

# **YOUNG GIRLS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE: GROWING UP SOUTH NORTHAMPTONSHIRE**

**A thesis submitted in candidature for the degree of PhD, University of L**

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## **Abstract**

Although there has been a surge of interest in a geographical approach to the study of children, there is a pro-urban bias in much childhood research. Childhood is seemingly assumed to be an entirely metropolitan experience; there is a paucity of research on rural childhoods. Few studies have investigated girls' use of outdoor environments, particularly those beyond urban settings. The dominance of pro-urban and 'malestream' research tends to hide the experiences of girls living in rural areas.

This thesis explores difference and diversity in the lifestyles of 10-15 year olds growing up in South Northamptonshire, employing a multi-stranded methodology including: a questionnaire survey of children; in-depth discussion work with girls centred on child-taken photographs and videos, and interviews with mothers. To try to get close to the lifeworlds of young people, wherever possible their voices are included in the text. The study area represents one type of rural experience - that of an affluent, commuter-dependent area. The theoretical constructs of liminality and habitus are used to help make sense of the use and social ownership of space.

A series of factors is shown to interact in various ways to produce complex geographies. Contingency effects of gender, age and location create a multitude of rural lifestyles; there is no universal 'country childhood'. Girls use and value recreational space in a myriad of ways. Young people often have to share their play spaces, and anxiety, tension and conflict between rival groups is commonplace. Girls and their mothers express concern about stranger-danger, gangs and traffic hazards, and this limits the spatial freedom of some girls. Mothers, deeming the private car the only safe form of transport, determine the spaces in which their daughters spend their leisure time. Rather than providing greater spatial freedom, the rural offers parents more control over their children's use of public space.

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# Contents

## Abstract

## Acknowledgements

## Contents i

## List of Figures vi

## List of Tables viii

## List of Plates x

## Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1	Children's Geographies	1
1.2	Exploring Multiple Childhoods: Identifying Some Research Questions	2
1.3	Research Aims and Objectives	4
1.4	Epistemological Considerations	6
1.5	Structure of the Thesis	8

## Chapter 2 Exploring Childhood Geographies

2.1	Introduction	12
2.2	Social Constructions of Childhood	13
2.2.1	Devil or Angel?	14
2.2.2	Liminality, 'In-betweenness' and Childhood	16
2.3	The New Sociology of Childhood	18
2.3.1	An Emergent Paradigm	19
2.3.2	Four Sociological Dichotomies	21
2.4	The 'New' Cultural Geographies of Childhood	27
2.4.1	The 'Geography of Children' and 'Children's Geographies'	29
2.4.2	Defining an Agenda for the Geography of Children	30
2.5	Invisible Geographies of the Rural Experience	33

## Chapter 3 Investigating Country Childhoods

3.1	Introduction	35
3.2	Defining 'the Rural'	35
3.2.1	Descriptive Definitions	36
3.2.2	Socio-cultural Definitions	37
3.2.3	The Rural Locality	38
3.2.4	Social Representations of Space	38
3.2.5	Defining the Rural in this Study	39
3.3	The Rural Idyll	40

<b>3.4</b>	<b>Social Constructions of the Rural Childhood Idyll</b>	<b>42</b>
3.4.1	‘Rural Writings’	43
3.4.2	Media Images - Rural Utopia and Urban Distopia	45
3.4.3	Adult Nostalgia	46
3.4.4	The Rural Childhood Idyll	47
<b>3.5</b>	<b>Rural Childhoods: Invisibility and Neglect</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>3.6</b>	<b>The ‘Reinvention’ of Rural Childhoods</b>	<b>52</b>
3.6.1	Studies of Youth Migration from Rural Areas	52
3.6.2	Agency Publications	54
3.6.3	Cultural Geography and the ‘Hidden Geographies’ of Rural Children	55
<b>3.7</b>	<b>Summary</b>	<b>58</b>

#### **Chapter 4      Gender and Childhood Geographies**

<b>4.1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>4.2</b>	<b>The ‘Invisibility’ of Girls in Childhood Research</b>	<b>60</b>
4.2.1	‘Malestream’ Research	61
4.2.2	Girls and Outdoor (Public) Spaces	63
<b>4.3</b>	<b>The Neglected Rural Geographies of Girls</b>	<b>65</b>
4.3.1	Constructions of Rural Femininity	66
4.3.2	Constructions of Rural ‘Girlhood’	67
<b>4.4</b>	<b>Summary</b>	<b>69</b>

#### **Chapter 5      Understanding the Worlds of Young People: Methodological Strategies and Techniques**

<b>5.1</b>	<b>Setting a Research Agenda</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>5.2</b>	<b>Exploring the Worlds of Young People</b>	<b>71</b>
5.2.1	The ‘Least Adult’ Role	71
5.2.2	Gender Issues - A Woman Exploring the Worlds of Girls	73
5.2.3	‘Performing’ Research	75
<b>5.3</b>	<b>Choosing the Study Area</b>	<b>77</b>
5.3.1	Doing Research ‘at Home’	77
5.3.2	The Study Area - Rural South Northamptonshire	79

<b>5.4</b>	<b>Choosing the Participants</b>	<b>87</b>
5.4.1	Working with Children in School	87
5.4.2	Recruiting 'Hidden' Children	88
5.4.3	Recruiting Mothers	88
5.4.4	The Participants	89
5.4.5	Ethics, Consent and Confidentiality	90
<b>5.5</b>	<b>Choosing the Research 'Tools'</b>	<b>92</b>
5.5.1	The Questionnaire Survey	93
5.5.2	In-Depth Discussion Work	95
5.5.3	Interviews with Mothers	99
<b>5.6</b>	<b>Interpreting the Data</b>	<b>101</b>
5.6.1	Analysis Strategy: The Questionnaire Survey	101
5.6.2	Analysis Strategy: Group Discussion and Interviews with Mothers	102
5.6.3	Analysis Strategy: Visual Methods	103
5.6.4	Presentation of the Data	104

## **Chapter 6      Rural Realities**

<b>6.1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>6.2</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>107</b>
6.2.1	'Country Children' or 'Urban Incomers'?	109
6.2.2	Evaluations of Village Life	111
6.2.3	Leisure Choices	112
6.2.4	Hanging Out in the Countryside	118
6.2.5	Summary: Does Location Matter?	122
<b>6.3</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>122</b>
6.3.1	Perceptions of Town and Country	123
6.3.2	Favourite Leisure Spaces and Activities	130
6.3.3	Spatial Restrictions and Perceptions of Risk	135
6.3.4	Friendship Groups and Gang Membership	137
6.3.5	Summary: Does Age Matter?	138
<b>6.4</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>139</b>
6.4.1	Preferences for Rural Living	139
6.4.2	A Retreat from the Street?	141
6.4.3	Use of Leisure Facilities	148
6.4.4	Girls at Risk	149
6.4.5	Boys and Girls come out to Play	150
6.4.6	Summary: Does Gender Matter?	151

