.

> If you ask anyone like 'would you prefer to be anorexic or would you
> prefer to be obese?' They'd all say anorexic. (Sarah, 16)

According to Thomas, reactions to bodies that have something wrong with them can range from "disgust and abhorrence to heartfelt pity" (2003: 64). However, when this 'invalidity' is seen to be unnatural, it places an element of blame on individuals themselves and is more likely to evoke reactions of disgust than pity. Another participant totally concurs with this train of thought.

> Nobody is naturally fat but some people are naturally thin and they just
> can't put on weight. (Tara, 15)

Thus, while underweight youths are seen to be at the mercy of nature, overweight adolescents are at the mercy of their own self-inflicted weaknesses. It is arguable, therefore, that being thin, even extremely thin, is closer to nature and to what Goffman calls 'normal'.

Most theorists who have contributed to the sociology of the body have explained the socially symbolic meaning attached to being fat in Western cultures.

253

Gordon, 1990; Featherstone, 1991; Frank, 1991; Turner, B, 1992, 1996; Baudrillard, 1998; Grogan, 1999; Redmond, 2003; Gill, Henwood and McLean, 2005; Monaghan, 2005 and many others agree at some level that within an aesthetically driven Western World, the fat body is perceived to be "indicative of laziness, lack of discipline, unwillingness to conform" (Bordo, 1993: 195). The findings in this research largely confirm such attitudes towards the fat body and offer an insight into why the overweight body is stigmatised. Participants frequently described the fat body in terms of 'disgust'. Goffman proposes that those who encounter a flawed body, such as the fat body, are likely to make secondary judgements about the individual on the basis of their perceived primary flaw or abnormality (1963b). This certainly appears to be a cruel social reality recorded in these narratives.

For the majority of respondents fat is socially representative of unhappiness and disgust. For one participant being fat is unimaginable.

> It's disgusting, like Americans that are really obese... I just couldn't imagine myself that way 'cause I just wouldn't be happy. (Shauna, 16)

Just as Goffman suggests, these interviewees can be seen making judgements about the entire embodied character of overweight individuals on the basis of their fat physique.

> You think they're lazy, that they eat a lot of fast food. Okay it could be hormonal but I don't think a lot of people actually think that when they see someone heavy walking down the street. (Gillian, 16)

Other participants confirm Gillian's suspicions that most do not blame physical failure for fat; it is much more of a personal failure. This is similar to Gill, Henwood and McLean's findings that being fat is not only about looking unattractive, it is about being viewed as a moral failure (2005: 55).

> If you see someone like that you can just sort of tell what sort of person they are. They're lazy sometimes. They're just fat. If you see someone's flab you always just say he doesn't really care about his appearance at all. He doesn't really give it much thought. He just goes around eats and then turns out like that. (Evan, 13)

One participants indicates how someone can even be labelled 'stupid' because they are overweight.

> A boy in my class was quite big and he used to get slagged by the people in the older class... If they were playing football and your man fell, they'd start calling him fat and stuff and they'd say 'oh look at you, you're so stupid'... There was a girl in my class that people used to slag as well 'cause she was big. Just the same stuff, if she did something stupid they'd start slagging her about being fat. She was just slagged because she was fat even though they mightn't use the word fat, it was always because she was fat. (Ger, 13)

In this participant's experience, therefore, overweight youths are said to be stupid because they are fat and are said to be fat because they are stupid.

As a mechanism for avoiding labelling and unwanted stares, some strongly advocate the concealment of perceived 'disgusting' fat. The idea of 'seeing flab' was something that was taken up by half the interviewees in this investigation. Their tone took on an air of revulsion as they described the social exposure of fat. Participants appear scarcely able to comprehend how the fat body can be revealed in such an open way, without shame prompting individuals to conceal it. One female respondent certainly dislikes the fact that her friend exposes her 'flab' and tries to school her to conceal it.

> Like my friend is big but it's just that she wears low bottoms and high tops and she has a stomach that would kind of flab over. And you'd love to kind of say to her 'wear your top down a bit' 'cause it's not nice I don't think. (Lynn, 16)

With reference to females, a male participant asserts that it is even acceptable for women to have a bit of weight on, as long as they do not expose it.

> It's okay for women as well as long as they keep it all hidden way rather than wearing belly tops. (Cian, 16)

255

A female respondent agrees with such a practice, even if it means it is preventing girls who are carrying weight from keeping up with current fashions.

> It's the fashion to have things down on your hips. There are a few big girls I know and they wear their trousers down on their hips and their bellies would be hanging out. It's not a pretty sight. (Caoimhe, 16)

As much of the literature suggests, the stomach appears to be the focus of attentions.

> It's the stomach - if it's rippled, it's horrible, yuck. (Brian, 16)

Participants appear to be repelled by fat and particularly at the audacity of others to expose such 'horrible' flesh.

> I have a problem with people going around flaunting fat. A lot of people seem to let the fat hang out and they don't seem to care, both males and females. I remember seeing a guy a few months ago who was wearing a t-shirt and his gut actually hung out under the t-shirt. I remember thinking that was pretty disgusting. I've seen both (males and females) do it and it's not particularly enjoyable to look at. (Cathal, 16)

For both males and females, therefore, the message from these young onlookers is to keep 'fat' under wraps.

Given the social schooling received by adolescents which equates fat with carelessness, laziness, repulsion, stupidity and the stigmatisation which I will soon show it receives, it is little wonder that youths in this research had such an enormous fear of becoming fat. This fear appears to be so great in some that they imagine situations where fat invades their body, as if on an assigned mission, over which they have no control.

> The guy next door to me has put on a lot of weight. So I worry 'cause I just don't want to turn out like that and I could. (Evan, 13)

For another respondent the magnitude of becoming fat, and the idea that fat could spontaneously attack her body, is even more striking.

256

It could happen any time. God knows what I'd do, probably collapse. Things like that frighten me to think I could get fatter and be afraid and paranoid all the time about what I'm eating. (Shauna, 16)

Whether rational or irrational, the fear of waking up to find her whole body has become fat, is a terrifying possibility for this participant.

It's like a big fear for me; imagine you woke up really, really heavy one morning. It's a big thing. (Gillian, 16)

Hence, for some, preventing themselves from getting fat is the thing they care about most in terms of maintaining their appearance.

I don't want to be fat basically but that's the only thing I care about. (Daniel, 13)

Even though another participant confesses to not being that conscious about his weight, he fears becoming fat.

I wouldn't be that conscious of my weight but I wouldn't want to be a big, huge fat person. (Andy, 16)

The fear of becoming fat is simply a frightening thought that would require immediate action in the event of it happening.

If I found myself putting on weight I'd make a serious effort to get rid of it. I'd definitely do something about it if I was getting fat. (Cian, 16)

The data now begins to move from the social meaning of fat and, perhaps why overweight youths are stigmatised, to how they are stigmatised. For one female participant, her fear of fat is related to a low self-image and to a societal rejection of her.

You feel low if you're after putting on weight, you can see yourself that you're after putting on weight. And you'd feel real low in yourself and you'd feel as if no one wants to be with you. (Anna, 15)

One respondent indicated that stigmatisation is normalised in our socialisation process to such an extent that it is impossible to avoid being socially schooled on who should be labelled with embodied validation and who with embodied

257

invalidation. Brian, aged 16, considers this to be the case with the very intentional discrimination and stigmatisation of overweight individuals.

> Fat people are treated very differently. Just the general image in itself. They say never judge a book by its cover but that's not what teenagers do, teenagers do judge books by their covers. I don't want to fall into that category but I do. It's the way I've been brought up and I've been taught to think about how you should classify a person or give them labels and that's what I find myself doing. (Brian, 16)

Brian clearly stigmatises through the labels he uses to classify people, yet he states he would never verbally label someone to their face. Others, however, do not follow this practice.

> You can see it happening everywhere and people being slagged about their weight all the time. (Brian, 16)

The normalisation of stigmatisation with regard to overweight adolescents is so vast that every participant could recall instances where one of their peers had been abused or where they themselves had been abused. Lynch and Lodge (1999) and Connor and Armitage (2000) found that prejudice against overweight peers begins during childhood through processes of intentional exclusion and stigmatisation. The findings of this study confirm such intention and confrontation.

> I wouldn't say they're (overweight youths) treated very nicely. There's one guy who's in my year and everyone just calls him a beach whale, stupid stuff. (Barry, 16)

This happens whether or not the overweight person is known to those who stigmatise them.

> Even if people don't know them they say 'look at her, she's so fat'. Some people that are overweight get a lot of abuse and a lot of name-calling. (Caoimhe, 16)

Other participants have seen their overweight peers experience such verbal and physical abuse.

> This guy who was in my class last year, they'd say 'giggly arse' and 'giggly bum' to him and then they'd kick him. They used to call him

258

'watermelon with legs' and 'fatty' and all this. It's normal for things like that. (Evan, 13)

The verbal and physical stigmatisation of this young male may see him being constantly schooled on his supposed subordinate embodiment. One might imagine that a weighty individual would be strong enough to protect himself from physical abuse in a way that the underweight youths identified in the previous section were unable to. However, this is not about the domination of the strong and the subordination of the weak. It is about a complex and strategic allocation of power through the domination of those worthy of embodied validation and the subordination of those deemed unworthy.

Goffman does not look at the emotional impact of this type of stigmatisation, possibly because Goffman's stigmatisation is not intentional or confrontational. For Monaghan, however, although 'fat' is not a four-letter word, it can be used as an abusive term (2005), evoking a similar, or perhaps even worse, emotional response than if it were a four letter word. Constant stigmatisation is emotionally overwhelming and it appears there is nowhere that overweight youths can go to avoid being judged on the basis of their bodies.

> With my friend no matter where she goes there's always someone calling her 'fat bitch' and 'big belly'... The boys would just say it to her you know if they were playing football and they would say 'oh go on, you can't run for the football, you're too fat'. I do pity her. I know she just sits on the stairs at night. (Eve, 13)

The fact that this participant's friend appears to be too frightened to leave the stairs at night demonstrates the degree to which overweight adolescents are rejected through the normalisation of their stigmatisation. Its possible impact on youths is heartrending. Another participant also holds that such stigmatisation can take place at any moment when an even slightly overweight youth attempts to participate in 'normal' activities. The purposeful subordination of the young girl in this narrative,

259

creates an individual whose schooling on stigmatisation from those around her has left her highly conscious of her bodily inferiorities.

> You'd just be playing football or something and someone would just say something that would really hurt her feelings and she'd get really upset. They'd say 'look at the state of you' and 'you look disgusting' and more to her. She is a bit overweight but not really. She'd get really upset about it 'cause she's conscious of her weight anyway and then when people say things like that to her it doesn't make her feel great. (Amy, 13)

Not only is this girl self-conscious of her own deviation from 'normal' bodies, but others deliberately school her in an awareness of it. According to Goffman's hypothesis, if these youths were to talk to those who call them names about the nature of their stigma and educate them on it, they may be accepted as normal. I would like to argue, however, that it is as a result of a well-founded fear of further abuse that it is almost impossible to undertake this. In addition, those who stigmatise in these instances are not like Goffman's 'normals' who mean no harm and may accept a stigmatised individual if given a chance. In these instances, the continual referral to an adolescent's flaws means that being accepted as normal is virtually unachievable. As Leder acknowledges the *'disappearance'* of the body (1990) is much less likely for stigmatised individuals. As long as those who stigmatise are unwilling to stop preaching about overweight individuals' flaws to others, these youths and everyone around them will be continually schooled on the fact that they are stigmatised and unable to attain embodied validation.

Certain participants even note the way they have internalised their stigmatised label and now also believe they are too fat to be worthy of embodied validation.

> All my brothers tell me I'm fat. One goes on about it for ages, even you know when I'm down at the flats and I'm playing with my friend, he'd say 'oh that's the first time I've ever seen you running. Like they can really hurt you the way they keep on saying it to you.... Just after

playing a game and I'd be sitting up for a rest, it's all after coming back
to me again and I just shake my head. (Eve, 13)

Although I cannot see how Eve's physique could justify such labelling, she now considers herself to be fat. She has internalised her supposed stigma and now describes her embodiment in this way. This points to the huge impact of bodily stigmatisation in that it may lead individuals to form delusional opinions of their own embodiment. Another young female gives a similar example of her negative perceptions of her embodiment and how stigmatisation has shaped this. At an earlier point in this interview when Molly first recounted the way she is stigmatised by others, she began to cry and the topic was abandoned until she later returned to it.

I have often been upset because sometimes they call me things and say
stuff about my weight, but most of the girls they don't really get jeered
at because most of them are pretty. The rest of them would just get one
or two comments and then they'd be let alone. They continuously have
a go at me though, like every Friday. (Molly, 13)

In this narrative the fact that all of her friends get one or two deliberate labels directed at them gives another indication of the normalisation of stigmatisation whether one possesses an overt stigma or not. Molly, however, appears to be constantly bombarded with such stigmatisation because of her body image and therefore, this may be conceptualised as bullying. Consequently, she has been schooled on the body in a way that now causes her to set herself apart from her 'pretty' friends, placing herself in a category more in keeping with the negative labels she has been given. An older female also makes a connection between being stigmatised over her weight and her sense of 'invalid' embodiment. It is unlikely to be a coincidence that the time those who had stigmatised her about her body stopped, was also the time she stopped being so self-conscious.

261

Obviously the slags you get are really bad. When I used to be paranoid about my weight I got slagged so much by these fellas on my road. Every time I walked by they'd turn around and start screaming 'you fat bitch' at me. I learned not to say or do anything to them but just ignore it and I think they just grew out of it. (Tara, 15)

In the previous three narratives, these young girls have pointed to the vast ways in which stigmatisation takes its form in their lives. For Goffman's stigmatised, it is an awkward stare or an uneducated comment which causes individuals to be aware of their deviation from the norm. For these participants certain others incessantly teach them about their deviation from the norm in a manner which is intentional and confrontational, yet frighteningly normal.

In this section participants have pointed to the overweight body being deviant from what is 'normal' or 'natural'. While they find it easy to credit someone being naturally thin, they find it difficult to understand someone being naturally fat. Therefore, individuals are given personal responsibility for becoming fat. The term 'fat' is seen to label the entire embodied self, rather than just the body. According to respondents in this section, negative labels to do with one's personal character such as being lazy or stupid can be associated with being fat. This verifies Monaghan's (2005) assertion that 'fat' may not be a four-letter word but it may certainly be used as an abusive term.

In this section I have proposed that labelling an individual because of a perceived 'invalid' body, may occur through a type of intentional and confrontational schooling on stigmatisation from others in a manner which Goffman's notion of stigmatisation fails to incorporate. More worryingly, this section has revealed some of the distressing narratives which have been articulated by these youths. Many display the severe emotional impact of embodied stigmatisation. Some respondents even show how they have come to believe in

262

such labelling and internalise a belief that they are actually too fat to achieve embodied validation.

## 7.5 Complex Strategies to Cope with Stigmatisation

This section is concerned with the complex strategies which respondents suggest are employed by overweight adolescents to cope with stigmatisation. I argue that this takes place through three main complex strategies. Firstly, the data suggests that some overweight youths attempt self-enclosure where for some period in time they can be free from social focus. Secondly, overweight youths may form groups which consist of other overweight adolescents also. Thirdly, some narratives point to a further complex reality, where adolescents resort to open self-stigmatisation as a means of displaying how little they are affected by any negative labelling.