<b>6.5</b>	<b>Exploring Multiple Rural Realities</b>	<b>152</b>
6.5.1	Classifying Rural Lifestyle Experiences	152
6.5.2	Themes to be Further Explored	155

## **Chapter 7      Difference and Diversity in Girls' Use of Recreational Spaces**

<b>7.1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>156</b>
<b>7.2</b>	<b>Locational Factors and Recreational Opportunities</b>	<b>159</b>
7.2.1	Variations in Facility Provision	160
7.2.2	Variations in Independent Mobility and Access to Public Transport	164
7.2.3	Opportunities for Socializing - Friendship Groups	170
<b>7.3</b>	<b>Family Background and Parenting Strategies</b>	<b>173</b>
7.3.1	Variations in Access to a Private Car	174
7.3.2	Home Ranges and Spatial Freedom	176
7.3.3.	Authoritarian vs. Permissive Parenting Strategies	179
<b>7.4</b>	<b>Individual Differences</b>	<b>183</b>
7.4.1	Leisure Preferences and Multiple Transitions to Adulthood	184
7.4.2	Lifestyle Choices and Places to be Alone	186
7.4.3	Lifestyle Choices and Places to be with Friends	188
<b>7.5</b>	<b>Understanding Diversity in Girls' Use of Recreational Spaces</b>	<b>199</b>

## **Chapter 8      Contested Countryside Spaces**

<b>8.1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>202</b>
<b>8.2</b>	<b>Conflict between Girls and Adults</b>	<b>203</b>
8.2.1	Conflict in Outdoor Spaces	204
8.2.2	Conflict in Indoor Leisure Spaces	209
<b>8.3</b>	<b>Conflicts between Groups of Young People</b>	<b>216</b>
8.3.1	Sharing Outdoor Spaces	216
8.3.2	Sharing Indoor Spaces	226
<b>8.4</b>	<b>Conflicts between Girls and Boys</b>	<b>228</b>
<b>8.5</b>	<b>Space, Place and Conflict</b>	<b>231</b>

## **Chapter 9      Spaces of Risk and Safety**

<b>9.1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>233</b>
<b>9.2</b>	<b>Defining Risk</b>	<b>234</b>

<b>9.3</b>	<b>Girls' Fears</b>	<b>235</b>
9.3.1	Safe Places/Unsafe Places	236
9.3.2	Gangs	240
9.3.3	Stranger-Danger	248
9.3.4	Traffic Hazards	253
<b>9.4</b>	<b>Mothers' Fears</b>	<b>256</b>
9.4.1	Gangs	257
9.4.2	Stranger-Danger	259
9.4.3	Traffic Hazards	263
<b>9.5</b>	<b>'Rural' Fears</b>	<b>265</b>
<b>9.6</b>	<b>Summary</b>	<b>268</b>

## **Chapter 10    Making Sense of Young People's Worlds: Some Concluding Comments**

<b>10.1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>270</b>
<b>10.2</b>	<b>Summary of the Principal Research Findings</b>	<b>271</b>
<b>10.3</b>	<b>Understanding Some Rural Childhoods</b>	<b>273</b>
10.3.1	Structured 'from without'	274
10.3.2	Experienced 'from within'	275
<b>10.4</b>	<b>Evaluating the Research Project</b>	<b>276</b>
10.4.1	Revisiting the Research Aims	276
10.4.2	Limitations of the Research	278

## **Appendices**

<b>A</b>	<b>Sample of questionnaire</b>	<b>280</b>
<b>B</b>	<b>Sample of photo posters</b>	<b>292</b>
<b>C</b>	<b>Sample of interview schedule</b>	<b>297</b>

<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>303</b>
---------------------	------------

## List of Figures

<b>Chapter 1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	
Figure 1.1	Structure of the thesis.	9
<b>Chapter 2</b>	<b>Exploring Childhood Geographies</b>	
Figure 2.1	Theoretical field for the social study of childhood.	21
<b>Chapter 5</b>	<b>Understanding the Worlds of Young People: Methodological Strategies and Techniques</b>	
Figure 5.1	Location of the study area.	79
Figure 5.2	Average price of houses sold in 2000, according to housing type.	83
Figure 5.3	Infrastructure of the study area.	86
<b>Chapter 6</b>	<b>Rural Realities</b>	
Figure 6.1	Length of residence in home village.	109
Figure 6.2	Distance of move from previous to current place of residence.	110
Figure 6.3	Leisure facilities visited by young people.	115
Figure 6.4	Levels of car ownership, according to household.	117
Figure 6.5	Size of friendship groups.	119
Figure 6.6	Composition of friendship groups.	119
Figure 6.7	Composition of gangs.	120
Figure 6.8	Size of gangs.	121
Figure 6.9	Residential preferences, according to age.	127
Figure 6.10	Good things about living in home village, according to age.	127
Figure 6.11	Bad things about living in home village, according to age.	128
Figure 6.12	Desired improvements to home village, according to age.	129
Figure 6.13	Favourite place in home village.	130
Figure 6.14	Reason why favourite place.	131
Figure 6.15	Favourite place in home village, according to age.	131
Figure 6.16	Reason why favourite place, according to age.	132
Figure 6.17	Levels of club membership.	134
Figure 6.18	Leisure facilities visited by young people, according to age.	136
Figure 6.19	Places deemed to be unsafe, according to age.	136
Figure 6.20	Residential preferences, according to gender.	140
Figure 6.21	Good things about living in home village, according to gender.	141
Figure 6.22	Desired improvements to home village, according to gender.	142

Figure 6.23	Favourite place in home village, according to gender.	144
Figure 6.24	Reason why favourite place, according to gender.	144
Figure 6.25	Places where young people regularly hang out with friends, according to gender.	145
Figure 6.26	Leisure facilities visited by young people, according to gender.	148
Figure 6.27	Places deemed to be unsafe.	149
Figure 6.28	Places deemed to be unsafe, according to gender.	150
Figure 6.29	Tiers of influence on young people's lifestyle experiences.	154
<b>Chapter 7</b>	<b>Difference and Diversity in Girls' Use of Recreational Spaces</b>	
Figure 7.1	Parental care-taking conventions and the place behaviour of children.	158
Figure 7.2	The playground. Drawing by 10 year old girl, Greens Norton.	190
Figure 7.3	The playground. Drawing by 11 year old girl, Towcester.	190
Figure 7.4	The shop. Drawing by 10 year old girl, Greens Norton.	197
<b>Chapter 8</b>	<b>Contested Countryside Spaces</b>	
Figure 8.1	The bus shelter. Drawing by 11 year old girl, Silverstone.	218
<b>Chapter 9</b>	<b>Spaces of Risk and Safety</b>	
Figure 9.1	Content of photographs taken to illustrate safe places.	237
Figure 9.2	Content of photographs taken to illustrate unsafe places.	239