One third of interviewees focused on the way overweight adolescents try to remove themselves from the possibility of stigmatisation through avoiding interaction with 'normals'. In these narratives, however, such individuals do not simply rearrange their day so as to limit their chances of interactions with 'normals' as Goffman (1963b) suggests they might. It is much more complex as adolescents' days are not necessarily their own to rearrange. They must go to school and face being schooled on the possible normality of rejection, which has arisen so frequently in this chapter. When overweight youths do have any authority over how to spend their time, one third of participants believe they choose to spend it alone. They find a space where their seemingly 'invalid' embodiment is not on display to others. Cut off from the normalisation of stigmatisation, the world can seem a lot less harsh. However, how heart wrenching that the degree to which

overweight adolescents are intentionally confronted and rejected over their bodies urges them to resort to total self-enclosure. According to one respondent, it is a lack of confidence and the unlikelihood of making friends that causes youths to turn to enclosed spaces. In light of the narratives regarding the physical and verbal abuse of such youths already addressed, however, their fear of labelling may be very well founded. In this sense, self-enclosure is not only the type of free will act which Goffman describes it as, but equally a consequence of deliberate rejection.

> They don't have the confidence if they're really fat, they don't usually go out much. At my age when they're fat they don't think they'll make friends at all and they just stay in their house. (Evan, 13)

Rob holds a similar view of the 'shyness' of overweight youths in this school. It may be argued, however, that this shyness and fear are not solely a consequence of the way overweight adolescents look, as Rob believes, but because of the way others constantly react to how they look.

> They're really shy and they're just afraid to get out there 'cause of the way they look. (Rob, 16)

Another young participant holds that the prevalence of verbal abuse and stigmatising labels caused her friend to resort to, or to be pushed into, protecting herself through self-isolation also.

> Everyone in the area keeps slagging her and she wouldn't come down for ages 'cause people were calling her fat. (Eve, 13)

Eve believes stigmatisation has had similar consequence for a boy in her area.

> There is a big fella and they do slag him all the time but he's after loosing loads of weight... He doesn't really come down anymore. He used to always be down. (Eve, 13)

Another participant is of the belief that really fat people definitely hide away more, unwilling to let themselves be seen. Again he points to the fact that there is no need

264

for really thin people to take such measures and gives the impression that they have a lot less to be ashamed of.

> I'd say if you were really fat you wouldn't be as prepared to be out and about and for people to see you. You'd hide away more. People do that. If you were just really thin it wouldn't be as bad so you wouldn't mind being seen. (Cian, 16)

Others feel sure that they would have to resort to the same type of self-enclosure if they became fat. For one young female a fat body would prevent her from being both sociable and fashionable and she would try anything to regain control over her body.

> If I put on a few stone I'd feel awful and I'd want to loose it. I wouldn't want to be too public. I wouldn't be able to wear all the belly tops and stuff. I'd probably try my hardest to loose it. Maybe eat only a snack and half a dinner a day. (Shannon, 14)

According to the voiced experiences of the adolescents in this research, overweight youths live a life in which they must constantly battle. In class, in the playground, in their area they are relentlessly forced to adopt complex defence strategies against stigmatisation. Self-enclosure allows them to draw breath away from the persistent and consistent nature of stigmatisation outlined in these interviews. It may also be a place where they can contemplate the reality of their intentional social rejection, a possibility neglected by Goffman.

It is arguable that not only can overweight adolescents come to be ashamed of themselves as the previous respondent hinted at, but they are also likely to be aware of others being ashamed to be seen with them as one participant describes.

> If they're very overweight they just wouldn't fit it. You wouldn't want to be seen with them because you'd be embarrassed because everyone would be looking at him and then staring at you and saying 'what are you doing with him?' (Kevin, 13)

Perhaps it is for this reason that other interviewees point to the way overweight adolescents gravitate towards other overweight adolescents for the formation of

265

friendship groups. Goffman believes this occurs because the stigmatised individual may feel less tense around people with like stigmas. Within this research context there is perhaps also an element of escapism. As in the case of total self-confinement, adolescents can have a break from intentional and confrontational abuse when they are around those who can empathise with such labelling. Members of the group may be seen to share similar levels of embodied validation and may even come to attain embodied validation amongst each other. This grouping behaviour is certainly alive and well in the school settings of these participants.

> They may just sit down by themselves or with a few other people the same. (Eoin, 13)

Another participant has noticed identical patterns.

> If you see one big person, you'll probably see three. They'll all hang round together. (Caoimhe, 16)

One respondent holds such patterns to be very much the norm in his school and even suggests that this may emerge as a result of their intentional rejection from other peer groups and the constant stream of remarks aimed at to school them on their stigmatisation.

> They'd just get slagged going along and would be looked down on I suppose. Wouldn't be treated on the same level as other people. There's one guy in third year and he's called 'slim shady' 'cause he's so huge. (Andy, 16)

Another participant believes the normalised manner of their stigmatisation may be the reason behind their formation of 'rejected' peer groups.

> There's a group of them that are friends and they're all big... The three of them are very, very big. If you had to pick out big people you'd pick the three of them. Maybe it is just coincidental that the three of them are friends or maybe they are on the same wave length. It could be a possibility that they feel rejected by other groups. But it's not just them, there's loads more groups. Like there's two big people in sixth year that

always hang around together and even more in the junior years. (Andy, 16)

Amazingly, according to 13-year-old Chloe such segregation on the basis of body size is absolutely normal. In fact, she suggests that adolescent groups in her school are formed in relation to the body size of those who constitute them. She believes anything else would increase the risk of stigmatisation.

> Fat people are put into a different group. People who are fat or chubby tend to stick to that group and thin people stick with thin people. That's what my cousin does 'cause she's fat. She tends to stick with people who are the same size as her instead of going with skinny people because she thinks they are talking about her behind her back. She cares what they think about her all the time. (Chloe, 13)

Another participant believes that if she were to put on weight she would only hang around with other teenagers of her own size. Such is the dialogic-deliberating which goes on through policing and comparing, she believes that if she became fat she would not be able to go out in public with her thinner counterparts.

> I'd be conscious that I might get overweight and I wouldn't feel very good about myself or like going out with people who would be a lot skinnier than me. (Amy, 13)

There is a dual process at play in this segregation strategy. Firstly, there exists the kind of self-exclusion or gravitation towards people with like stigmas arising out of a fear of encountering stigmatisation, which Goffman refers to. Secondly, however, there is a process of social rejection where individuals are 'put' into a different group emerging from the reality of intentional stigmatisation.

There is another option open to overweight adolescents seeking inclusion which also further develops Goffman's notion of stigmatisation. This comes in the form of 'self-stigmatisation' and appears to have an 'if you can't beat 'em, join 'em' logic at its core. Displaying the analytical and insightful characteristics of

many adolescents, one young participant set this group of self-stigmatising yet fun loving youths apart from the youths referred to in the last two paragraphs.

> There's two kinds of fat people. Some think no one's going to want to know them 'cause they're fat and then others just try and then make friends. There's one lad who's very overweight but he says he doesn't care and he's one of the most popular people in our year. There's very few that still have the confidence that he has when you're overweight. He's very funny. (Evan, 13)

Given the normalisation of stigmatisation, it is unlikely that the young male Evan speaks of has avoided being labelled because of his perceived 'invalid' embodiment. His reaction, however, is to overtly maintain a happy demeanour which appears to be unharmed by such labels. The ability to laugh off any stigmatisation is what reduces the possibility of this adolescent being rejected. The case is similar for another participant's peer.

> If you're a bit fat who cares if you're a good laugh. Like if you can laugh about it too. If you're really fat and you're having a fight you can be just slagged because of your weight and a whole load of people think that funny. (Mark, 12)

In light of the heartache and anguish outlined in this chapter to date, the possibility of a youth finding their own stigmatisation being truly funny is quite slim. What the funny *façade* does allow, however, is for such youths to remain within 'normal' peer groups because they also appear to think their stigmatisation is funny. They even come to self-stigmatise as a demonstration of way they are not affected by any labelling. This is not the type of process, referred to by Goffman (1963b) whereby others are schooled on the nature of their stigma and become accepting. On the contrary, this process increases stigmatisation, for the individual is not only openly stigmatised by others but also by themselves. Although the individual in question may have access to 'normal' groups they continue to be referred to as ' the funny fat person'. Furthermore, self-stigmatisation does not appear to lead to embodied

validation, but simply produces a greater social awareness of their lack of embodied validation. Six different interviewees who contributed to this study used the term 'funny fat people' or something closely related to it and on each occasion this required youths making open remarks about their own weight. Cathal who speaks of the way his friend simply laughs off the labels deliberately aimed at him and joins in such labelling himself probably provides the best example of this.

> Like one of my friend's names is 'fat boy' and he thinks it hilarious. He's not that fat but he thinks it's hilarious and he constantly makes comments about how fat he is... He'll refer to himself as festively plump. (Cathal, 16)

The fact that Cathal's friend maintains his sense of humour means he is not rejected from normal peer groups, as he has proved he has something to offer them. When referring to 'funny fat people' another interviewee also suggests that this process works because there is no point in stigmatising someone who just finds it equally funny.

> There's no use slagging someone if they just laugh it off and agree. (Ger, 13)

This is a most valuable insight as it exemplifies the way in which stigmatisation is intentional and aimed at causing harm. Where obvious signs of harm are not achieved stigmatisation may actually be reduced. Therefore, overweight adolescents may be less stigmatised in the long run if they participate in the seemingly hilarious practice of their own self-stigmatisation. For Goffman such tactics are not an issue, as his stigmatisation never has the same intentional and confrontational element which is clear in these narratives. Furthermore whether one self-stigmatises because they genuinely do not care about how they look, or because they are trying to avoid exclusion from 'normal' peer groups, one constant remains. It is the overweight body which continues to be stigmatised.

Consequently, whether it is stigmatisation by the self or others, the body continues to be labelled 'fat' and the stigmatisation of the fat body continues to be normalised.

In this section I have drawn on the rather complex strategies which overweight adolescents may undertake to cope with stigmatisation. I have suggested that this can range from self-confinement to social segregation to self-stigmatisation. All of these strategies display agents who are actively trying to cope with the stigmatisation which surrounds them according to these participants.

## 7.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have used Goffman's notion of stigmatisation to attempt to understand adolescents who are labelled and often ridiculed on the basis of their bodies. While Goffman proposes a framework which looks at groups of 'normals' and 'stigmatised', I have suggested that it is also about the 'normalisation of stigmatisation'. Here, both groups are schooled on stigmatisation through the experience of stigmatisation at some point and to some degree. However, for one group it is more persistent and perhaps more aligned with bullying.

Throughout this chapter, I have emphasised the apparent intentional and confrontational nature of this stigmatising process, which is aimed overwhelmingly at the body. It is plausible to affirm that through focusing on the 'invalidity' of others, those who stigmatise, are hoping to divert attention from their own possible flaws. I have suggested that this is a complex mechanism aimed at the allocation of power. It is, perhaps, an attempt by some to perpetuate their own worthiness of embodied validation, through the identification and subordination of those who are

unworthy. While the data indicates that both underweight and overweight youths can be deemed unworthy of embodied validation, overweight youths are likely to face most ridicule and rejection.

The narratives in this chapter confirm Monaghan's assertion that 'fat' may not be a four-letter word, but it can certainly be used as an abusive term (2005). As Goffman (1963b) proposes, secondary labels are applied to individuals on the basis of the first label. This chapter has shown how fat people were labelled 'lazy', 'disgusting' and even 'stupid'. Labels relating to the body, constantly school adolescents on the inescapability of their embodied state. I have highlighted the harsh emotional impact, which such labelling has, even to the extent where participants suggest that they come to believe in their unworthiness to achieve embodied validation.

Finally in this chapter I have examined, three complex strategies which the data reveals to be employed by overweight teenagers to cope with the process of stigmatisation. They may choose self-confinement where they are not faced with the problem of attaining embodied validation from others. Through choice or lack of choice, they may only associate with those who display similar levels of validation. Alternatively, participants hold that overweight youths may self-stigmatise in an overt performance to demonstrate the way they are supposedly unaffected by stigmatising labels. However, while these are legitimate strategies to cope with stigmatisation by those who have perceived 'invalid' bodies, it is also necessary to examine the strategies used by adolescents to cope with satisfying 'valid' hungers yet constructing 'valid' bodies. These strategies are equally complex and will be the focus of Chapter Eight.

## 8.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the processes utilised by participating adolescents to attain embodied validation. I look at the way participants in this investigation point to the consumption of food as fulfilling a valid desire. Not only this, but they suggest that food can indeed be a source of self-sufficiency, independence and sociality. I show how respondents are schooled by advertising on the desirability of certain foods such as 'junk foods' and how they are also schooled on such foods through their lack of choice in consuming 'junk foods' in certain school contexts.

There is a complexity in the schooling of the body, however, because adolescents are also schooled in the knowledge that embodied validation does not come from carelessly indulging. Therefore, I examine the strategies which adolescents put forward as 'compensating' measures to counteract the dangers of over-indulgence. In this chapter I discuss how unacceptable levels of indulgence, brings feelings of guilty eating, irrespective of sex or class. However, some of the compensating strategies which participants describe are concerning and even more worrying is the commonplace nature of such strategies within many of their narratives.

I proceed to take an in-depth look at 'exercise' as an example of a compensating activity. Furthermore, I examine it as a highly 'validating' activity. I show how these youths are schooled on the validating nature of exercise from peers, siblings, parents and within the gym. This shall be referred to as a process of 'social induction' within validating activities. I use 'social induction' as a possible

alternative to the notion of 'social construction' of the body. As an explanation of this, I show in the final section how bodies are essentially responsible for their own construction. Exercise is motivated by the mind, yet carried out by the body, highlighting the truly 'embodied' nature of 'construction'. However, I also outline the magnitude of understanding 'validation' as 'embodied' for these adolescents. I describe how physical construction and its implications appear to have the power to impact back upon the entire embodied individual in a distinctly validating way.

## 8.2 Fulfilling Valid Embodied Hungers

In this section I look at the importance of fulfilling valid and natural desires to eat among these participants. I show how personal responsibility for their own choice of food intake is evident among both males and females. They enjoy indulgence within the 'hypermarket of culture' where they "want to accept everything, eat everything, touch everything" (Baudrillard, 1982: 10). The fact that these adolescents largely have independent responsibility for personal intake may itself be seen as a form of cultural capital (Boden, 2006) or as Shilling suggests, as "a major *source* of sociality" (2005: 153). Purchasing of food, therefore, appears to have the ability to offer fulfilment, happiness, independence and sociality.

This section focuses on how participants also point to the fact that in their school setting, they have little choice in the food they consume. Unlike the UK, where the Government is responsible for providing food in schools, it is predominantly private tenders who are accountable for feeding Irish youths. In line with the huge emergence of convenience food described by Schlosser (2002), therefore, schools offer foods that are less perishable but which promise flavour

273

and fulfilment. It is arguable that adolescents largely choose what may be considered 'junk food' or 'fast food' and paradoxically by virtue of their choice are often left with no choice.

On the whole, both males and females in this study agreed on the importance of eating. Theorists such as Bordo (1993) and Turner (1984, 1992, 1996) would probably not be surprised that the males who contributed to this discussion, valued the notion of consuming food to satisfy hungers. They may, however, be quite taken aback by the open relationship females appear to have with food. Fulfilling one's desires is not done embarrassingly behind closed doors, as many feminist theorists suggest, but female participants outline a satisfying of what they see as valid desires, in an overt and open way. One interviewee laughingly comments that like her mother, she too is an 'animal' for food.

> She (mother) just eats and eats, she's just an animal like me. I just eat and eat, like yesterday. I had a curry last night and after the curry I felt so full and then I had a drink and after that I was able to have a bar so I can really eat like. (Lynn, 16)

Another participant also enjoys food and would never refuse the fulfilment it provides.

> I wouldn't starve myself or I wouldn't refuse my food if it was put in front of me... Yesterday I just kept eating and eating and eating and I wouldn't stop. (Anna, 15)

Although 16-year-old Shauna recalls that she did try to totally repress her hunger through a complete limitation of her food intake for about a week when she was aged 14, her intention now is to satisfy such hungers.

> It would never stop me eating and go around starving. I'm never starving and I eat loads of rubbish. (Shauna, 16)

Despite Turner and Bordo's suggestion that controlling desires is essential to the construction of femininity, one young female holds that such practices are unnatural.

Everyone has to eat, it's not natural not to. (Sandra, 13)

For the adolescents in this research, therefore, hunger is natural, eating is satisfying and eating certain foods is even uplifting.

It is arguable that the advertising of certain foods schools youths on food choice and that this impacts on their eating patterns. It is often the foods that feature within consumer culture as being most satisfying and gratifying which these adolescents choose to fulfil these valid hungers. It is not enough to view this form of popular capital through marketing advertisements, however, but as Baudrillard (1982) and Bourdieu (1984) affirm, youths want to feel it, eat it and enjoy it. For some, food such as chocolate socially abounds and offers the promise of happiness much more than other food products.

> It's everywhere, on the TV and advertisements and everywhere. Like the Cadbury's ads. It's like it will make us happy. Say if they're advertising bananas they wouldn't advertise the taste but with chocolate it's all about the taste and what's different about it than other bars. (Sandra, 13)

Another interviewee makes an almost identical observation.

> Chocolate boosts your energy and all that and they have a nice taste off them… They all have different tastes compared to say, a banana, like you eat that all the time but different chocolate bars taste different… We see everyone around us and all the ads. They always have one's like when your one was lying on the sofa and eating the dairy milk. She sinks down into the chair and they say she's making love to it. (Chloe, 13)

Bordo (1993) pays much attention to the power of such advertising and the way in which it entices individuals to embrace the sheer indulgence on offer. For one participant chocolate is simply a drug.

275

> I love sweets. I have a sweet tooth. We all have. Chocolate has a drug in
> it that makes us happy. (Mark, 12)

Another interviewee comments on the fact that it is the sugar and the range of

tastes, which makes food like chocolate something one is happy to embrace.

> I'd nearly have a bar or some sweets everyday… it's the sugar and
> because it tastes nice probably. It's like with chocolate it's not just plain
> chocolate that you get, there's lots of different bars with other things in
> them. It's just whatever's in them is really nice. (Josh, 13)

The advertising for chocolate, conjures up atmospheres of ultimate relaxation,

according to one female youth.

> Some ads make it look so relaxing 'cause in the Galaxy ad and it's
> raining out and she's just sitting there eating the Galaxy. Makes it look
> like you have to do that when it's raining out, just get a cup of tea and
> sit there. It's so relaxing 'cause she's just sitting there with her Galaxy
> and the whole world is just walking by in the cold and it's lashing out.
> It's just so relaxing and when your eating it you're not thinking about
> whether it's bad for you. (Caoimhe, 16)

This young lady has been schooled on the soothing powers of chocolate for the

body and it is her full intention to recreate for herself the relaxation being

advertised. For others also it is their intention to experience the calming power of

such foods.

> It tastes nice and it's really calming. All the ads on the television make
> it seem so calming. In the Nestle Double Cream ad 'cause they have
> someone in brown clothes so it looks all soothing and everything… It
> looks gorgeous and really tasty. You feel it would make you feel great.
> (Amy, 13)

Again, yet another interviewee longingly points to the happiness chocolate
promises.

> Ahh chocolate… All the ads make it look so gorgeous. Like the Galaxy
> ad where she closes the curtains and jumps onto the couch and the
> chocolate is sitting on the wrapper and she's about to eat it… It seems
> like it will make you so happy. (Gillian, 16)

Most participants made some mention of the desire to consume what may be

described as junk food. However, in spite of the picture of eating alone which they

276

refer to in advertisements and the emphasis which Bordo places on women thinking it sinful to eat in public, these females spoke of such eating in the company of friends and family and in open public spaces.

The consumption of 'fast food' was not as common as 'junk food' among these youths, yet both seem to occupy a central position within the eating choices of respondents. The fact that food intake is a 'choice' points to a self-sufficiency among both male and female youths. Their intentions to taste the relaxation, happiness and satisfaction promised by certain foods denotes a pattern where adolescents gravitate towards similar food types, in spite of the fact that they are hugely responsible for their own intake choices. A number of factors may be suggested for this gravitation. The first of these focuses on how adolescents are schooled on the sense of fulfilment on offer which has already been addressed. As Schlosser (2002) asserts, the manufacturers of certain foods have been trying to lure youths into becoming loyal customers from the time they were able to nag their parents enough to purchase them. Secondly, junk food and fast food are convenient choices purchasable from funds given by busy parents or by now financially independent adolescents themselves. Finally, due to youths' gravitation towards such choices they may be actively limiting the inclusion of other, perhaps more healthy, choices.

In spite of a mandatory element of the school syllabus (SPHE) advising adolescents to make healthy food choices, not one of the five schools I visited provided food options other than junk food and fast food for students. I am led to believe that this is a pattern which is changing, but this is often done through banning certain foods and is more applicable to primary schools. The fact that secondary schools often provide no alternatives to junk foods and convenience

277

foods means that these youths may actually have no choice but to indulge in these foods. Schooling therefore, which promotes such food is occurring both outside and inside of schools themselves and this creates a complex contradiction with syllabus content. Participants clearly indicated the terrifying notion of becoming fat in the previous chapter and their legitimate social reasons for this. However, these respondents consume foods, both through choice and through necessity, which significantly increase the possibility of becoming fat. It is the opinion of one male participant that the vast majority of boys in his school are responsible for buying their own breakfast and lunch and that of these, most opt for convenience foods.

> If you go up to the shop, it's like all doughnuts and I'd say they sell hundreds of sausage rolls a day. It's lately that they started selling cream or jam or plain donuts. It's like a normal newsagents you go down to, they have like every bar you want, like a big sweets shelf. They sell all different kind of crisps and there's a drinks cabinet. You can order your roll at the 10 o'clock break and they have it ready for you at 12 o'clock. A lot of people would have wedges and breakfast roll. They have salad rolls as well but they wouldn't be as popular. (Andy, 16)

For those who are not allowed to venture off school grounds at lunchtime, their choice of food intake is restricted to what is available within school canteens. Such canteens appear to bear an enormous resemblance to the type described by Schlosser in his detailing of capitalist companies expanding their fortune within American schools. In all of the schools I visited this choice was strikingly unvaried. One interviewee lists the limited choices available in his school canteen.

> Hotdogs, muffins, doughnuts, hamburgers, sausage rolls. (Evan, 13)

For another it is similar.

> It's all hot-dogs and burgers and chicken burgers and sometimes they do chicken wings and sausage rolls. There's a shop too and they do chocolate bars and jellies and fizzy drinks. (Josh, 13)

278

It may be affirmed that youths have great independence with regard to their food intake and this independence can be seen to gravitate towards very particular food types. What is emerging within schools, however, is that even if youths wanted to channel their choices in a more healthy direction, this option would not be available to them. One young female describes this dilemma among self-sufficient adolescents in her school.

> Most people just eat rolls and crisps and bars. The shop upstairs, that's all they sell is sweets. They don't sell fruit or rolls and they sell fizzy drinks. Even if you wanted to stop taking them, even cut down on them, like they're still in front of you. (Anna, 15)

Although having much choice in terms of their food intake in theory, it appears that in reality, these adolescents have little choice.

> The only thing you can really get is burgers, biscuits, chips, crisps and muffins. That's all people eat they don't eat anything that would be good for you. (Sandra, 13)

One male contributor responsible for his own eating makes a similar point.

> I don't eat that much good stuff for lunch. I just get a box of wedges or a sandwich. I like salads but it's easier to get junk food so it's too much hassle to try and have a healthy lunch every day. If you go to the shops there's not much of a choice to get good food. If you go up to get baps they're usually not very nice so it's just easier to buy hot food and have a good dinner I suppose. (Cian, 16)

It is paramount to note that while some participants spoke of a desire to have healthy options available to them, the majority bore testament to the popularity of junk food and fast food.

In this section I have looked at narratives that provide vivid accounts of these adolescents' intentions to dive into the pleasure and contentment promised by certain foods. Although these youths indicate a significant amount of self-sufficiency and self-responsibility for food intake, they also point to limitations in the food choices they can make within a school context. By and large, respondents'

motivation for buying food was to fulfil what they saw to be valid hungers. They also viewed treating themselves as quite acceptable and neither males nor females wanted to "go beyond control, to kill off the body's spontaneities entirely" (Bordo, 1993: 146). What they do appear to be absolutely vigilant about, however, is the need to maintain a complex balance between over-indulgence and under-indulgence. The last interviewee quoted above hints at this balance when he justifies eating 'unhealthy' food at lunchtime with eating a 'good' dinner. This is a phenomenon of 'continuously compensating' which others expand upon in much greater depth in the next section.

## 8.3 Equilibrium through 'Continuously Compensating'

The focus of this section is on the complex strategies that are used by these participants to balance the body against the consequences of over-indulgence. While they clearly see the biological and social advantages of eating, they also appear to be relentlessly reflexive regarding the possible danger of becoming fat through over-indulgence. Occasions of such over-indulgence are described as resulting in feelings of guilt and worry. Therefore, participants outline the regimes of 'continuously compensating' which they implement to counteract feelings of guilt and to prevent becoming overweight. However, it also becomes apparent in this section that some of the processes of compensation being used are blurring the boundaries between 'ordinary' patterns of regulation and 'disordered' patterns of regulation.

Despite the strong focus by Bruch (1977), Turner (1984, 1992, 1996), Bordo (1993) and many others solely on women being engulfed by the need to

compensate, this research found little distinction between males and females. In terms of eating disorders, Turner and Bordo, view them as an extension of a normal preoccupation with dieting. Turner follows Bruch and refers specifically to middle-class females from over-protective families (Turner, 1984: 185, 1992: 221). There are limitations to such an analysis, however. Firstly, in focusing on middle class girls and their familial expectations, this neglects girls from other social classes. The data presented in Chapter Five showed that participants identified similar images as 'valid' and undertook the same process of dialogic-deliberation to arrive at their decision regardless of social class. Chapters Six and Seven, examined how students are schooled on the way the body works as a mechanism for social acceptance and social rejection regardless of class backgrounds. Similarly, they attach the same importance to the need to compensate. Thus, it is no longer sufficient (if it ever was) to focus on middle-class females alone and disordered eating as a solution to their quest for validation.

Secondly, is it essential that males be included in any theory which seeks to understand the complexities of body regulation in contemporary times. Bordo does refer to the regulatory practices of the male being united with the practices of the female against "a common enemy: the soft, the loose; unsolid, excess flesh" (1993: 191). When it comes to eating, however, Bordo describes a very patriarchal setting where men are predominantly served, waited on and expected to consume "Hungry Man Dinners" (1993: 108). Within Bordo's social setting, women lay the table with copious amounts of man-sized foods for their husbands, while females restrict their own eating so as to conform to ideals of aesthetic beauty created by men. Within such a setting, while men are generally seen to be more independent than women, they have little independence over, or input into, their own eating

practices. However, this research bears witness to a situation where the males involved present narratives which show males in a different context. For instance, male participants speak of their father preparing dinner and they speak of a responsibility to provide their own lunches. In addition, they clearly speak of the lure of treats, yet the guilt which may follow and the necessity to compensate for treating oneself too much. Although Bordo gives an invaluable account of the dynamics of guilty eating, it is only women who are detailed as experiencing it. For both sexes in this research, however, indulgence brings enjoyment, which is followed by guilt, which is, in turn, followed by a short period of compensation.

By and large, participants appear to believe that it is acceptable to over-indulge on occasion and they do not see this as a problem so long as they compensate afterwards. This is not an attempt to suppress their desires through very ordered and regimented eating patterns. These youths either lack the willpower to do this or they do not want to. The 'disciplined body' described by Frank may help to develop an understanding of the findings in this research. "With regard to desire, the disciplined body understands itself as *lacking*" (Frank, 1991: 55). Therefore, for the adolescent this could account for their resignation to natural desires which should be satisfied and which they intend to satisfy. Hence, the compensation or "regimentation does not remedy this lack, but it can forestall total disintegration" (Frank, 1991: 55). The intention is to be able to indulge, even overindulge, but to be continuously reflexive of the need to follow this by a compensating regime which prevents plummeting into the realms of 'fat'. Adolescents' compensating is about becoming schooled in the complex process of balancing over-indulgence and under-indulgence so that they get the best of both worlds.

It is arguable that this complex process of balancing shares strong similarities with bulimic practices. Both Turner and Bordo, focus predominantly on restricted eating and anorexia as an extension of this. When Turner refers to a type of compensating body, he proposes purges, sweating, fasting and diet as ways of restoring the body's equilibrium (1984: 178). Similarly where Bordo attempts to describe more 'compensating' practices than 'suppressing' practices, she sets bulimia apart from anorexia which acknowledges a "hunger for unrestricted consumption" as well as "the requirement to get back in firm control" (1993: 201). It is unfortunate that a type of Foucauldian suppression and rejection of natural desires dominates most of Turner and Bordo's work because their work on indulging, but regaining equilibrium and control seems to better describe the strategy of 'continuously compensating' outlined by participants.

Comparable with the 'new petite bourgeoisie' (Bourdieu, 1984) or those who want to embrace all that is popular within culture, the youths involved largely want to eat their cake but still have 'it'. 'It' in this instance refers to what is aesthetically acceptable and the plight to achieve it is summed up accurately by one interviewee.

> I eat loads of junk food. I prefer to eat all that sort of stuff but then you want to have a nice figure as well. You like to fit into your jeans after eating a packet of crisps or something. (Shannon, 14)

It is quite acceptable for the females in this study to eat 'junk food' as long as they enforce regulatory measures which means they do not deviate from the pursuit of embodied validation. For some, this compensating is done through attempting to flush any excess eating out of one's physical system, to exercise it out or to follow excess eating with a short period of restriction.

> I eat junk food every day, but I balance it out. I have 2 litres of water every day and I walk to school so I usually don't find myself putting on

too much and if I did find myself putting on weight, I'd just go easy on the junk food for the next few days. (Tara, 15)

Another follows an almost identical compensating regimen.

I try to drink eight glasses of water a day and jogging is now part of my routine 'cause it's there. (Shauna, 16)

As Frank (1991) suggests, these participants appear to largely accept that they have natural desires which they intend to satisfy. Regimentation is not to eliminate such desires as Turner and Bordo follow Foucault in emphasising, but to counteract the possibility of falling at the mercy of fat. It is not eating junk food, which causes female respondents to feel guilty, but rather 'overeating' such food. Feeling that one has overindulged or treated one's self too much is what seems to give rise to guilt. Of course 'overeating' is itself an extremely subjective term, but experiences of guilt can emerge regardless of one's definition of overeating. It is at this point that, the type of 'dialogic-deliberation' or self-schooling described in Chapter Five re-emerges. Still focusing on female participants, each one who discusses the notion of guilty eating describes a similar consequential process. It is as if the deliberating agent comes to have two roles. Firstly, to reflexively remind the self of its failures and the possible risks involved and secondly, to calm the self from becoming too frightened, through focusing on the regimen which can subsequently be employed to counteract total disintegration. One young girl provides a vivid example of the way the agentic self is fore-fronted to deal with such guilt ridden dilemmas.