## List of Tables

### **Chapter 2      Exploring Childhood Geographies**

Table 2.1	The three phases of <i>Rites of Passage</i> .	17
-----------	---	----

### **Chapter 3      Investigating Country Childhoods**

Table 3.1	Rural-urban continuum typologies and terminologies.	37
-----------	---	----

### **Chapter 5      Understanding the Worlds of Young People: Methodological Strategies and Techniques**

Table 5.1	Population of Northamptonshire and South Northants - actual and % change.	80
Table 5.2	Index score for selected locations in Northamptonshire, 1961-1971.	81
Table 5.3	Indicators of affluence and poverty.	84
Table 5.4	Service provision in settlements in the study area.	85
Table 5.5	Summary of participants - the questionnaire survey.	89
Table 5.6	Summary of participants - in-depth discussion work.	90
Table 5.7	Summary of participants - interviews with mothers.	90
Table 5.8	Summary of questionnaire survey.	93
Table 5.9	Summary of in-depth discussion work.	95
Table 5.10	Strengths and weaknesses of group discussions.	96
Table 5.11	Strengths and weaknesses of visual methods.	97
Table 5.12	Content of the photographs taken.	98
Table 5.13	Summary of interviews with mothers.	100
Table 5.14	Strengths and weaknesses of semi-structured interviews.	101

### **Chapter 6      Rural Realities**

Table 6.1	Socio-economic groups and car ownership in South Northants.	106
Table 6.2	Classification of settlements in rural South Northants.	108
Table 6.3	Age and gender composition of sample in each settlement type - frequency and %.	108
Table 6.4	Residential preferences, according to location.	110
Table 6.5	Bad things about living in home village, according to location.	111
Table 6.6	Desired improvements to home village, according to location.	112
Table 6.7	Favourite place in home village, according to location.	113
Table 6.8	Places where young people regularly hang out with friends, according to location.	113
Table 6.9	Time spent alone in own room each day, according to location.	114



Table 6.10	Frequency of visits to popular leisure facilities, according to location.	116
Table 6.11	Household groups and car ownership in South Northants - frequency and %.	117
Table 6.12	Leisure facilities visited by young people, according to levels of car ownership.	118
Table 6.13	Perceptions of towns and countryside.	124
Table 6.14	Perceptions of the countryside, according to age.	125
Table 6.15	Perceptions of towns, according to age.	126
Table 6.16	Ways in which young people spend leisure time alone in their room, according to age.	133
Table 6.17	Reasons why places are deemed to be unsafe, according to age.	137
Table 6.18	Composition of friendship groups, according to age.	137
Table 6.19	Perceptions of the countryside, according to gender.	139
Table 6.20	Ways in which young people spend leisure time alone in their room, according to gender.	143
Table 6.21	Leisure activities when hanging out with friends, according to gender.	146
Table 6.22	Home range when alone, without seeking special permission, according to gender.	146
Table 6.23	Home range when alone, when permission has been sought, according to gender.	147
Table 6.24	Home range when with friends, without seeking special permission, according to gender.	147
Table 6.25	Home range when with friends, when permission has been sought, according to gender.	147
Table 6.26	Composition of friendship groups, according to gender.	151
<b>Chapter 7</b>	<b>Difference and Diversity in Girls' Use of Recreational Spaces</b>	
Table 7.1	Method of transport to place where meet friends, by gender.	165
Table 7.2	Method of transport to place where meet friends, by age.	165
Table 7.3	Frequency of bus services to Northampton.	167
<b>Chapter 9</b>	<b>Spaces of Risk and Safety</b>	
Table 9.1	Common Fears of Girls.	236
Table 9.2	Common Fears of Mothers.	256

## List of Plates

### **Chapter 7      Difference and Diversity in Girls' Use of Recreational Spaces**

Plate 7.1	The Brickle pocket park, Silverstone.	187
Plate 7.2	Bucknell Wood, Silverstone.	187
Plate 7.3	The big pond, Whittlebury.	187
Plate 7.4	The swing in Katie's back garden.	188
Plate 7.5	The rabbit hutch in Chloe's back garden.	188
Plate 7.6	The playground in the 'Trees' housing estate, Towcester.	191
Plate 7.7	The playground, Greens Norton.	191
Plate 7.8	The recreation ground, Towcester.	192
Plate 7.9	The 'wooden park', Towcester.	192
Plate 7.10	The rope bridge at the 'wooden park', Towcester.	193
Plate 7.11	The hut at the recreation ground, Towcester.	194
Plate 7.12	Inside the hut at the recreation ground, Towcester.	195
Plate 7.13	Young people in the hut at the recreation ground, Towcester.	195
Plate 7.14	The village shop, Silverstone.	196
Plate 7.15	Outside the shop, Buckingham Way, Towcester.	197
Plate 7.16	The shop, Buckingham Way, Towcester.	198

### **Chapter 8      Contested Countryside Spaces**

Plate 8.1	The playground in the 'Poets' housing estate, Towcester.	207
Plate 8.2	Outside the Leisure Centre, Towcester.	210
Plate 8.3	Outside a supermarket, Towcester.	213
Plate 8.4	Inside the library, Towcester.	214
Plate 8.5	A supermarket coffee shop, Towcester.	215
Plate 8.6	Outside a fast food restaurant, Towcester.	215
Plate 8.7	The sand pit in the playground, Greens Norton.	217
Plate 8.8	The back of the Leisure Centre.	218
Plate 8.9	The recreation ground, Silverstone.	219
Plate 8.10	The fort at the recreation ground, Tiffield.	219
Plate 8.11	The recreation ground, Towcester.	224
Plate 8.12	Woodland near Banbury Road, Litchborough.	225
Plate 8.13	The climbing wall at the rear of the Leisure Centre, Towcester.	225
Plate 8.14	The basketball court at the recreation ground, Towcester.	229