If I eat loads I say 'Oh my God' and think I have put on pounds... but then I say 'oh that's ok. I'll get it off... I'll do more exercise and it will be ok'. (Mary, 13)

It is arguable that it is not a case of these females feeling they have lost control because they feel their "cravings are a dirty, shameful secret, to be indulged in only

when no one is looking" (Bordo, 1993: 129). Eating in public doesn't seem to be what causes this fear. Rather, it is an urgency to immediately enforce compensating regimen in the battle against fat. Perhaps Bordo focuses too strongly on women's need to overeat or 'binge' (Bordo) in private. In these narratives, it appears to be done very much in public. After all, how can they demonstrate their competence in the complex process of indulging in foods and participating in practices popular among their peers and have the independence to do so, and still display a physique high in embodied capital, if this process is not done in public? Eating for these contemporary adolescents can be seen to be a social occasion in itself, where their independence is played out. One participant speaks of going to get food in the evening as a time which allows her to meet up with friends. In this instance it is overeating which evokes guilt, not public eating. The controlling agent is again evident in this narrative.

> Some weeks I go down with my friends and get a curry for five nights and I say 'that's enough I'm not getting any curries next week 'cause I'm after treating myself too much. So I say 'I'll give myself a break this week and save up', 'cause the amount of money that you spend on them is mad and you'd also feel like you were after putting on loads of weight and you have to get rid of it and then you exercise more and you end up exercising more. (Anna, 15)

This dialogue bears witness to the fact that eating is a public occasion in itself for adolescents. The self-sufficiency involved displays agents in control of their own intake. This participant intends to eat curries and treat valid desires by doing so. It is when she feels she has 'treated herself too much' and may risk putting on weight that she begins an obvious dialogue with herself in an attempt to school herself on how it is now time to begin a compensating regimen. Another female follows the same process. Eating is done in public, overeating is acknowledged and the agent begins a dialogic-deliberation on regimes which must be introduced.

> I keep on eating all the time, like I'm after having a big lunch and mum's making a stew this evening, I'll go home and eat the stew and after the stew I'd still be able to eat something else... If I eat loads I feel like 'Oh my God what am I after doing, I'm just after eating too much.' You'd feel really annoyed with yourself. You feel like your stomach is all bloated and you feel full and it's not nice. I hate it. But it's like going to the gym, you feel like you can eat whatever you like before you go and then when you come out you feel like everything you're after eating is just gone. (Lynn, 16)

It is the 'intention' which is essential here. These young females do not intend to reject, or rebel against some kind of sinful public eating. Their intention is to accept food, even embrace it, but to reject fat. Guilty eating, therefore, does not come into play prior to eating but only when participants feel they have overeaten. As long as regimes, such as going to the gym, are enforced, one can eat as much as one wishes beforehand. Another girl describes a similar process but in this case, the voice of the disciplining, schooling self is even stronger within this self-dialogue.

> When I'm going to the cinema I eat a huge thing of popcorn and sweets and coke and I come out feeling 'I really shouldn't have done that.' It puts a dampener on eating 'cause you're feeling guilty, but you're also thinking 'oh my God it's only food'. So you say 'I shouldn't have eaten that much but now I'll do a hundred sit-ups'. (Gillian, 16)

In this narrative it is almost as if there is two-way conversation going on. As with the others, the agent takes on two roles. One, to remind the self that they have overdone it and two, to deliberate on what compensatory action should be introduced to counteract the situation. Once more, this interviewee does not feel guilty for eating but for eating 'that much'. For Bordo and Turner such guilty feelings are common to the female, but amazingly they neglect to account for identical feelings of guilt among males.

Most commentators do not suggest that men experience the type of problems with eating generous amounts of food in public as women do. The

narratives quoted above, offer an alternative approach of female eating. In addition, the male narratives which I now address, also shed a slightly different light on male eating. I wish to argue that males too, experience the type of guilty eating which females have long since been detailed as experiencing. The findings in this study suggest that boys wish to eat tempting foods, as much as girls do, and that they also feel the need to continually compensate should they feel they have indulged too much. Being fat has the same consequences for men as women in society. Respondents in Chapter Seven established this, where they largely confirmed the assertions of Gill, Henwood and McLean's study that "discourse sets up the individual to discipline their own body, and finds them morally culpable if they fail" (2005: 55). Respondents also showed how it leaves them overtly ridiculed and segregated if they fail. Therefore, while these males do not want to repress their natural hungers, they have sufficient social schooling on embodied validation to know that they do not want to risk total submission to them either. The reflexive self rationalises that eating is acceptable, therefore, so long as it is followed by a period of compensating regimen. One male participant explains this process and also draws attention to two other social changes ill addressed by Bordo. It is this young male's father who cooks the family dinner and it is this participant himself who is responsible for his own food intake at lunch.

> For the last two weeks I've been eating burgers everyday as well as dinner. My dad cooks good stuff. I don't really mind about the last two weeks 'cause I'm going to burn it off anyway, but if I were to sit around doing nothing then I probably would mind. I just ate them 'cause I was hungry at the time and it was too much effort to go and get proper lunches. (Enda, 16)

Hence, this respondent does not have a difficulty with eating particular foods, in fact they are convenient for his independent lifestyle. However, he holds that it

would be destabilising if a form of self-regulation did not balance an excessive intake out. A younger youth also points to the need for such compensating.

> If I thought I was getting fat I'd kind of be annoyed with myself, I would be annoyed with myself and try and do a lot more exercise or even stop eating or something like that. (Kevin, 13)

Although one cannot be sure that this participant actually would go so far as to stop eating altogether, his referral to such a period of restriction does demonstrate the level of fear and guilt that exists among males towards becoming fat. It also shows that he considers introducing drastic compensating regimes. For another, controlling the balance between over-eating and under-eating, and the guilty feelings which flourish between the two, points to feelings identical to that of female participants.

> I've been eating so much rubbish and all lately and I have to try and get it all off again. I'm not starving myself but I was over-eating again but I'm not anymore. (Barry, 16)

For this young male it is necessary to follow overeating with a period of restriction in order to remain in control within this seemingly endless cycle. Others too, stress the necessity to compensate, not for eating, but for overeating. This is seen to be paramount in reducing the risk of becoming fat.

> I really like sweets but I'm eating a lot of sweets and I'm trying to stop that now. I don't want to be fat when I get older. I just don't want to be big. If you want to be big, you want to be big with muscle rather than flab. (Evan, 13)

Male interviewees continue to refer to relationships with food similar to that of their female counterparts, yet this is a similarity which many theorists have failed to acknowledge sufficiently. The process of 'dialogic-deliberation' whereby the self takes on the role of negotiator, teacher, discipliner and implementer, distinctly comes into play among males also. One youth even outlines the similarities in the male and female mind set to introduce compensating regimes. No one could deny

that the guilt, with which he describes over-eating is equal to that described by any female, as is his compulsion to compensate and reclaim control.

> If a girl would try to work off what she'd eaten then I suppose men would do that as well. I know that's what I'd do, go for a run or something to try to burn it all off. It's happened before if I'd gone out to breakfast with someone and I'd eaten loads and I'd think 'I shouldn't have done that.' Then at nighttime I'd go for a cycle or a run or something just to burn it off. Anyway it would make you feel better about what you'd done. If you sit around doing nothing you'll just feel awful but if you go out for a run or cycle you wouldn't feel as bad. You'd feel like you made an effort to get rid of it. (Cian, 16)

For a younger male also, the individual dialogue which he partakes in following a period of perceived over-eating, indicates again the role which the agent takes on to negotiate what has just happened, and what should subsequently happen, to calm the fear of possible risks. However, he also directs attention to something that may account for the neglect of guilty eating among males in much of the literature in this area. He suggests that boys might think it 'girlie' to talk about the need to compensate and, therefore, suggest a relationship with food typically assigned to females only. It must be stressed, however, that as the above quotes imply, the majority of males in this research spoke much more openly about compensating for overeating than many other issues.

> When I eat too much I feel a bit bloated and full, I probably wouldn't eat any sweets the next day. Sometimes I might feel like I have to eat less the next day but then I might just say 'that was just a once off.' I'd just feel stupid and try to take a break from some stuff. I'd be afraid of the way I'd look if I kept eating like that. Some boys mightn't feel up to telling about how they feel, they don't want to say how they're overweight. They might think it's a bit girlie to say 'I'm going to stop 'cause I don't want to get overweight'. (Ger, 13)

These narratives display how males as well as females must be included in any discussion on guilty eating or compensation.

If compensating regimes are not intended at rejecting the body's valid desires, but to forestall totally disintegration to such desires, as Frank (1991)

proposes, then the cyclical process which these adolescents participate in is very similar to what underpins bulimia. Bordo holds that "bulimia precisely and explicitly expresses the extreme development of the hunger for unrestrained consumption" (1993: 201). This is exactly what the adolescents in this research appear to be expressing in their complex regimen of continuously compensating. They embrace consumption, but unrestrained consumption can give rise to such panic and fear that practices such as vomiting become a desirable and extremely accessible option. For any individual who wishes to enjoy all the temptations and pleasures within a 'hypermarket of culture' (Baudrillard), yet retain their embodied capital, bulimic regimen pose a perfect solution to such contradictory expectations. Furthermore, it is not only those with diagnosed obsessive disorders who choose to use them or if it is, then undiagnosed obsessive disorders surround these participants in a most familiar and habitual fashion. According to one female interviewee if she ate too much she would feel like getting sick. Just as Turner and Bordo affirm, such obsessive practices are not abnormal; the practice of purging is something that many youths in this participant's area choose to utilise as a form of compensating.

> When you eat loads like, you want to get sick. That's the way I feel but all the young one's down my way they get sick anyway, like when they eat stuff they take stuff for it and it makes them get sick so anything they eat they throw up afterwards. (Chloe, 13)

This young girl goes on to describe in even more detail how much in keeping the practice of eating and vomiting is with other compensating regimen discussed earlier. The objective in both is simply to empty the system so that one does not have to fear filling it the next day.

> That's the way people do it, like if you're sick one day you'll eat the next. (Chloe, 13)

290

This participant speaks of vomiting as a compensating regimen in a way which appears to be equally at home within the practices of schooling the body which surround her, as exercising may be for instance. Another female also discusses the normalisation of vomiting among her peers.

> More people are going on diets and more are sticking their fingers down their throat and all that. 'Cause my friend was making herself sick there for a while and she's gone very thin. (Anna, 15)

For one interviewee, the possibility of youths turning to vomiting as a means of obtaining some form of equilibrium is so likely that she is highly cautious when commenting on a friend's weight.

> I wouldn't say to her (friend) to loose weight or anything 'cause people do things to themselves if they think they're big. Some people take it the wrong way and make themselves sick. (Lynn, 16)

It is worth noting that despite Bruch's (1977) emphasis on eating disorders being more prevalent among middle-class girls with controlling parents, that data on the use of bulimic behaviours thus far emerged from interviews with girls from working-class areas who described relationships with their mothers characterised by friendship, rather than dominance. According to Reimer "various lifestyle orientations must be considered open: youth with similar orientations do not all come from the same backgrounds" (Reimer, 1995b: 138). When Reimer's theory is applied to Bruch's, it may be argued that it offers a more accurate picture of how bodies are schooled within the present day context where different classes may be encompassed within similar discourses.

What is startling about these narratives, however, is that participants describe the utilisation of compensating regimen for specific purposes and set periods of time to achieve some goal. They do not describe the body breaking down under them as Turner does. It appears as if they are chosen as a quick fit

solution to transient discomfort. For instance, one participant describes how her next-door neighbour is making herself vomit until such time as she gets her shape back after pregnancy.

> The girl who lives next door to me, she's after having a baby, she keeps on taking Andrews and throwing up after she eats 'cause she wants to get back skinny 'cause she's only my height... She just wants her figure back. (Eve, 13)

Another participant follows Turner in referring to bulimia as a 'disease'. Nevertheless, she herself describes partaking in self-induced vomiting for a specific period and does not portray falling victim to the disease in the way Turner, and indeed Bordo, describes. This remained for her a self-schooling choice within the attainment of a particular objective. The insight which is offered in this dialogue into the feelings one experiences when using vomiting as a compensating regimen, illustrates the great danger of leaving this process unexplored.

> I did the throwing up your food thing and it wasn't nice. I did it for about three weeks... The first few times you do it you think 'oh great this is going to work' and after a while you realise all you're thinking about is food and throwing it up. You eat but then you're really, really hungry 'cause your food isn't staying down... For a few days it was the best thing ever and then after a week it just made me feel sick because I'd been sick all the time. It is a sickness, it's not something that's so glamorous but you know models do it. You know pop stars do it and in school I'd say a few are definitely doing it. (Shauna, 16)

Bulimic practices in this instance were almost like aerobics might be, simply something this girl tried out for a while but they failed to grow on her. I cannot prove that she will not revert to vomiting as a compensating practice in the future but for now it was simply a disciplining ritual which she chose school herself in for a short time. It did not, in turn, choose her.

For male interviewees also, bulimic practices appear to be very much a feasible option in achieving a specific goal. Although less normalised among the males in this research, the fact that self-induced vomiting featured at all among

these boys, points to a change in who can be legitimately excluded from this debate. One male refers to a fellow student in his class who, he suspects makes himself sick.

> There's this guy in my class and last year he was quiet chubby and he came back this year and he's thin. From what he said I'm pretty sure he would make himself get sick... I don't think anyone would actually admit to it but I think some guys probably do it. (Enda, 16)

Another male respondent explains how the practice of vomiting is highly normalised among males within certain sports. Again, however, he suggests that it is used for a particular length of time to quickly attain some objective, but he does not indicate any continual dependence on vomiting. The embodied self who is schooled on this process may simply use it for a specific goal.

> My friend does boxing so you have to keep to a particular weight. If he ate too much or wasn't training and his weight went up, they'd make themselves sick for a while until they get it back again. It's like with jockeys too. (Barry, 16)

Even though it is for success within sporting activities, this narrative still points to the blurring of moderate and obsessive forms of compensating. It points to Turner and Bordo's theories of the obsessive being on a continuum with what is normal. Having said that, it also redirects such theories towards the normalisation of bulimic practices. Whether for sport, for peer acceptance, for increased desirability, or to combat the fear of fat, the intention behind vomiting is to control and balance body size and to forestall any threat of total disintegration (Frank, 1991: 55). Although one other male participant does not admit to using vomiting to control body size, he does further illustrate the common practice of purging, when the equilibrium of the body is under threat.

> If I'm out and I'm after drinking loads and I have a feeling in my stomach too, then I get sick to get a lot of the alcohol up 'cause the alcohol is going into your liver, but if it's not digested, or whatever the stomach does to the alcohol then it'll just be sitting in your stomach and

mixing with everything so you just get the alcohol out of you and then you can go back to just being tipsy or whatever way you were before. (Rob, 16)

Vomiting appears to be a practice which many adolescents are not fearful of implementing. The alternative, for them, is far more fearsome. It appears as if Turner and Bordo have been extremely accurate in their respective descriptions of the discipline and the disease being synthesised into one.

In this section I have examined the process of maintaining an embodied equilibrium. Dialogic-deliberation, where individuals act as agents who self-school through deliberation on options and take action in relation to the meaning of such options for their embodied selves, also came to the fore in this section. These interviewees show that while they see the importance of eating and indulging, they are also cognisant of unfavourable consequences and so deliberate on what should be done to avoid them. This section has shown how a balance is maintained through a practice of continuously compensating for excess indulgence, which may entail anything from drinking water, doing exercise, or vomiting. I have suggested that guilty eating and feeling the need to compensate may be less classed and less sexed than previously thought. This section has demonstrated that embodied regulation was neither exclusive to, nor dominated by, the middle-class females involved. Rather, feelings of guilt and the need to counteract this through the use of regimen, worryingly even through vomiting, was described by participants regardless of class or sex. In the next section I examine in a more in depth way the compensating regimen of 'exercise'.

## 8.4 Exercise as a Form of 'Social Induction' into Validating Activities

This section aims to address exercise as a popular practice for schooling and disciplining the body among participating adolescents. The narratives in Chapter Five pointed to the way participants negotiated the type of body, which held a status of 'truth' or 'validity' through dialogic-deliberation. This was generally some form of the 'aesthetic-athletic' body. In this section I am concerned with how they encounter the 'aesthetic-athletic' body through exercise and how they attempt to attain it through exercise.

The dual process of structure and agency that lies at the core of Bourdieu's concepts of 'habitus' and 'field' and Giddens' 'structuration theory' is, once again, vital to this current discussion. On the one hand the above theories state that structures inform agents on how to behave, but on the other hand, it is through agent's participation in such behaviour that structures are maintained. The narratives in this dissertation, to date, emphasise the importance of discourses but, moreover, the importance of the social implementation of discourses. I argue in this section, therefore, that these adolescents are schooled on exercising regimes to achieve valid embodiment both through macro structures and micro interactions. I refer to this form of schooling as 'social induction' within validating activities. I examine how it takes place within the intimate social settings of these youths and in a particularly heightened way within individualised, silent communication in the gym.

The dual process, which I have just described as 'social induction' within body regulation, has been defined by many others as the 'social construction' of the body. For instance, Foucault, Turner, and to some degree Bordo, largely follow

the structural or macro aspect of dualism. Foucault believes in much of his work that structural or dominant discourses invest their knowledge in bodies so as to train them and regulate them and "subjugate them by turning them into objects of knowledge" (Foucault, 1977: 28). In this instance, bodies are regulated in the interests of structural control. Likewise, Turner attempts to understand the problem of the body for society. Here too, "the body of the individual is regulated and organised in the interests of population" (Turner, B, 1996: 67). Hence, for Turner, society must concern itself with problems of the body in order to ensure the stable reproduction of itself. Bordo, like Turner, draws significantly on the work of Foucault to affirm that "our bodies, no less than anything else that is human, are constituted by culture (Bordo, 1993: 142).

Other theorists, however, have adopted the more agentic aspect of dualism. For instance, Goffman holds that it is interaction with others which informs individuals on modes of self-regulation (1963a). Thus, this coincides with participants' referral to being predominantly influenced by the activities of their peers. Agency stems from the fact that it is individuals who are seen to be responsible for schooling bodies through informing patterns of behaviour and not the hierarchical directives of discourses. Nevertheless, individuals are still following social rules and for this reason, commentators (for example, Shilling, 1993, 2003) have placed Goffman's body within the realms of social constructionism also. Frank (1991) draws on the work of Goffman in focusing on the influence of interactive rules of behaviour. However, I am suggesting that whether through dominant discourses or intimate interactions, it is misleading to term this the 'social construction' of the body. All that such influences can ever be seen to do is to offer individuals a form of 'social induction' or 'schooling' on

body validating activities, such as exercise. They can never be seen to construct bodies, for only bodies can construct bodies. This is where Frank goes beyond the others in offering an insight into the corporeal dimension of embodied regulation and this is the focus of the final section of this chapter. For now this section look at the duality of 'social induction' into validating activities, which is necessary before 'embodied construction' takes place.

In open-ended question and answer sheets 242 adolescents were asked to comment on the type of exercise regimes they partake in, if any. Strong patterns emerged in participants' answers which indicates the omnipresent nature of individualised exercise regimes. I am suggesting that due to this prevalence these adolescents are constantly undergoing a process of 'social induction' into exercise activities that are seen to be validating though their constructing of a desirable physique. Females, in first year groups, chiefly describe regulation through participation in team sports, yet they undertake individualised exercise regimen such as sit-ups, walking and running also. By the time females reach transition year, the findings suggest that participation in team sports is overwhelmingly replaced by participation in individualised exercise programmes only. Many of these older females point to the gym as being a fundamental aspect of such regimen. The findings of these open-ended answers clearly point to the importance of body altering activities for females. Their importance is conjured up by an answer put forward by one first year girl who wrote the following:

> I do hockey, swimming, gymnastics, basketball, track running and PE. I walk a lot and I do stretches at night for my gym, which I hope will tone my belly. I am more obsessed with exercise than food. (First year female)

For males in the first year category in schools, something more worrying appears to be occurring. While a small proportion of their young female counterparts refer

to using treadmills and exercise bikes, none of them refer specifically to doing so within gyms. A much more significant number of males in this age group, on the other hand, detail using exercise programmes and weights programmes within the gym. Although they are aware of the dangers, the primary motive is to increase fitness and boost muscle. These appear to be vital for male validation during adolescence. Where males do not or cannot access formal gyms, they appear to create their own fitness sanctuaries. Again, one first year male outlines the importance and extent of such exercise regimes.

> I do weights so I can have large arm muscles. Sometimes before a fitness test I would run up and down the stairs to improve my leg muscles. (First year male)

Not only within schools, among peers, however, but also outside, interviewees describe how they are schooled on practices for achieving embodied validation through receiving a 'social induction' to these from family members.

Interviewees indicate the value of body validating activities among family members as being an encouraging reason for their own engagement in such activities. Hence, 'social induction' is clearly taking place at an interactive (Goffman) level. This is not to suggest that schooling as to what regimes should be implemented is not infiltrating through from the popular exercise patterns within dominant discourses (Foucault), but simply that, according to these narratives, schooling is at its most powerful when it enables agents within their daily routines. Male respondents primarily outline the normalisation of exercise regimes, including fitness and weights training among their older brothers. The type of body which their brothers see as validating clearly resembles the 'athletic' body described by Baudrillard (1998). When one participant, Evan, was asked if people

298

work out to attain a particular body shape, he immediately discusses the regimes of his brother and how this schools Evan himself on body techniques.

> People are very conscious about that. I wanted to start trying them (weights) 'cause my brother does it a lot and I wanted to do it but I was told not to so I'll try it next year. I want to do dumbbells and weights and press-ups… Well I do press-ups and sit-ups but that's it. I'm afraid doing weights now will stunt my growth and I don't want to be small. My brother's seventeen now but he started when he was fifteen or fourteen. He still wouldn't be big compared to most people. He has a good build but he wouldn't be too tall like. (Evan, 13)

Going on the mediated experiences of his brother, this participant proposes that he will be even more conscious of regulating his body when he is older. Moreover, he sees how alteration of the physical self has aided his brother in enhancing his own sense of social agency through his new founded embodied validation.

> It'll be more important when I'm older because I see my brother and he wants to get stronger, like more muscle and he always weighs himself to see what weight he is, every morning… He wants gym membership so he can get stronger. He usen't be very confident but now he is. (Evan, 13)

For another interviewee also it is the alterations which his brother has made to his body, and the consequent change this has made to his sense of validation and self-happiness which is influential in this respondent's own participation in individualised exercise activities.

> One brother weighed eighteen stone and he was really unhappy with himself so he's gone down to sixteen stone now. He did weights and ran. He's happy now and he's keeping it that way 'cause that's healthier. I don't do any weights or press-ups yet. I do sit-ups. I do fifty every second day. (Mark, 12)

Another youth describes how his brother began disciplining his body so that he could improve his social situation also. This knowledge schools this participant in the reality that the manipulation of the body can allow one more comfort and validation in society and help to attain what he calls a 'normal' position.

He (brother) used to be really fat but now he's really skinny. He goes jogging with my sister and then he does rugby in school too. He's so different to what he used to look like. In first year he was pretty fat but now as he's grown up, he's got skinnier and now he's normal... He might have been getting a bit of a slagging and he might have started taking it seriously. He wasn't really fat either, some of it was muscles 'cause he started doing weights in second year even though he wasn't on the rugby team. He just did it 'cause he wanted to get strong. Now he tells me not to do weights while I'm still growing. I probably will do them when I get older. My brother has a mat for stretching at home that I use. He has big bells and small bells and he has a thing that you pull down. (Josh, 13)

Thus far respondents have largely confirmed the work of Goffman, where individuals have used validating exercise activities to overcome problems with their own bodies as a means of increasing their agency within society. I am suggesting that this reality is witnessed by others and subsequently acts as a form of 'social induction' into body techniques. Participants continue to identify induction being at it's most powerful within the regimen of their siblings.

My oldest brother he has just pure upper body strength, he's really strong. He's not as tall as other guys, I'm about as tall as him but he's twenty-five. He's a lot stronger than most people his age but he mightn't be as tall. Then my brother just below him is a lot taller but he probably wouldn't have as much strength. I'd prefer to be like him 'cause he's really strong but it's just that my oldest brother is like a tank. His biceps are really big. He goes to the gym regularly and if he doesn't go to the gym then he'd be pretty moody... I think I'd want to put on a bit more upper body strength, like my biceps and that. The exercise I do just maintains what I have. I try to do fifty push-ups at least every day, sometimes more. If I just have a lot of free time I just start working out. (Rob, 16)

Turner makes a clear connection between adolescents and their families with regard to bodily obsessions (1984, 1992). The connection he makes, however, is that regulatory regimes such as starvation may emerge among young females as a result of fraught relationships with their parents. Within this study the connection, although familial, is very different. Siblings are clearly schooled on the body through the regulatory regimes of one another. Hence, rather than regulation being

an act of rebellion, it is more an act of imitation, or even competition. One young male makes specific reference to the existence of such competition between his brother and his friends, where they compete to see who can control their body through regulatory regimes in the shortest length of time.

> He (brother) doesn't like putting on weight so he goes to the gym to get it back off. He works in an office and he does a competition every so often with a lot of lads to see how much weight they can loose in a certain amount of time. They just try to take off weight and then they weigh themselves on a certain day and whoever has lost the most weight wins. They put on bets with each other and whoever wins the competition wins the money. To lose it he'd go to the gym more often. Sometimes he goes for runs. (Kevin, 13)

Some of the female adolescents who were interviewed during this study also reveal the influence of their brother's exercise regimes over their own practices. This not only points to the way in which families can influence, support or compete with one another within regimes to regulate the body, but that the athletic body as an aesthetic form, has no gender boundaries. Although to varying degrees, it is the flexible, fit and firm physique which is normalised within structural and interactive schooling on embodied validation for both sexes. Regulation, in this instance, is certainly not a rebellion against one's family, as in the case of Bruch (1977) or Turner's (1984, 1992, 1996) starvation, but on the contrary. They offer a forum where family members can either encourage each other or compete with one another. Either way they offer a form of schooling or 'social induction' to one another. One female respondent distinctly outlines that her participation in certain individualised exercise activities is facilitated by her brother's participation within the same activities.

> I do dancing, about five or six hours a week. I used to train at swimming, 'cause I'm a lifeguard, about four hours a week but now I only do one. I do a lot of walking as well. I walk to school and I walk home from school and I walk to work and home... If I was just sitting there I might start doing sit-ups as well. We have weights and all in our

house and I started them. My brother has a boxing thing so I do that too. He's a fitness instructor. My brother and my dad do weights too. (Caoimhe, 16)

Given that Bordo (1993) suggests, the physical shape desired by males and females are distinctly similar and that participants of both sexes deliberated and decided upon certain degrees of aestheticism and athleticism as 'valid' in Chapter Five, their adoption of the same validating exercise activities is of no surprise. One young female states that through their outspoken comments and their own regulatory regimes, both her brother and her mother school her to increase her athleticism and to constantly reject uncontrolled contours. Through their verbal and practical actions, her family provide an unmistakable form of 'social induction' into body regulation and the use of embodied validation to increase social agency.

My brother says 'you should go running with me'… He runs up to the park and runs around it and runs back down 'cause he's real fit. He comes back home at about nine o'clock; he goes running round the flats again, he runs up and down the steps. He wouldn't like to be fat, he's twenty like. None of my brothers would like to me fat 'cause I know for a fact they wouldn't, 'cause you know if they see someone going by and they're fat they say 'oh look at him'. Even my mum does it she's that bad. Say she saw a big girl or a big boy going by she'd say 'if you ever got like that I'd kill you'… Then my other brother was too small and got bullied and he wants to be bigger. His friends in the gym and he's getting bigger and now he (brother) wants to join the gym. Because my older brothers is in the gym and he's big. Muscles just mean that you're afraid of him. (Eve, 13)

Her brother resolves the problem of being dominated by others through the creation of a more muscular and fit physical frame. This new strength is communicated to others through daily interaction and helps to warn off situations of uncontrollable domination in the future. Another female interviewee also points to the fact that discourses of body regulation are at their strongest when they reach the habitual setting of family practices.

My brother is not fat but he used to be and my mother got him out walking and jogging. He goes jogging with me, once a week for an

302

hour. I do a half hour walk each day and sit-ups and stretches. (Shauna, 16)

Female interviewees continue to refer to a process of 'social induction' into body techniques within the home. Furthermore, they point to relationships with their mothers which are much different to those described by theorists in the past.

Turner (1984, 1992) draws on the work of Bruch (1977), to suggest that it is hierarchical relationships between mother and daughter, which can lead to an adolescent daughter using body regulation as a vehicle for rebellion and freedom. In this study, however, teenage girls' relationships with their mothers appear to be much more friendship based. Where body regulation through exercising takes place, it may be seen as a binding force between mother and daughter. They school each other on types of validating activities in their shared pursuit of embodied validation.

> I'd do that in my house every night, you know get out of the bath and do a few sit-ups. Like all the time, if I was in the house with my mam we'd do sit-ups together. I love doing exercises and I do have my little sister doing them now. She's only ten. I guess my mam influences me the way that she is. Yeah 'cause she does be messing and she'd say 'will you hold my feet and I'll do a few exercises, sit-ups?' And then I'd 'you hold my feet now and I'll do a few.' I think it's good and it doesn't take long 'cause you feel much better in yourself when you do exercise. (Lynn, 16)

Therefore, although exercising is clearly an individualised activity with individual goals, this mother and daughter, help to accommodate the fulfilment of such goals through their interactive practices. In making this participant 'feel much better in herself', exercises clearly help her to feel more of a sense of embodied validation, thus enhancing her self-confidence. In none of these narratives is the trim and toned body implemented simply because it is popular in external discourses, but rather, participants choose to incorporate it into their lives because its implementation increases their power as agents. Another young female also speaks

303

of how her mother's regulating regimes act as a form of schooling and even surveillance over what she feels she should be doing herself.

> When she (mother) put on weight she said 'I'll reduce food and keep fit'. Then I think I have to loose weight. I even tried a diet once but that food was horrible. I do sit-ups on the tummy everyday, like fifty. I like to run, but it's kind of cold. I play on the badminton team to work on my arms. (Mary, 13)

Being slim and defined is obviously extremely important to this youth as it is to her mother. Another female points to how the body toning regimes of her mother offer her a form of 'social induction' into the need to regulate the body. Once again however, they encourage each other on their mutual quest for validation.

> When she's talking about weight I'd say 'I'm fat as well' and she'd say 'no you're not'... She already had the slender tone belt that she bought about two years ago before she went on holidays and she found that really good but since the winter came she didn't bother with it anymore and the belly was back so she bought the shorts the other day. Because of her bad back she can't do as much exercise as I do but we kind of encourage each other. (Gillian: 16)

It is certainly arguable from the data presented above that the 'aesthetic-athletic' body has attained a position of power among both males and females, young and old.

According to the narratives of participants 'social induction' and 'embodied construction' (which I return to in the next section) among adolescents takes place to a large degree within the gym. Here 'social induction' and 'embodied construction' are combined in a most influential and intensive way. Where formal gyms are not accessed, youths in this study seem to create their own fitness-orientated settings. These are settings in which the journey towards body alteration assumes an exclusive position. Manipulating the physical self within the gym can certainly be described as an individualised activity of construction. In addition, 'social induction' into the importance of focus, determination and 'proof' for

304

embodied validation can be seen to be at a particular high within participants' descriptions of the gym.