<b>Chapter 9</b>	<b>Spaces of Risk and Safety</b>	
Plate 9.1	The leisure centre pool, Towcester.	<b>238</b>
Plate 9.2	A supermarket near the centre of Towcester.	<b>238</b>
Plate 9.3	A field next to Wood Burcote Road, Towcester.	<b>238</b>
Plate 9.4	The bus shelter, Silverstone.	<b>241</b>
Plate 9.5	Outside the supermarket coffee shop, Towcester.	<b>241</b>
Plate 9.6	The village green, Greens Norton.	<b>246</b>
Plate 9.7	The Infants School, Silverstone.	<b>247</b>
Plate 9.8	An alleyway, Tiffield.	<b>249</b>
Plate 9.9	The A43, Silverstone.	<b>249</b>
Plate 9.10	The A43 at an entrance to the village, Silverstone.	<b>254</b>
Plate 9.11	The Lane, Potcote.	<b>266</b>
Plate 9.12	The village outskirts, Tiffield.	<b>267</b>

# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Children's Geographies

Children have long been regarded by academics as a somewhat marginal group whose activities and experiences matter less than those of adults (Scarre, 1989), and so until recently children have been neglected in academic research (Qvortrup, 1996). During the last decade there has been a growing recognition within the social sciences of a need to come to terms with the concept of childhood (Asquith, 1996; Aitken and Herman, 1997; James and Prout, 1990; Qvortrup, 1994) with geographers also beginning to acknowledge that the worlds of children were absent from their studies (Aitken, 1994; Holloway and Valentine, 2000a; James, 1990; 1991a; McKendrick, 2000; Matthews, 1992; Matthews and Limb, 1999; Philo, 1992; 1997; 2000a; Sibley, 1991; Skelton and Valentine, 1998; Valentine, 1996a; Valentine and McKendrick, 1997; Winchester, 1991).

In large part this expansion of the work of geographers can be attributed to a resurgence and change of focus in cultural geography in this period, and a growing appreciation that society comprises a plurality of social groups, each of which has its own 'ways of seeing' (Anderson and Gale, 1992; Jackson, 1989; Philo, 1991). This 'cultural turn' helped to define new areas of interest and inquiry (Matthews and Limb, 1999; Philo, 1992; Sibley, 1995b; Pile and Thrift, 1995). Within this new cultural geography, researchers have become concerned with discovering how different social groups make sense of their everyday worlds (Matthews, 1995). For example, studies of ethnic minority groups (Agyeman and Spooner, 1997; Ling Wong, 1998), gays and lesbians (Bell and Valentine, 1995; Valentine, 1997b), New Age Travellers (Davis, 1997; Halfacree, 1996) and women (Agg and Phillips, 1998; Hughes, 1997a; Little 1987; 1997b) within a rural context are contributing to an emerging body of work which is beginning to challenge the implicit assumption that rural dwellers are a homogeneous cultural group.

The heightened interest in the geographies of 'others' was a key factor in the development of the new cultural geographies of childhood (Valentine, 1996b). The recognition that society is not a homogeneous unit - that different groups exist and that these occupy unequal positions of power and autonomy - helped to focus attention on the marginalization of children as a social group (Matthews and Limb, 1999). There is now a well-established and rapidly expanding body of geographical work on and with children, and an ever growing celebration of difference amongst children (Valentine, 2000). This thesis is grounded in these new cultural geographies of childhood and forms part of the growing body of research which aims to debate, deconstruct and explore the everyday experiences of children.

In this chapter a rationale for the study of rural childhoods is presented. First, multiple childhood geographies are examined and some research questions are identified. Second, the research aims and objectives are discussed and the proposed outcomes of the research detailed. Third, some conceptual and epistemological considerations of the research are explored, with a particular focus upon the ways in which (adult) geographers can access the worlds of young people. Finally, the structure of the thesis is outlined.

## **1.2 Exploring Multiple Childhoods: Identifying Some Research Questions**

In geographical research on and with children the heterogeneous nature of childhood is being acknowledged. Children are understood to hold a variety of views and to experience society in very different ways (Garratt *et al.*, 1997; Sibley, 1995b; Valentine, 1997d). Childhood is seen to be differentiated and socially divided (Wyn and White, 1997). Conceptualizing the categories of 'child' and 'adult' as fluid and unstable, a multitude of geographies can be identified (Matthews and Limb, 1999; Valentine, 1997d).

Although there has been a surge of interest in a geographical approach to the study of children, there is a pro-urban bias in childhood research (Matthews *et al.*, 2000c). Childhood is seemingly assumed to be an entirely metropolitan experience (Chambers, 1986). As a consequence, there has been a paucity of research on rural childhoods, with even the 'classic' rural community studies of the 1950s failing to acknowledge that children were worth studying until they became part of the rural youth culture of young farmers' clubs and football teams (Frankenberg, 1957). Children, therefore, were seemingly invisible in the rural landscape, at least in the academic literature, and it was not until the publication of Ward's *The Child in the Country* in 1990 that the voices of young people were heard, in a text dedicated to the study of rural childhoods.

Ward (1990b) compared accounts of past and present-day country childhoods, as well as urban and rural childhoods, illustrating that young people are a distinct group worthy of study in the rural context. Ward documented the quality of life of young people living in rural Britain in the late 1980s and challenged the country childhood idyll by showing that there are negatives as well as positives about growing up in the countryside. In describing the everyday worlds of young people growing up in rural areas, Ward reconstructs the 'stereotypes' that present powerful images of country childhoods. He shows that the lives of rural children are full of paradoxes and surprises, and are more complex than these stereotypes suggest (Philo, 1992).

It can be suggested that it was Philo's (1992) review of this book in *Journal of Rural Studies*, a relatively new geographical periodical, which was to give greater publicity to Ward's work and to hasten the pace of geographical research. Philo's review was in large part a response to Gilg's (1991) earlier comments that Ward's book "is a pleasant diversionary read but there is little of substance here, either as a text book or as a provocative piece" (p. 90). Philo signalled the significance of Ward's work as part of the cultural turn in human geography and drew attention to the paucity of studies on rural childhoods. He identified the value of "uncovering something of the worlds inhabited by rural children", both in terms of how they are structured 'from without' and experienced 'from within' (1992, p. 198). Philo's timely call for greater research into this neglected rural geography has prompted a growing body of work focusing on the everyday experiences of young people in rural areas, although many would argue that there is still a lack of geographical research on rural childhoods, especially that which draws upon the disparate lifestyles of children (Matthews *et al.*, 2000c).

In childhood research few studies have investigated how girls make use of outdoor environments, particularly those beyond urban settings. It is as if female use of outdoor space comprises behaviour that is morally taboo; at best something that is of little significance and so justifiably ignored, or at worst something which only concerns an exceptional minority who are written off as troublesome 'others' (Matthews *et al.*, 2000c). Furthermore, there has been a focus on extraordinary rather than ordinary behaviour (Breitbart, 1998; McRobbie, 1991; Pearce, 1996). With the dominance of pro-urban and 'malestream' research, the experiences of girls growing up in rural areas have been hidden by the geographies of urban male childhoods.