> There's no real atmosphere in the gym. No one's really laughing and going around, it's all just everyone keeping to themselves, nice and quiet and focused. A few people would be talking, but they wouldn't be talking loud. There's music in the background and that would be about it. (Enda, 16)

Although geographically separated, another describes an almost identical setting.

> No one really talks to each other, you just go and do your own thing. There's people there and they want to get in shape so they're just concentrating on that. They don't want to stop and start talking, they just want to keep on going at it. (Cian, 16)

For Crossley (2004) individuals who exercise together may form friendships and relaxed interactions. However, according to Sassatelli "exercise relies on the capacity of each client to isolate from others and to focus on a personal sequence of movements." (2000: 232). Her description is much more indicative of that given by participants in this investigation. It is arguable that there is little verbal interaction in the gym, yet there is much bodily interaction. Just as the regulatory regimes of peers and family members offer adolescents a form of schooling or 'social induction' into body techniques, so too do the strangers they meet within the gym. Observation of one another in this setting acts as a definite form of horizontal surveillance. It may well be dominant discourses of the 'aesthetic-athletic' body and its status outside the gym which prompts individuals to enter in the first place. However, once inside the gym, it is not posters of dominant ideal discourses on walls which schools on validating activities, as would be in line with Foucauldian thinking, but gym goers school each other through the symbolic interaction that takes place between their bodies. On the one hand, the gym is highly social in that bodies are continuously educating other bodies on body validating techniques and displaying tangible proof of such techniques. On the

305

other hand, it is highly individualised in that gym goers are reflexively bound to the task for which they have come; the construction of the toned body. "The disciplined body may be among others, but it is not *with* them" (Frank, 1991:55). One participant illustrates this complexity.

> There's not a lot of people talking. There's just music playing. Most people just keep to themselves... Everyone's taking it seriously and some people might listen to music and others watch TV and when I go to the university gym there's a TV at each treadmill. When I was there last week there was a girl walking and when I looked at her treadmill she was walking for an hour and ten minutes just watching the TV. Some people are just freaks for fitness. You get the one's who are just walking and walking and walking and walking. Then you see guys pushing the weights. Huge guys pushing huge weights and they're just doing it to get a big physique. You see them all 'cause there's lots of mirrors around. Around the whole place there's a lota, lota mirrors. There's no posters or anything which I thought you would see, of body-builders and advertising, but it's not there at all. (Andy, 16)

From this narrative it is clear that individuals within this setting rely much more on bodily communication ('unfocused interaction') than verbal communication ('focused interaction') (Giddens, 1991)). The projection of a body, which has achieved the goals of athleticism to acceptable degrees, offers visual and tangible proof of the fruits of individualised labouring. This body is focused and determined, with no time for, or interest in, verbal conversation. This body says all it needs to through the embodied capital it projects and its regimen educates others on what they should do to achieve embodied validation also. According to one interviewee the regimes of the fit and firm body have the power to make other gym goers feel guilty if they falter within their pursuit for validation.

> Nobody talks. You see women going around in twos but a lot of people don't even talk in the changing rooms. It's like they're saying 'I'm here to achieve a goal and I'm going to get it'. It's very intense. People are trying to do so much to be fit and toned...It's really intense. You see people on the bikes or the strider and they're so determined looking and they're sweating. There'd be people there practically all night and they'd be looking at you and you're thinking 'that's all I'm able to do'. There are people who would spend three hours up there. They'd lift

306

weights, go on the treadmill, do the bike, steps, go down for a swim, go into the Jacuzzi and then the steam room afterwards, like the sauna. It's like a religion; they think they have to do it. (Gillian, 16)

It may be asserted that 'social induction' into body forms and shapes, which takes place through powerful discourses and through social interaction outside the gym, is further communicated to youths within the gym. This last participant even goes so far as to say that exercise regimes have become like a religion for some. Both this interviewee and others have used the phrase 'have to do it'. This points to how intrinsic validating exercising activities are to the pursuit of embodied validation.

In this section I have looked that the influence of the exercise regimes used within adolescents' social contexts on their own validating activities. I have suggested that the 'aesthetic-athletic' body confirms its validating capacity, through the increased agency which accompanies this 'valid' form. Narratives have pointed to the gym as a setting where youths are schooled on the validating practices that may be implemented to construct the 'aesthetic-athletic' body. Within the gym, surrounding mirrors facilitate surveillance of the accomplishments of other bodies and of the tangible labouring of one's own body. Furthermore, fitness machines, apparatuses and equipment provide numerical proof of validating efforts. Throughout this section I have referred to how youths are schooled on body regulation, as 'social induction' within validating activities. While this may have fallen under the umbrella of the 'social construction' of the body in the past, I believe this to be distinctly misleading and hugely neglectful of the ultimate 'embodied construction' of the body.

307

## 8.5 Embodied Construction and Embodied Validation

This section focuses on exercising activities which aim to construct the body in some way. In order to explain truly 'embodied' validation, I stress how essential it is to view the mind and body as co-dependent in the construction of the body. I also examine how exercise offers embodied validation in that it not only impacts back on the body, but also on the mind. Therefore, it is not simply bodily validation, but 'embodied validation'.

In Section 8.4, I suggested that the notion of the 'social construction' of the body is deceptive and neglectful of the agentic and particularly, the corporeal construction of the body. Frank elevates that corporeal dimension of bodily construction when he contends that "bodies alone have '*tasks*'." Social systems only provide the context in which tasks are defined (1991: 48). Crossley further attempts to emphasise the corporeal in his work (2001, 2004, 2005). For Shilling, a return of the sociology of the body to the corporeal is not before time (2003). Through his 'reflexive body techniques' Crossley gives power to the body to act back upon itself, in order to modify itself. He acknowledges that such techniques are directed by the mind and, therefore, encompasses the co-dependence of mind and body within 'embodiment'. For instance, the mind schools the body on what tasks of exercising to carry out. Through such exercise the body works back upon itself to improve tone and athleticism. The process of 'continuously compensating' which was addressed earlier in this chapter, results in a body which is consistent in terms of body weight. Compensating through drinking large amounts of water, introducing short periods of food restriction or even vomiting, forms a body that communicates to others consistency and order. The athletic body, however, has the

power to communicate more than mere consistency, as it is concerned with body shape as well as weight. The athletic body exhibits its labouring through definition and exhibits its control through alteration. Even more than proving it can fulfil acceptable discourses (Foucault and Turner) and proving it can overcome the interactive problems it may encounter (Goffman and Frank), the athletic body offers a tangible validation of worth. Through visual proof that the mind can instruct the body to carry out certain tasks and succeed within them, 'embodied construction' executes physical validation in a most powerful sense. For many participants, bodily construction through exercise regimes, such as sit-ups, is essential because of the visual proof of physical validation it offers, through being toned.

> I do about thirty sit-ups a day because I want a flat stomach and they just work their way into your routine. (Shauna, 16)

For one male it is all about tangible proof also.

> I do sit-ups and push-ups and crunches to be toned. (Eoin, 13)

Others more strongly refer to exercises proving the validation of the body.

> I think the stomach and the legs are the most important for a girl... They do sit-ups and press-ups to keep their stomach toned and keep their legs a nice shape. That's what I do anyway and it's great when you see it working. (Shannon, 14)

For another the type of tangible proof of physical change that Crossley refers to, is even more apparent.

> If I didn't do them (sit-ups) I wouldn't feel right, like I have to do them. I feel better with myself if I do them 'cause I think my stomach is going down. I'm after doing my exercises. It makes you feel better in a way if you see that it's flattening. (Anna, 15)

Many theorists have suggested that if such self-alteration emerges out of a reaction to social discourses and social interaction, then it is sufficient to place it under the umbrella of 'social constructionism'. It is obvious from the data above, however,

309

that whether the toned body is a reaction to discourse or interaction, the toned body is ultimately the creation of the body itself, albeit instructed by the mind.

The need for tangible and numerical proof of the body's achievements is firstly driven by the mind, but essentially accomplished by the body. The physical body and its abilities are vitally important for ensuring achievements, yet it is the job of the individual mind to keep the body schooled on increasing its abilities. The notion of going past the body's natural limits which features so strongly in Bordo's work with regard to dieting is more prevalent in relation to exercising among these youths. I would suggest that this is less about making the body a machine (Turner, 1992, 1996; Sassatelli, 2000) and more about schooling the body on how to act out its competencies and capabilities on machines (Crossley, 2004). Crossley indicates how the body progresses in its own know-how to attain mastery over machines. However, he does not expand on the personal effects of this mastery. I would argue that bodies prove their abilities through machines, which offer numerical and tangible proof of their achievements. Crossley paints an embodied picture of exercise, in that a co-dependent mind and body carries out such tasks. However, with regard to the impact of exercising, Crossley accounts for how this acting back upon the body via the machine affects the body through physical validation, but offers no indication of how this impacts upon the mind through the psychological validation of self-achievements. These narratives suggest that it is only through recognising 'physical validation' and 'physiological validation' that we can understand the complexities in attaining 'embodied validation'.

Pushing the body to attain embodied validation was commonplace among these youths. When Bordo (1993) and Grogan (1999) provide detailed accounts of individuals who push their bodies in similar ways to these participants they

envelope such narratives within the context of anorexia, obsessive body-building, or compulsive exercising. None of the respondents in this investigation, however, describe themselves as having any of the above conditions. This may mean that many of these interviewees have undetected obsessive disorder. More convincingly, however, it may refer to the reality that pushing the body to its utter limits it not exclusively a practice for the disordered but, rather, reflects the notion of a 'continuum' which is put forward Turner (1984, 1992, 1996) and Bordo (1993). One must push boundaries to attain goals and one must attain goals in order to experience the exhilaration of self-achievement. When many of these youths exercise, therefore, it appears that it is much less about relaxation and enjoyment, than about pushing numbers, pushing times, pushing heights, pushing weights; constantly pushing the body. In order to remain focused within such tasks a reflexive, motivated and agentic self is evidently required. It is far from the earlier work of Foucault and his prisoners, whose self-regulation became so routinised that the self became decentred from a body that was now responsible for policing itself (1977). While Foucault may be criticised for focusing on a mindless body and Giddens for focusing on a bodyless mind (1991), the co-dependence of the two are essential here. According to the experiences conveyed by participants, the body never reaches a point where it begins to school and police itself. Mind and body are pushed to achieve tangible and numerical goals, which impact back both in terms of physical validation and psychological validation.

A quarter of interviewees describe how embodied construction impacts back upon psychological validation, through the body's achievements and accomplishments. For one male there is no sense of accomplishment without individualised exercise practices.

311

> You just feel better about yourself when you feel like you've worked out. If you sit there all day and do nothing there's no sense of accomplishment. (Cian, 16)

Another interviewee does not refer to a formal gym but, all the same, reflects on the meaning of setting goals, achieving goals, pushing goals further and the sense of self-achievement that this process brings.

> I'd lie on my bed when I'm watching TV and I'd be just doing sit-ups and each day I'd probably do more of them. I might do fifty one day and seventy-five the next and I'd increase it 'cause if you start low you become fit and you feel good about yourself. If you're just lazing on the couch all the time you don't feel that nice and you have to keep at them. If I was tired after thirty I'd maybe take a little rest but then I'd go back and do the next twenty. You like to aim your target at whatever number and get that far. You feel good about yourself if you do. (Shannon, 14)

Other participants describe the journey to self-achievement through control of the body and do so with data so detailed that it would be unjustifiable and unwise to overly fragment their narratives. For one such participant this process takes place primarily within the gym where the abilities of the body are pushed against the ferocity of the machine. Self-achievement comes through the body's capacity to overcome its own limits. This female firstly describes her regimen on the machine.

> I'm on the treadmill and there's loads of buttons and you can press each one. Really it's just as fast as I can go. I'd get on it and you know the way it goes real fast, I'd try to keep up with it as fast as I can go. Even if I got tired I'd go and do something else but I'd always come back to the walking thing. I think that's the best one you can do and your legs start getting real tired but I just keep on going like I time it and I say 'no I have to do it' and you do feel like just collapsing. I always do that. (Lynn, 16)

The way that the mind schools the body is clear in this narrative. It is not the body that regulates itself but it is instructed by the intentions of the mind that it 'has to do it'. Once the body cooperates within such tasks it proves that it can overcome any tiredness or exhaustion. When asked what she is aiming for in this process, this

participant indicates that self-achievement comes through the creation of an athletic body. However, she also points out that there is a further complexity at play than resolving problems of the body. It is fundamentally about psychological validation through accomplishing physical goals.

> I just really want to keep myself fit, it's not even to loose weight. Well I would kind of wish I could loose a bit of weight but I don't really think I'm fat. I like the size I am. I just really want to keep myself fit... If I don't do exercises I'd feel like I was getting lazy and I'd be real disappointed. When you do exercise those pains that you get from exercising just go away 'cause you're getting used to it and that just makes you feel great about yourself and what you can do. (Lynn, 16)

Hence, this young female is concerned with proving that she can achieve the bodily goals she has set for herself. It may be suggested that at these moments, within the gym, it is not so much about proving to celebrities their bodies can be bettered, or proving to friends that their bodies can be outshone, but about proving to the self that you have control over being who you aspire to be. Another interviewee also describes in detail the value of 'bodily construction' within the gym for evoking a sense of self-achievement in both mind and body. Again, self-achievement, or in this instance aptly described as 'self-pride', comes from proving to oneself that the body can overcome its own "lacking" (Frank, 1991).

> I keep on going 'til I can't go anymore. I just watch TV while I'm doing it and just keep running. I don't know it's just weird I just get energy or something. I thought about that before, I just don't know what it is. I know I just want to maintain my shape and it's something I need to do as well. There are days that I'm just absolutely wrecked coming in from school but I still manage to make it down some nights even when I am tired. (Barry, 16)

This participant speaks of the 'need' to go to the gym. Perhaps this need is fulfilled through the fact that "regularised control of the body is a fundamental means whereby a biography of self-identity is maintained" (Giddens, 1991: 58). The 'need' for this interviewee certainly appears to be significantly related to the reality

that his body can prove its physical validation via machines. Crossley points to the fact that proof of the body's accomplishments is clearly displayed on the machine, but he does not account for how each goal set and overcome enhances an individual's right to feel psychological, as well as physical, 'self-pride'.

> I set myself a goal and then I make a higher goal for myself, running or something. It makes me feel good about myself that I'm doing it and not just lazing around. And even if you are tired, your muscles would be aching but you'd have the energy to do it... I'd be tired one minute and then the next I'd have lots of energy so I'm not really pushing myself but I will just keep going until I'm absolutely wrecked. When I first went I had small goals and I'd be able to do them no bother but I'd just stop then. I wouldn't say 'I'll keep going for just another ten minutes' but now if I'm not too tired I'll just really push myself 'cause it makes me feel I've done something and I'm proud of myself that I actually did it. (Barry, 16)

There is an audible tone of the 'embodied validation' which emerges out of 'embodied construction' for this participant.

Another respondent also provides a deeply comprehensive account of the sense of self-achievement one feels within the gym when the successes of the body are offered in tangible numerical form. The magnitude of self-accomplishments through an accumulation of numbers is at the heart of this narrative, driving this participant to push and push the body, even to the point where the body is no longer cooperative. The co-dependency of mind and body within 'embodied construction' is made particularly prominent by this interviewee. She vividly describes the thoughts of the schooling mind and the physically responsive body on her last trip to the gym.

> I got up on the treadmill and I said 'I'll do a hundred' and I ended up burning a hundred and fifty calories because every time I got to the next ten I was thinking 'keep going now, keep going'. I felt I had to keep going until I eventually got a stitch and had to stop. My friend was on the one beside me and she was running and running and running and I was walking really fast but she only burnt half the amount of calories I did. Basically I was thinking if I burn more I'll loose more weight and I want to be toned. I don't want big flabby thighs. I just wanted to keep

going, burn another ten, another ten and then just five more but eventually just had to stop because I couldn't to anymore. My body had to tell me to stop. I had to get a stitch. So my body just had to say 'listen Gillian stop', like that's what I was doing by getting a stitch. I then had to tell myself 'look you're dying with a stitch you have to stop' but I probably would have kept going and kept going until I did get a stitch in the end. Then my friend stayed on for another few minutes because she was like 'no I have to get to a hundred, I have to get to a hundred'. She felt also that she had to get higher and higher. (Gillian, 16)

The level of insight this participant offers into the instructions of the mind and the active tasks of the body within 'embodied construction' is astounding. The need for a sense of self-achievement and tangible proof of this is so enormous that every confirmation warrants a superior confirmation. The eventual command of the body to 'stop' provides a reminder of the complexity of embodied validation that the body's ultimate responsibility for carrying out tasks (Frank, 1991; Crossley, 2001, 2004, 2005). This stoppage, however, is only momentary, because as in the case of Lynn and Barry already addressed, overcoming aches and pains can be objectives in themselves, providing further proof of self-accomplishments. One may argue that overcoming aches and pains offers psychological validation through the physical validation, which comes from a numerical proof of control.

I usually feel so good when I come out of the class. It's like 'yahoo'. I've burnt a couple of calories and you feel like you really achieved something, you can even see the calories on the screen. Then you come home and you're wrecked. The first couple of times I went to the class I was so stiff the next day and for a few days but you get used to it and your body begins to work better for you. You feel good when you come out, you feel like you've lost a bit of weight and burned calories. It's good because you're getting exercise and being athletic but I can't see why you can't get as much enjoyment out of walking the dog. When I was on the treadmill I was thinking that I should be walking Cindy instead of walking on the treadmill. I felt kind of guilty but if I went walking the dog I wouldn't feel that I had achieved anything because you wouldn't know how many calories you'd burnt. That's really important 'cause it's in front of you all the time on the treadmill and all of a sudden that's all you're looking at. You're just looking at the numbers going up and you're saying 'keep going'. (Gillian, 16)

315

Hence, even though the body can stiffen and stitch, this participant holds that these are only temporary aches until the body familiarises itself with such regulation and begins to 'work with her'. For another interviewee instructing the body within regimes of athleticism and the sense of achievement which follows gives rise to an occasion where one can truly self-congratulate. Much like the self-pride outlined earlier, increasing the body's athletic abilities brings about a psychological 'buzz' characterised by self-worthiness for this participant. The buzz of control is produced through the tangible feeling of one's muscles changing and this itself eases any existing tensions, according to this youth's experiences.

> It's like if you work your muscles you kind of get this buzz afterwards like you're really relaxed. You're not tense 'cause you feel you've done something and you know it 'cause you feel you're muscles relaxing. You can say to yourself 'that was good'. (Rob, 16)

As with the body overcoming its own aches, this change in the feeling of one's own muscles, clearly indicates the role of the corporeal in 'embodied construction'. Schooled by a constantly 'centred' mind, this young man goes on to describe the exhilaration of self-achievement through the regimes of the body. In this instance, the ability to realise one's own goals and control one's own accomplishments, comes through jumping higher heights, as well as accumulating higher numbers. It is this narrative which probably indicates most powerfully that bodily achievements not only impact back upon the body. According to this participant they have the power to reach much further than this, back into the individual psyche and assume a role which judges the true worth and 'good' of the entire individual.

> I'd just do push-ups and these things that tense up all the muscles along your abs. You lie on your toes and your elbows and I'd do that for five minutes and change over every minute to one side and then the other side and then both arms again. Even if I was tired I'd keep going 'cause if you set a goal for yourself and not accomplish it then

316

you'll feel terrible. You think 'I cant accomplish the things I set out to do, even the small things, giving an extra minute isn't going to make that much difference to me'. If you want to do a twenty minute jog or something and you're after running for nineteen and then with one minute to go if you don't do the extra minute then you've wasted nineteen minutes and you're going to have to do it again another day. It's like with jumping (high jump) it makes you feel like you're accomplishing something. Like if you set a goal for yourself and say 'I want to do the highest one' and you go for it, it makes you feel really good. But if you kind of say you don't want to do the highest one and then rather than working at it you let the opportunity pass you by, if you don't take every opportunity, you can feel like you haven't accomplished what you set out to do and you feel like you're not as good a person, not in personality, but that you can't stick to your own word to yourself. (Rob, 16)

Success within exercise regimes can offer a definite predictability (Giddens 1991: 56-58, Frank 1991: 55). What is more, this is a predictability which the body itself, instructed by the mind, is responsible for constructing. The sheer endurance participants have detailed through such rich and meaningful narratives, provide an insight into the vital importance of embodied validation for both the bodies and the minds of these youths.

In this section I have examined 'embodied construction' through exercise as a means of attaining embodied validation. Exercise emerges out of a co-dependence between the mind and body. Hence, I have argued that exercise, not only acts back upon the body to offer physical validation but I have shown how participants describe this acting back upon their mind and their sense of psychological validation also. Exercise regimes provide proof of validation through overcoming particular numbers and lifting particular weights and constructing a tangible proof of such achievements. Respondents indicate the magnitude of physical activities for embodied validation, when they state that because of exercise: ' I feel better about myself' (Cian); 'I feel good about myself' (Shannon); 'I can feel great about myself' (Lynn); 'I'm proud of myself' (Barry);

'I feel like I've really achieved something' (Gillian); and 'I can stick to my own word to myself' (Rob). In these statements there exists a distinctive type of positive reinforcement and holistically 'embodied validation' for these adolescents through 'embodied construction'.

## 8.6 Conclusion

During this chapter I have examined the quest for embodied validation through strategies of compensation and construction. These participants suggest that it is valid and natural to want to eat. Through their description of responsibility for their own eating and eating among friends, they point to the importance of eating for cultural intermediation (Bourdieu, 1984). However, they have equally indicated that projection of a balanced. controlled body for a cultural intermediary is important. Those who feel that they are failing in their ability to balance what the body consumes, with what the body communicates, describe feelings of guilty eating. While theorists such as Turner and Bordo, explore the prevalence of guilty eating and restrictive eating as a result, among middle-class girls, I have found no such classed or sexed distinctions. Moreover, almost all participants referred to the need to compensate and to maintain the body's equilibrium. Their indulging and compensating cycles resemble Bordo's description of bulimic behaviour. Some participants even go so far as to describe actual bulimic practices being commonplace in their social contexts. This allows adolescents to indulge and experience the excitement of such indulgence, but to avoid any undesirable consequences for the body. The body remains consistent.

In this chapter, I have also examined exercise as a regulating strategy which allows the body to be 'constructed' as well as consistent. Within the sociology of the body, the regulation, manipulation and construction of the body, has largely fallen into the realm of the 'social construction' of the body. In this chapter I have proposed an alternative to this to be 'social induction' within body activities. Participants discussed the use of exercise regimes among their peers, siblings and parents and suggested how this schools them on certain validating activities and encourages them to partake in such validating activities. Therefore, I have described exercise as a form of 'social induction' into validating activities. Respondents also described this type of induction taking place in a heightened way within the gym. Here, mirrors facilitate observation of validating activities, where youths can negotiate how to attain physical validation.

However, I have proposed that whether the aestheticism and athleticism of the 'worked out' body is communicated through dominant discourses outside the gym or through silent interaction within the gym, it is misleading to call this the 'social construction' of the body.

> "Bodily domination is never imposed by some abstract societal
> Other; only bodies can do things to other bodies. Most often, what
> is done depends on what bodies do to themselves." (Frank, 1991:56)

In this chapter I have shown how it is an active co-dependence between mind and body that is involved in 'embodied construction'. Finally, through the detailed narratives provided by participants, I have examined how embodied construction leads to embodied validation. Constructing actions impacts back upon the body to modify the body as Crossley states (2001, 2004, 2005). However, this would only offer physical validation. Alternatively, the data suggests that construction also brings with it physiological validation. It is the thrill and accomplishment which

319

comes from tangible and numerical proof of the body's pursuits that turns the pursuit of embodied validation, into the attainment of embodied validation.

# Conclusion

This study makes a significant contribution to current theoretical understandings of adolescence as an embodied experience. The aim of this research was to embark upon a journey which would align actual adolescent feelings and opinions with existing theoretical understandings. This approach has given the youths involved a voice in how they should be understood within an all too rare interlinking of the sociology of the body and the sociology of childhood.

I began this study by looking at the impact of consumer culture on teenagers' perceptions of who they are and who they aspire to be. However, I questioned an emphasis within theories of consumerism which view adolescents as being passively schooled on ideal images. Findings from respondents suggest that adolescents' relationship with consumer culture should be understood to occur within the type of dualistic framework which is at the core of Bourdieu's concept of habitus and Giddens' structuration theory. On the basis of this research I would propose that ideal discourses within consumer culture certainly do school adolescents on the body, but it is only through adolescents' engagement with such schooling and their appropriation of such images, that the images are validated. I have referred to this as the 'validation of idealism' which occurs both through participation within macro education and micro implementation. Consumerism and advertising sell certain body images, such as that which I have termed the 'aesthetic-athletic' body, as a 'valid' form of embodiment. This body form only becomes truly powerful, however, when agents choose to activate it, and thus validate it, in their everyday interactions.

Foucault has made many invaluable contributions to our comprehension of the body within sociology. Foucault's notion of 'bio-power' certainly resembles the type of power consumer culture holds in the lives of youths. It is a powerful authority that schools on truth by attaching a status of 'truth' (Foucault: 1980) to a particular body discourse, conveying it as 'valid' because of its proposed benefits for individuals and collective populations. Consumer culture can also be seen to use strategies of panoptic surveillance by virtue of its abounding presence in these teenagers' lives. Respondents describe how they feel pressurised to implement regimes that will lead to supposed 'true' or 'valid' embodiment.

However, what this study adds to Foucault's work is a detailed agentic narrative that underlines the journey from discourse to practice. These youths are not simply schooled on discourses of truth from external structures and implement them without question. This occurs much more via a process of what I call 'dialogic-deliberation', which is complimentary to Foucault's concept of bio-power. With regard to bio-power it is assumed that large volumes of people follow particular powerful discourses. It is not my intention to contradict this. The number of participants who point to the lean and toned body as being ideal would make such a contradiction impossible. However, bio-power is primarily concerned with macro processes, presuming individuals simply follow along with little procedural reflexivity. Bio-power ignores "the voices that emanate from bodies themselves." (Gill, Henwood and McLean, 2005: 40-41). It points towards an all-encapsulating theory of embodiment, where the body as very individually meaningful and uniquely experienced is "left untheorized" (Budgeon, 2003: 42). Bio-power embraces a 'one size fits all' explanation of the body, which Crossley, believes to be deeply problematic in its failure to recognise embodied diversity (2005: 15).

Dialogic-deliberation focuses on the active negotiation and internalisation of discourse on a micro level. How much of adolescents' schooling on discourses is accepted as true and how much is deemed to be false, and how much of this falseness is acknowledged within the framework of self-comparisons. These are issues which are constantly being negotiated by the individually embodied youths partaking in this research. Dialogic-deliberation offers a mechanism whereby participants talk themselves through what is to be taken as true and what to be subjugated as false.

Due to the fact that Foucault focuses on bio-power as an all-inclusive or an all-exclusive force, he neglects the dialogue of negotiation with others in the same way as he ignores its occurrence with the self. For instance, Foucault (1977) is of the opinion that with the growth of panoptic surveillance within prisons in the nineteenth century, prisoners began policing their own bodies to act in accordance with the discourses or rules of the prison, rather than being physically policed and punished by the prison guards. This is an extremely powerful model of surveillance over a wide space. Nonetheless, Foucault never addresses the mindset of the prisoners who did not accept all of the rules, nor did they reject all of the rules. It is likely that these may have constantly negotiated with themselves, which rules were to be taken as true for their own personal survival. It is also likely that prisoners would have spoken with each other about the type of rules which were being imposed and which they should follow. Surely prisoners were also schooled by the practices of other prisoners and negotiated their own practices in light of this. By the same token, these adolescents can be seen to partake in a process of dialogic-deliberation with the self and also with others in relation to how prevailing discourses should be appropriated and how much of these discourses one should

appropriate. What is appropriated appears to be more dependent on the gaze of their peers than authoritarian figures. Narratives point to the gestures, glances and discussions aimed at the body by peers as being the most powerful form of schooling they receive on the body and highly influential when deliberating upon their own embodied practices. This means that policing of the body is much more horizontal than the type of vertical surveillance Foucault refers to.

This research has also found that this horizontal policing of the body takes place in very gendered forms of dialogic-deliberation. The females involved describe how they are schooled on the body within horizontal surveillance through continuous verbal and visual deliberation on the body. The males, on the other hand, describe being schooled through horizontal surveillance which displays strong elements of pre-panoptic surveillance. Policing for males occurs largely through the type of brute-force which Foucault described in prisons prior to the introduction of the panopticon. The males police levels of embodied validation less through verbal deliberation on what is acceptable and more through proof of embodied validation within shows of strength. Where policing takes place, through verbal deliberation, this is more focused on types of embodiment that are unacceptable.

This investigation has found that if schooling on types of valid embodiment occurs within a peer context, then so too does the actual assignment of embodied validation. Participants in this investigation suggest that youths with 'valid' bodies attain places within the most validated activities, which further enhances their embodied validation. This study shows a hierarchy of activities which shed light on the Irish context. Foley (cited in Connell, 2005a) presents such a hierarchical model in an American context, while Swain (2003) presents a British model. This

model presented by Irish adolescents shows an expected gravitation towards GAA sports as well as sports like soccer and rugby. However, like the other studies this displays a distinctive identification of highly physical team sports as being the most prestigious, particularly among young males.

This research provides an insight into the complexity of 'display' for these males. All of the adolescents involved appear to be much like Bourdieu's 'new petite bourgeoisie', acting as cultural intermediaries for popular forms of cultural capital (1984). However, these youths show quite a complex relationship with cultural capital, especially the males involved. Among these males there is a definite sense of the need to neutralise their schooling in one form of cultural capital with another, in order to be a successful intermediary. Therefore, while Bourdieu presents three forms of cultural capital, - embodied, institutional and objectified (1984), - this study adds to this the notion that one form of capital has the ability to neutralise another and that this is necessary for the successful intermediary. What this study also adds is the way embodied capital is identified as the main form of capital which participants use to attain success and popularity, especially if their embodied capital has been validated through acceptance onto the most prestigious team sports. Many of these youths are being schooled by teachers, coaches and their fellow peers, to believe that those who have valid physical ability to succeed on prestigious teams receive superior accolades, allowances, appreciation and acknowledgement.

Bourdieu provides little insight into the lengths that individuals will go to in order to have their embodied capital appreciated and validated. This research provides an in-depth account of the extreme efforts youths will make for embodied validation within sporting activities and groups. It also conveys the pressure on

adolescents to maintain this in order to retain their places, making the pursuit of embodied validation within sport a most consuming and arduous task.

Worryingly it is not only places on teams which appear to be so highly dependent on embodied capital, but also places within adolescent relationships. Adolescents in this investigation point to a dependence on embodied capital for acceptance within and the maintenance of romantic relationships. They also believe that this embodied dependence is stronger in Ireland than in other countries they have visited, particularly because of a prevalence of single-sex schooling. They describe communication that revolves around what I have termed 'impressive interaction'. This refers to a focus on embodied appearance rather than on building friendships. The manner in which these relationships are reliant on what they can offer for fleeting periods resembles Giddens' (1991) notion of the 'pure relationship' and Sennets (1994) analogy of modern relationships with an airport departure lounge. This study adds an embodied dimension to these theoretical concepts. While Giddens proposes that relationships can break down when one party becomes more concerned with their own individualised betterment, this research points to a reverse scenario involving the body. In this instance, relationships can break down when not enough attention is paid to individualised bettering of the body or dedication to embodied validation.