Philo's (1992) observation that "the social life of rural areas is fractured along numerous lines of difference constitutive of overlapping and 'multiple forms of otherness'" (p. 201) highlights the need for research which acknowledges difference and diversity in the experiences of young people growing up in rural areas. This research attempts to uncover some of the multiple experiences of growing up within a rural setting. The work is grounded in the conviction that there is not an universal country childhood, nor are young people who live in rural areas representative of one social group. Instead, the research emphasizes the range of diversity and difference in experiences of growing up. Particular attention is paid to girls' experiences of growing up in the countryside and the multiple realities of girls' use of outdoor spaces.

The study focuses on the experiences of 10-15 year olds growing up in rural South Northamptonshire (henceforth South Northants). Although there is an increasing body of research with children and young people, the early teen years have been somewhat neglected (Skelton, 2000; Valentine and McKendrick, 1997). This age group have limited mobility as they are unable to drive and “their use of space is restricted by rules governing entry to cinemas, public houses and so on” (Valentine and McKendrick, 1997, p. 232). Further, “they are at an age when they perceive themselves to have out-grown publicly-provided play and leisure opportunities and want their independence from parents to explore and negotiate public space for themselves” (ibid. p. 232). This age group includes those children about to make the change from attending a small village primary school to attending a much larger secondary school in a nearby market town. The lower boundary of ten years reflects the age by which pronounced gender differences emerge with regard to how boys and girls encounter outdoor environments in their day-to-day life (Matthews, 1987).

The characteristics of South Northants present an interesting context for the study. South Northants is an accessible part of Midland England which has experienced rapid growth, with many incomers seeking a ‘rural’ lifestyle. It is an area increasingly characterized by an affluent, middle-class population. The area has a relatively ‘youthful’ population age structure, a low rate of unemployment, and high levels of owner occupation and car ownership. The area is familiar to the researcher, enabling a wealth of background knowledge to be drawn upon. (Familiarity with the district also creates some ‘baggage’, with views coloured by the researcher’s own experiences, an issue examined in Chapter 5.) South Northants represents one particular type of rural experience - namely that of an affluent, commuter-dependent area.

### **1.3 Research Aims and Objectives**

This study is concerned with exploring the everyday lived experiences of a group of young people growing up in rural South Northants and aims to uncover some neglected rural geographies. In order to define the scope of the project, two aims were developed:

1. to investigate whether locality constitutes a contingency effect upon rural childhood(s) - particularly whether ‘the rural’ matters as a defining experience for young people growing up in UK society today;
2. to examine whether gender and age are important factors in the outdoor behaviour and experiences of young people who are growing up in a rural area.

Within these broad research aims a number of more specific objectives were formulated. The first aim encompassed a number of research questions. The role of locality is examined with regard to whether rural childhoods differ from urban childhoods and in what respects. It is questioned whether there is such a thing as a 'country childhood' and, if so, what this encompasses. Rural childhoods are compared between and within settlements in South Northants to establish the extent to which place matters. It is considered whether the size of settlement and the facilities provided influence experiences of growing up in a rural area.

The research considers how young people, aged 10-15 years, understand and experience their everyday (rural) environment, and how they make use of local spaces. The perceptions of both young people and parents with regard to advantages and disadvantages of a 'country childhood' are explored in order to establish the role locality plays in young people's experiences of growing up. In considering the importance of location, diversity in rural childhoods is identified.

The second aim includes a set of factors which can also be taken into consideration when exploring rural childhood geographies. In considering the extent to which gender and age cut across location to give rise to multiple childhoods the significance both of locality and other macro-social forces is examined. The rural lifestyles of boys and girls are investigated to establish the role of gender in experiences of rural upbringings. The effect of gender upon young people's use of outdoor spaces is explored. Particular attention is paid to whether place use is 'gendered' within the rural landscape - whether there are spaces in which boys or girls are predominant, whether girls' use of outdoor space is influenced by notions of gender-appropriate behaviour, and whether their use of space is restricted by these.

It is examined whether pre-teens and young teenagers have different rural experiences. The place use and behaviour of 10-15 year olds is investigated in order to establish whether there are any age-related variations in experiences of growing up in a rural area. It is considered whether different places are valued by different age groups, and whether young people of different ages use outdoor space in different ways.

With these aims in mind a number of outcomes were identified at the onset of the research project. This research was conceived to provide a new insight into a number of neglected rural geographies and to enter the discourse on the agency of the child. Further, it was anticipated that the research would contest ideas of universal 'country childhoods'.



## 1.4 Epistemological Considerations

All academic research is set within frameworks and structures which influence the ways in which knowledge is sought and understood. Davis (1998) has suggested that there are three approaches through which social science research attempts to understand the worlds of children, the third of which defines this thesis. First, children can be studied as a group apart. In an effort to contrast young people's lives with those of adults, "some texts have represented children as possessing one homogenous (sic) voice or culture" (Davis, 1998, p. 326). Children are seen as social actors in their own right and, like adults, are considered able to interpret the meaning of social behaviour. Early childhood studies, such as those carried out by the 'Birmingham School' in the 1960s and 1970s, attempted to understand the worlds of children in this way (Boëthius, 1995; Garratt, 1997).

Second, children can be understood through examining macro-social characteristics. Research favouring this approach principally differentiates between young people in terms of social structural factors and macro-social issues such as gender and age. Although differences *between* groups can be explored using this research strategy, differences *within* the same gender, class and ethnic groups have tended to be ignored.

Third, children can be recognized as having multiple worlds. Research using this framework is concerned with culture and difference. This approach acknowledges that not all children will experience a common way of seeing, although they have some commonality in that they are not adults (Matthews *et al.*, 1998a), and that children have different wishes and expectations. This research is conducted within the spirit of this approach. Qualitative research methods and a child-centred approach are used in order to get close to young people's worlds.

However, the extent to which adult researchers can gain access to children's worlds has become an important issue in geographical childhood research (Thomas, 2000; Valentine, 1999a).

Aitken and Wingate (1993) have suggested that:

"children's personal geographies are different from those of adults to the extent that we, as adults, rarely discern the nuances that comprise the worlds of children. A child's day can be prolonged by a thirst for knowledge in environments that adults find mundane and commonplace. Children see things in these environments that we have forgotten how to look for, let alone understand" (p. 65).

Aitken and Herman (1997) contend that although we, as adults, may be able to reconstruct the circumstances of childhood, this reconstruction is often embedded in a set of cultural values. Although as adults we may be able to construct a notion of childhood, it is unlikely that we will be able fully to appreciate children's experiences. The emotions of young people probably remain somewhat distant and elusive, since years of accumulated knowledge may filter and structure our thinking about what it means to be a child. Aitken and Herman refer to this dilemma as the 'crisis of representation'.