This research offers much insight into the narratives of those youths who are seen to have 'invalid' bodies. It confirms the continued existence of Goffman's (1963b) notion of 'stigmatisation', even to the point that I refer to the 'normalisation of stigmatisation' as an inevitable part of one's social schooling. I also add to this issues of 'intent' and 'power'. It is clear that the type of stigmatisation which Goffman noted, remains in existence among the adolescents

involved. This is where physical flaws are given some kind of a status of 'abnormality'. Goffman appears to be quite right in his description of this label as 'embodied' for it infers negativity about the entire individual and not simply about their physical appearance. This is where Monaghan (2005) suggests that the 'fat' is received as if it were a four-letter word. Indeed, participants agree that 'fat' is interpreted as an abusive term that labels the entire embodied individual, both personality and physicality. In addition, if one youth purposefully calls another youth 'fat' then there is an obvious element of 'intent' involved. It may also be argued that this intent is aimed at imposing 'power' structures. For instance, Goffman holds that when normals stigmatise they mean no harm and if they do it is because they know no better (1963b: 141). However, these participants point to a normalisation of stigmatisation, whereby they have all been schooled on stigmatisation through experience of it and are well aware of its impact. This implies that, on the whole they do know better, so when stigmatisation occurs it is less as a result of an accident or of ignorance and perhaps more about intentional subordination. Stigmatising youths do not appear to want to be educated on the stigmas of others and go on to accept them, as Goffman proposes (1963b: 143). As long as certain youths assign 'embodied invalidation' to some, they are advocating themselves as worthy of embodied validation or at least detracting from the possibility of invalidation. This can be seen to be essentially about the intentional subordination of some through schooling them and other onlookers on their perceived inadequacies, as a means of increasing one's own proximity to embodied validation.

This research also provides an invaluable insight into the strategies which are employed by those who are deemed to have 'invalid' bodies to cope with their

label. Horrifyingly, respondents show that this may result in the type of 'self-enclosure' or 'segregation' which Goffman suggests. However, it may also result in a process that I call 'self-stigmatisation' which Goffman does not address. Within this strategy adolescents stigmatise and label themselves, as others do, in an attempt to display an external appearance of nonchalance towards stigmatisation and even abuse.

The practices which some of these adolescents and their peers implement in their pursuit of embodied validation, appear to concur with Bordo (1993) in that there is no need to go to clinics, psychiatric units or support groups to find behaviours usually categorised as obsessive. The adolescents in this research describe disordered practices within vocabularies of normal self-regulatory regimes. However, they are much more closely related to bulimic practices than anorexic practices. Adolescents want to have control over their bodies, yet through desire or lack of choice (i.e. in schools), they also purchase tempting and fattening foods. Consequently, their eating becomes characterised by a process of what I term 'continuously compensating' that resembles those within the bulimic mind frame. Processes of 'continuously compensating' provide adolescents with a means of overcoming the contradictory schooling they receive; to satisfy the body's desires through consumption, yet maintain bodily control through regulation. Some might think that it is inappropriate to compare the practices of participating youths to those with obsessive disorders such as bulimia. Firstly, I wish to argue, however, that they are highly comparable, in that the whole process of over-indulging and under-indulging is what characterises bulimia. Eating in this instance is extremely disordered and while Bordo, Turner and individuals in general refer to anorexia as an 'eating disorder', anorexia itself is characterised by extremely 'ordered' eating

patterns. The dieter, the obsessive dieter and the anorexic as an extension of these, are those people who are described by Turner and Bordo as having ordered and regimented their eating so much that they have gone beyond hunger. This may occur even to the extent that the body experiences hunger less and less. Participants in this investigation describe eating patterns underlined much more by 'disorder'. They want to indulge yet 'over-indulgence' is followed by 'guilt'. It may be argued that guilt itself is a reflexive response to the fear of becoming fat. Here a type of agentic, 'dialogic-deliberation' on action occurs again. The vast majority of respondents, who described feelings of guilt, did so whereby the self reflected upon it's actions, was subsequently remorseful at the occurrence of such actions, and finally, openly negotiated an implementation of regimen necessary to counteract the risks of becoming fat. Episodes of over-indulgence, therefore, are followed by regimen which ensure control of the thin body. It is at this moment that healthy and unhealthy regimen for control begin to blur into one. This is a continuum or a crystallisation, which Turner and Bordo ardently highlight in their work. However, rather than focusing on anorexia as a continuum of the norm, I wish to follow the experiences and insights of these present youths in turning attention more towards bulimia as a continuum of the norm.

Vomiting appears to be a practice that many adolescents are not fearful of implementing. The alternative, for them, is far more fearsome. Therefore, they describe using practices like vomiting as a quick fix to regulation for specific periods. As I have suggested it appears as if Turner and Bordo have been extremely accurate in their respective descriptions of the discipline and the disease being synthesised into one. Turner (1984, 1992, 1996) in particular, describes those with obsessive practices falling further into the disease. This research, however,

suggests considering the possibility that these youths are schooled in many modes of body regulation and may choose to utilise obsessive behaviours without actually becoming diseased.

What all body regulating and body constructing activities have is the ability to deliver proof of validation. This research proposes that this takes place to a large degree through individualised exercise programmes, where exercise is not aimed at having fun and making friends, but solely for purposes of body regulation and construction. Participants are schooled on validating activities from peers and parents, siblings and strangers and I suggest that this acts as a form of 'social induction' within validating techniques. The prevalent use of gyms and gym equipment among these participants and their peers also calls into question policing of age limits in this area.

I would like to suggest that these adolescents' relationship with exercise equipment may serve to optimise their relationship with all the complexities which they meet on the road to embodied validation. I decided to use qualitative techniques to obtain valuable insights into these youths' pursuit of embodied validation. However, much of what they returned to me showed how they are schooled to see this validation as being hugely quantitatively measured. For instance, these adolescents present data which explains how they compete with equipment to achieve faster times, to go further distances, to attain higher jumps, to burn more calories, to lift heavier weights, to become lighter or heavier etc. They speak of the sense of self-achievement and self-proof, what I call 'embodied validation', which this gives to them. What I call 'embodied construction' not only impacts back upon the body, as Crossley (2001, 2004, 2005) might suggest, but also upon psychological self-worth. Embodied validation as indicated by

quantitative values underlines almost all of the narratives presented in this research.

I wish to conclude therefore, that adolescents are schooled by influences such as consumerism, parents, teachers, peers and others on how to measure validation through numerical excellence. These youths are taught that overcoming the complexities one meets in the pursuit of embodied validation comes through being given the most compliments, winning the most wrestling matches, scoring the most goals, being asked on most dates, regulating in the most effective ways etc. Is it any wonder that some of these youths' biggest fears were also characterised by quantitative failures? In the general course of conversation, an overwhelming number of interviewees referred to their insecurities surrounding examinations and particularly State Examinations. They incessantly referred to worrying about 'not getting the points'. Obtaining the 'points' is seen as a form of validation of self-worth in these narratives. They are constantly being schooled to achieve validation in this numerical way. Perhaps, these respondents' referral to the insecurities they face with attaining numerical validation in other areas of their lives sheds some light on the vital importance of embodied validation. It is not so much the quality of endeavour, but the quantity of achievement that attributes validation. Within such a quantitatively driven world, is it any wonder embodied validation seems to be judged more on the quantities of the individual, than the qualities of the individual.

I began this Conclusion by stating that exploring actual adolescents' feelings and opinions surrounding their embodiment was paramount for embarking on this investigation. I have found that participating youths are schooled on the body in many ways and from many sources. I have uncovered how this schooling

is often contradictory, presenting adolescents with complexities which they must overcome in their pursuit of embodied validation. I have suggested that youths are predominantly schooled to measure this embodied validation through quantifying the body or its abilities. Equipped with all of this insight into adolescents' struggles with their bodies, I can't help but question why there is no endeavour by our formal education system to 'school bodies'. Schooling on the body takes place within the informal curriculum (e.g. in sporting activities) and particularly within the hidden curriculum (e.g. among peers, in canteens, by grouping policies, through bullying). Where issues relating to the validation of the body arise in the formal curriculum within the remit of the SPHE syllabus, the overwhelming focus is on combating obesity through asking adolescents to become aware of creating a positive body image and to think about their bodies. Of course realities within school canteens and tuck shops circumvent this message. In addition, however, this completely overlooks how many youths think about little else other than their bodies and indeed are actively schooled into becoming disturbingly bodily conscious. It is essential that methods be established to provide adolescents, and even children, with formal schooling on the sociological factors that impact upon the body so that youths gain a general schooling on the issues which find them assigning validation and invalidation through the quantitative dimensions of the body.

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333

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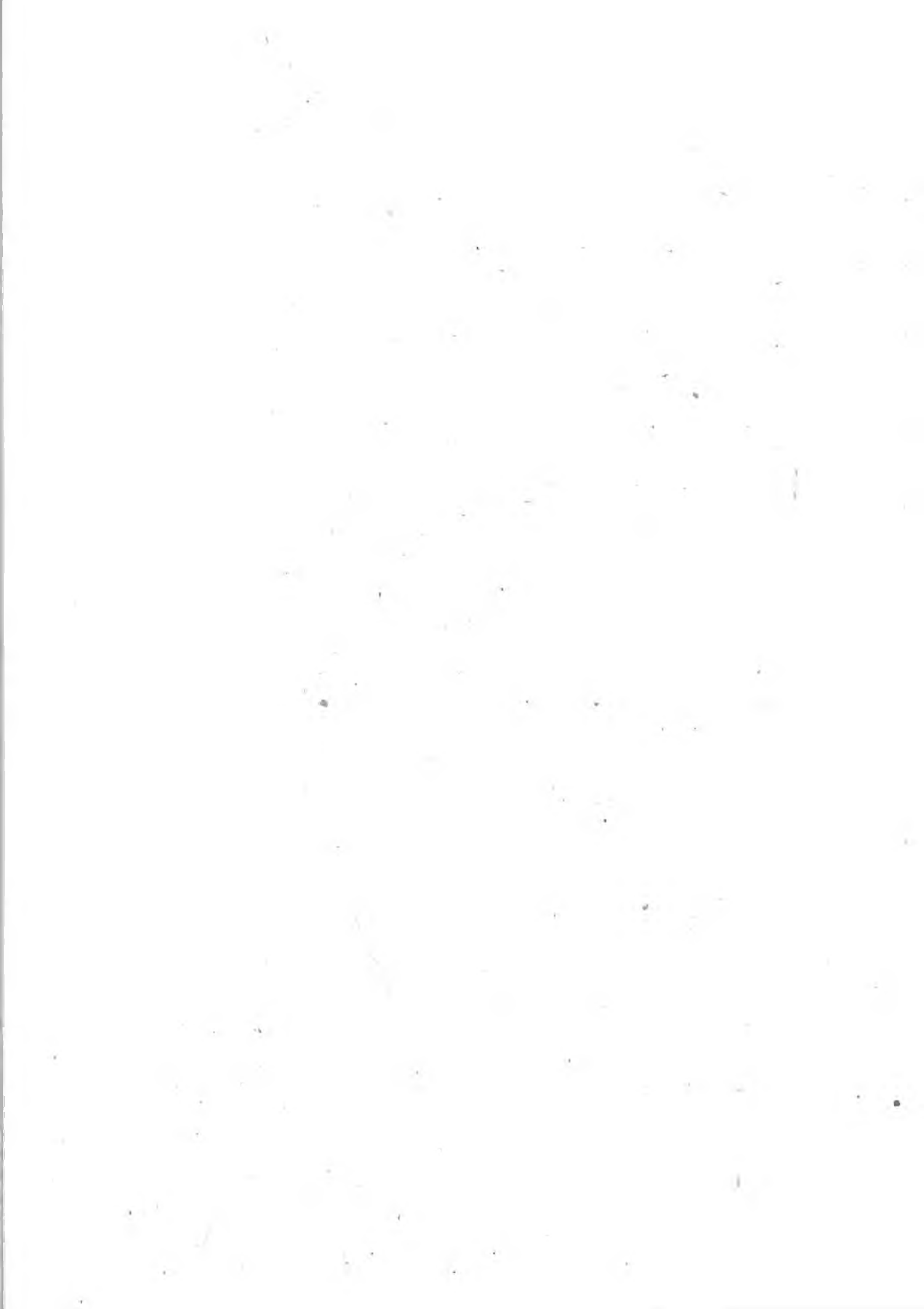
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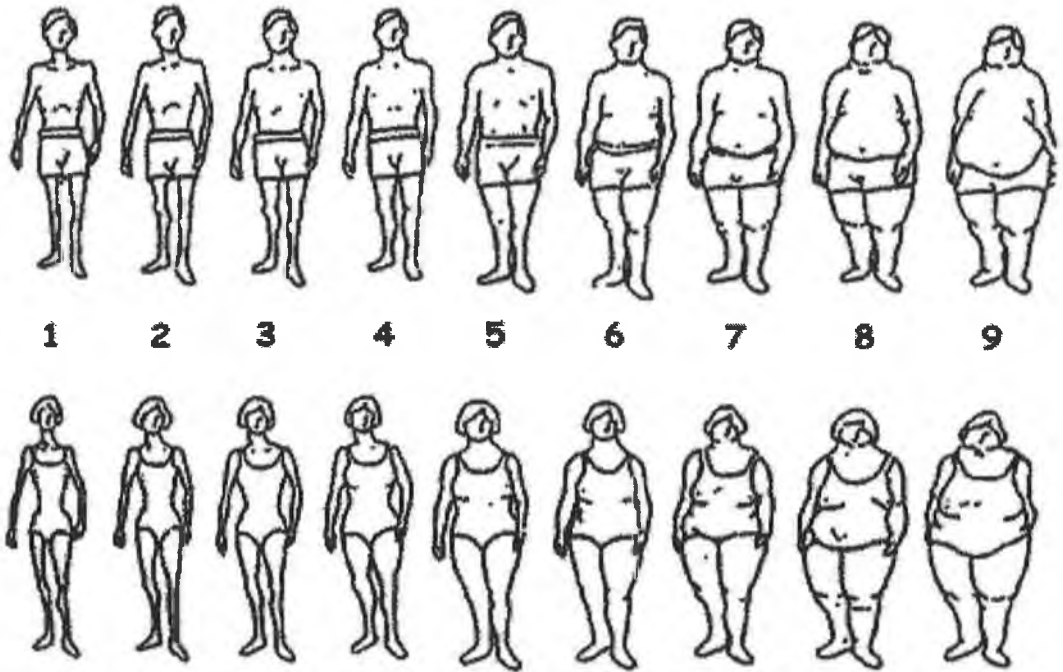
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- ♠ Which female image is the most 'ideal'? _____

- ♠ Which male image is the most 'ideal'? _____

- ♠ Which image are you closest to? _____

- ♠ Which image do you think the opposite sex would find most attractive?

  _____

## Appendix 2

School: _____

Name: _____

Year: _____

1. Explain how you prepare yourself in the morning for your day?

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. Describe what you would eat in a typical day?

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. Describe what, if any, exercise or sport you do and how much?

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. What do you think of dieting? Is it necessary?

_____

_____

_____

_____

5. Do you ever exercise or diet to change your self-image / shape? Why?

_____

_____

_____

_____

6. Would you be willing to participate in a project which would involve doing interviews to find out more about what you think of your image and that of others? If 'yes' why?