Taken to an extreme, this argument provides a case for adult researchers to dismiss the study of children and childhood as beyond their grasp, forming an excuse for maintaining the hegemony of adulthood (Matthews and Limb, 1999). However, as Matthews and Limb (1999) have argued, a "partial understanding is better than not attempting to understand" (p. 64), and with the use of appropriate methodologies geographers should be able to get closer to understanding the worlds of children. In order to illustrate individuals' experiences and attitudes the words of the young participants are drawn upon extensively in this thesis. Quotations are taken verbatim from young people's responses to provide a richly descriptive picture of rural childhoods and a rare insight into the particular experiences of girls.

Anderson and Smith (2001) have suggested that there has been a 'policy turn' which expresses a growing frustration with those aspects of cultural geography that appear (to some) to be inward-looking, esoteric and apparently oblivious to the 'real world'. This policy turn has given the concept of relevance a new lease of life. Anderson and Smith have argued that "a return to relevance and the quest for a 'policy turn' in geography seem to us to be key areas where an awareness of how emotional relations shape society and space is important" (p. 9). In exploring some multiple rural childhood geographies this research begins to unravel some 'emotional geographies'. This research acknowledges that emotions are a key set of social relations through which lives are lived and societies made, and that to exclude these relations from research leaves a gap in how we understand the world (Anderson and Smith, 2001).

The theoretical and conceptual framework of the thesis can be summarized as follows:

- Childhood is recognized to be socially constructed. Young people do not live as one cultural grouping and there is no single concept of childhood.
- Young people are recognized as environmental agents in their own right, both shaping and negotiating a complex (rural) place geography.
- Those macro-social factors (the 'hyphenated geographies') which layer childhoods and which affect young people's experience of place, such as age, gender and location, are distinguished.

## 1.5 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is structured around three themes. The first theme is explored in Chapters 2, 3 and 4. In these chapters the study is placed into context by conceptualizing rural childhood geographies. The second theme - exploring the ways in which the worlds of young people can be understood - is the focus of Chapter 5. Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9 are concerned with the third theme: uncovering some rural childhood geographies. In Chapter 10 these ideas are drawn together in order to make sense of young people's worlds. Figure 1.1 shows the structure of the thesis in diagrammatic form.

In Chapter 2 the development of the 'new' cultural geographies of childhood is examined, with particular attention paid to those aspects which relate to rural childhoods. The chapter traces the history of thinking about young people and childhoods. The new sociology of childhood, which has formed the basis for the developing interest in the geographies of children, is assessed. The discussion draws upon various social theories, and demonstrates the need for geographers to draw upon such theories in order to make sense of the complex geographies of young people. The development of the new cultural geographies of childhood is reflected upon, and the need for research into the lived experiences of rural children, especially girls, is highlighted.

In order to place the study into the rural context, Chapter 3 begins by addressing the concept of 'the rural'. In this chapter notions of the rural idyll are investigated, and social constructions of the country childhood idyll are examined. Studies of young people in the countryside are reviewed in an attempt to disentangle (adult) notions of country childhoods and the experiences of those young people living in rural areas.

The exclusion of girls in rural geography research is examined in Chapter 4. Through exploring 'malestream' childhood research (Griffin, 1993), a need for research into the everyday experiences of girls is identified. The chapter considers those studies that have examined girls' use of outdoor (public) space, and concludes by examining research into constructions of rural femininity.

Chapter 5 focuses upon the research methods used in order to gain an understanding of the worlds of young people. The research process adopted in the research is outlined. The chapter engages in the debate over the ways in which adult researchers can gain an understanding of young people's worlds, and the merits of the 'least adult' role in research are highlighted. The study area, participants, and the methods used to explore the everyday experiences of children living in rural areas are described. The chapter concludes by outlining the strategies used to analyze the data collected.

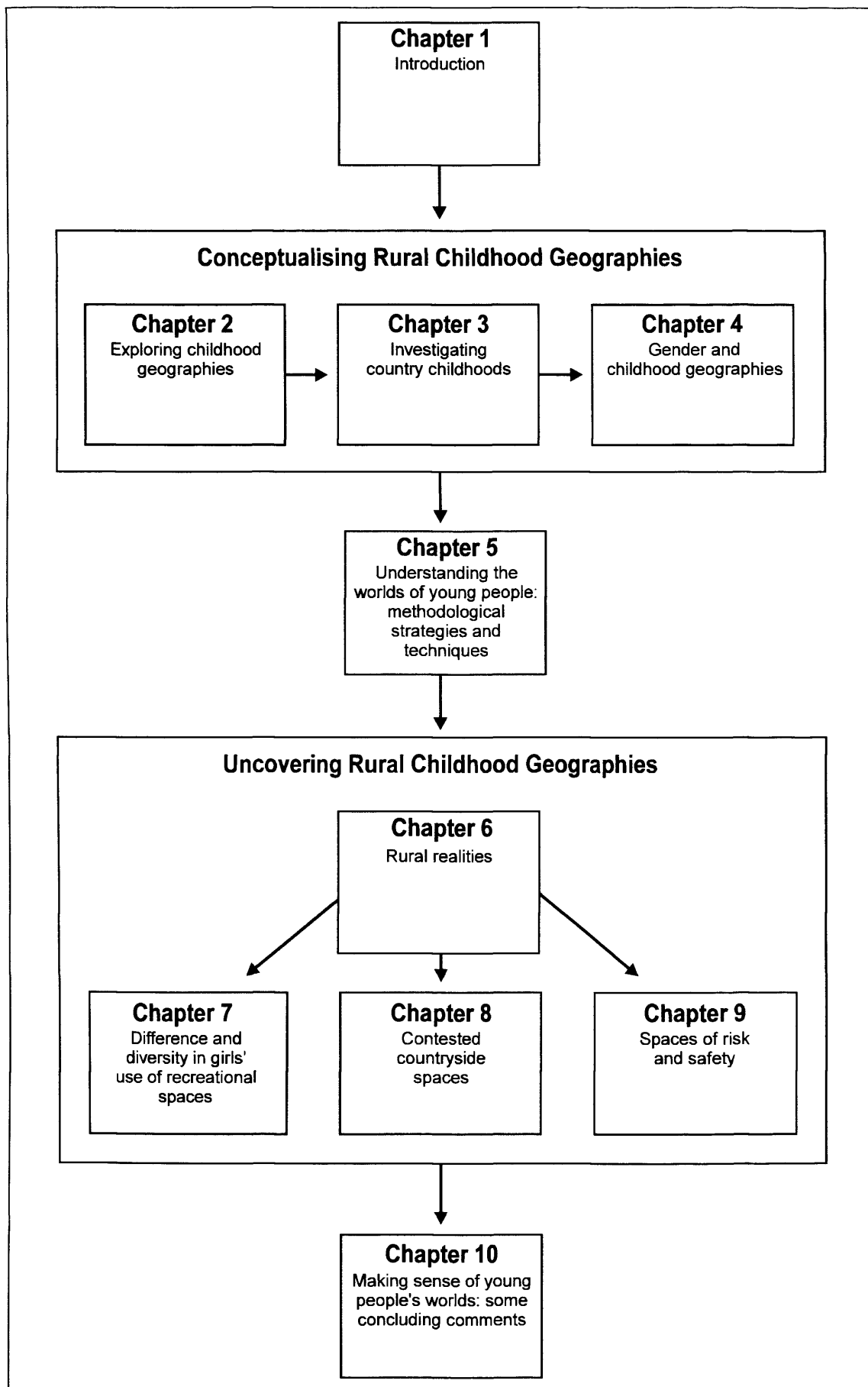


Figure 1.1 Structure of the thesis.

In Chapter 6 empirical data collected from an extensive questionnaire survey are explored to provide a general picture of the lifestyles of young people, both girls and boys, growing up in rural South Northants. The chapter focuses upon three factors - location, age, and gender - in order to highlight difference and diversity within the geographies of rural young people. The influence of location upon young people's experiences of growing up in a rural area is examined. Particular attention is paid to evaluations of village life, leisure choices, and the composition of friendship groups. Differences in young peoples' lifestyles associated with age are also explored, with discussion centred on perceptions of town and country, favourite leisure spaces and activities, perceptions of risk, and gang membership. Variations in experiences of growing up in a rural area according to gender are highlighted. Preferences for rural living, the use of outdoor spaces and leisure facilities, perceptions of risk, and friendship patterns are explored. The chapter concludes by presenting a typology of rural experiences to aid understanding of multiple rural realities.

Data from the questionnaire survey were used to pinpoint some themes worthy of further inquiry. Three themes were identified and subsequently explored in greater depth with young girls and their mothers. Chapters 7, 8 and 9 are concerned with these three themes: difference and diversity in girls' use of recreational spaces; contested countryside spaces, and spaces of risk and safety.

Difference and diversity in girls' use of recreational spaces is explored at three levels in Chapter 7. Locational factors and recreational opportunities are assessed, and variations in facility provision, levels of independent mobility and opportunities for socializing are examined. Family background and parenting strategies are used as starting points to examine diversity in levels of access to a private car, and girls' home ranges and spatial freedom. Authoritarian and permissive parenting styles are also explored. Individual differences are considered with regard to leisure preferences and lifestyle choices. Multiple transitions to adulthood are identified, and a range of rural childhood experiences highlighted.

Chapter 8 focuses on contested countryside spaces and explores collisions and conflicts over the use of social space. In this chapter some multiple realities of girls' use of spaces within a rural environment are uncovered, and coping strategies for dealing with conflict and collision are revealed. Three types of conflict are identified. Sources of tension between the environmental priorities of girls and adults are explored and examples are used to illustrate the ways in which the use of both 'outdoor' and 'indoor' spaces are contested. Conflicts over the social ownership of recreational space between rival groups of young people are described, with a focus upon age-related collisions. Conflicts associated with gender are also discussed. The theoretical constructs of liminality and habitus are used to help make sense of the complex performances of place use and the social ownership of space.

In Chapter 9 the perceptions of girls and their mothers as regards spaces of risk and safety are investigated. The discussion considers the 'sexualization' of risk and the impact of this upon girls' use of space. The concept of risk is defined and differences between 'social' and 'environmental' fears are highlighted. Girls' perceptions of 'safe' or 'unsafe' places are explored, and fears of gangs, stranger-danger and traffic hazards are revealed. The risk anxieties of a group of mothers are identified, and their perceptions of gangs, stranger-danger and traffic hazards are explored. Those risks associated with 'rural' spaces are also examined. The chapter concludes by considering the impact of perceptions of risk and fear upon the lifestyles of young girls growing up within a rural area.

Chapter 10 attempts to draw together these ideas in order to make sense of young people's worlds. The main themes which have emerged from this work are set out. These are addressed in more abstract, conceptual terms and linked to existing literature. The ways in which the experiences of young people are structured 'from without' and experienced 'from within' are considered. The research aims are revisited and areas for further research are identified.

## Chapter 2 Exploring Childhood Geographies

### 2.1 Introduction

In the past decade there has been a surge of interest in a geographical approach to the study of children (Holloway and Valentine, 2000b; Matthews, 1992; Skelton and Valentine, 1998). There is, however, a pro-urban bias in childhood research (Matthews *et al.*, 2000c), with childhood seemingly assumed to be an entirely metropolitan experience (Chambers, 1986). As a consequence of this there has been a paucity of research on rural childhoods. Further, few studies have investigated how girls make use of outdoor environments, particularly those beyond urban settings. In childhood research, girls' experiences have often been ignored, and there has been a focus on extraordinary rather than ordinary behaviour (Breitbart, 1998; McRobbie, 1991; Pearce, 1996). With the dominance of pro-urban and 'malestream' research, the experiences of girls growing up in rural areas have been hidden by the geographies of urban male childhoods.

This chapter forms a brief review of those aspects of the literature which are most salient to the subject matter of the thesis – the experiences of girls growing up in rural England. The discussion which follows focuses on key issues, dilemmas and discourses which can assist in unravelling the neglected rural geographies of girls.

Childhood is a social phenomenon and is so in the sense that every society forms its own set of norms, rules and regulations which construct the category of children (Shamgar-Handelman, 1994). The most prominent characteristic of the child, according to any definition, is that he/she is not yet an adult. Between and within societies, and between historical periods and social groups, any other parameter of the definition of the child may change. Thus despite the strong biological determinants which are an integral part of the definition of childhood, the concept of the child is culture-bound and socially constructed (Shamgar-Handelman, 1994).

Children have often been regarded as somewhat marginal people "whose activities and experiences matter less than those of adult - and especially male adult - human beings" (Scarre, 1989, p. ix). There is, however, growing recognition within the social sciences of the need to come to terms with the concept of childhood, which has until recently been neglected in academic research (Qvortrup, 1996). Further, the heterogeneous nature of childhood is being acknowledged, with children understood to hold a variety of views and to experience society in very different ways (Garratt *et al.*, 1997; Sibley, 1995b; Valentine, 1997d). Childhood is seen to be specific, differentiated and socially divided (Wyn and White, 1997).

There is constant slippage in the use of the terms used to identify the subjects of childhood research (Valentine, 1996a). Even a brief perusal of the literature shows an abundance of terms used to describe the pre-adult phase - infant, child, teenager, adolescent, youth, young person. The subjects of childhood research are classified in one of three ways, the third of which is central to this thesis: arbitrarily chosen biological ages (Hendrick, 1997b); legal definitions of adulthood such as the age of majority (Newell, 1993); or fluid and blurred criteria of adult status whereby a series of transitions must be passed through in order for adulthood to be reached (Baldwin *et al.*, 1997; Coleman *et al.*, 1997; Galland, 1995; Marsland, 1993). In this study the terms 'child' and 'young person' refer to the 10-15 year old participants. It is recognized that these terms embrace a range of young people.

In this chapter the foundations of the new cultural geographies of childhood are examined, with particular attention paid to those aspects which relate to rural childhoods. The chapter begins by tracing the history of sociological thinking about children and childhoods. The social construction of childhood is investigated and the changing approaches to the sociological study of childhood are discussed. The new sociology of childhood, which has formed the basis for the developing interest in the geographies of children, is assessed, with a particular focus on four sociological dichotomies through which the everyday lived experiences of girls in rural South Northants can be explored: structure and agency; identity and difference; continuity and change; local and global. The development of the new cultural geographies of childhood is reflected upon, and the need for research into the lived experiences of rural children, especially girls, is highlighted.

## **2.2 Social Constructions of Childhood**

It is well established in sociological literature that what it means to be a child is culturally constructed, and that meanings of childhood vary over both space and time (Cox, 1996; Jones and Wallace, 1992; Valentine, 1997c). Recognition that ideas of 'the child' have changed over time was in large measure brought about by the writings of a French historian, Ariès (Alanen, 1994). Ariès' *Centuries of Childhood*, translated and published in 1962, was the first general historical study of childhood (Archard, 1993). Ariès was the first to demonstrate that, although children are present in all cultures, their presence is differently regarded (Esman, 1990; Jenks, 1996a).



The central tenet of Ariès' thesis is that the biological facts of infancy are but the raw material upon which cultures work to fashion a particular version of 'being a child'. Although subsequently criticized for its approach and synthesis (Aitken, 1998a; Archard, 1993; Gittins, 1998; Goldson, 1997; Jenks, 1996a; Pilcher, 1995; Sommerville, 1982), Ariès's work has had an enormous influence on the study of children and childhood. By drawing attention to childhood as something that is socially and historically constructed rather than just a biological state, he gave impetus to the body of historical and sociological research on childhood which has burgeoned since the early 1960s (Gittins, 1998).

In this section, through exploring the ways in which childhood has been and is socially constructed (by adults) in British society, some of the frameworks within which children understand, experience and act out their childhoods are highlighted. First, two dominant concepts of childhood which resonate with contemporary (adult) ideas of what it means to grow up in a rural area are explored: that children are innately innocent (angels) or evil (devils). These concepts extend beyond definitions of a universal child, linking innocence and evil with particular landscapes and spaces. Second, some ideas which have emanated from anthropology and cultural theory texts are explored. The notions of liminality and 'in-betweenness' can be used to aid understanding of how childhood is socially constructed.

### **2.2.1 Devil or Angel?**

Two constructs of childhood have dominated conceptions of childhood since the sixteenth century - the child as the bearer of original sin (devil), and the child as pure and innocent (angel) (Holloway and Valentine, 2000a). Childhood has been a contested concept varying in definition across time and through space, and at different times each of these constructs has dominated popular thinking about childhood. These competing views of childhood extend into modern discourse, as analysis of recent 'media panics' over such constructions of childhood demonstrates. These constructions of childhood are important to this thesis, as constructs of sin and innocence have also been connected to ideas of town and country, with innocence, and in particular childhood innocence, linked to the countryside (Jones, 1999b). (The connections between constructs of childhood innocence and rurality are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, section 3.4.2.)

The first of the modern conceptions of childhood were based on the assumption that evil, corruption and baseness were the primary elements in the constitution of every child (Hendrick, 1997a; James *et al.*, 1998; Jenks, 1996a). Children were seen as the inheritors of original sin (Valentine, 1996a). The role of the adult was thus to constrain the behaviour of the child and suppress anarchistic impulses.

By end of the seventeenth century this view of the child was being re-evaluated. Strong romanticism of original innocence in contemporary novels and poems gave a sentimental portrayal of childhood (Sommerville, 1982). Within the discourse of romanticism nature and the rural were constructed as places of purity and innocence (Williams, 1985), thus the concept of the child was in some respects linked to that of the rural. Conceptualizations of childhood were diverse during the eighteenth century, but gradually a dominant notion of childhood innocence and the innate goodness of the child emerged (Valentine, 1996a). Children were represented as 'little angels' (Jenks, 1996a), understood to be born good and innocent, having qualities of purity, trust, beauty and joy (Gittins, 1998), features which could also be mapped onto constructions of the rural.

In the 1800s and 1900s the image of innocence dominated understandings of the child, however this imagining has been shaken by recent 'media panics' (Valentine, 1996a). In the last decade there has been sensational press reporting of violent crimes committed *against* and *by* children (Springhall, 1998). The murder of two year old James Bulger in 1993 was the stimulus to a broad public debate about the nature of childhood.

The murder of the toddler by two ten year old boys led to the formation of the 'end of innocence' argument. Images of the toddler's abduction from a Merseyside shopping centre were captured by closed circuit television cameras. These images became embedded in the nation's consciousness because the murder which shortly followed was "an act which had been, until now, literally unthinkable" (James and Jenks, 1996, p. 315). The events took place within the conceptual space of childhood which was, prior to this breach, conceived of as innocence enshrined. That children are capable of violence and even murder, is an idea that falls outside traditional formulations of childhood (Gittins, 1998; Jenks, 1996a). The boundaries of childhood needed to be shifted to accommodate a new definition of childhood - the concept of the child had to be redefined so that it once again fitted reality (Asquith, 1996).

In the media an assumption prevailed following the conviction of Jon Venables and Robert Thompson: that the murder signalled the loss of innocence of a previous 'golden age' of childhood (Davis and Bourhill, 1997). The Bulger case demonstrates that notions of childhood are continually reviewed, questioned and contested in British society; that what we understand a child to be today may vary to what we understand a child to be tomorrow. The case destabilized notions of childhood. Conflicting images of children are presented by the media, with 'real' stories found side-by-side with the fictional stories from advertising (Smith, 1995). Thus multiple and contradictory narratives are presented, challenging the cultural constructions of childhood prevalent at any one time and in any one place.

The dominant message in press reporting of the murder of Sarah Payne in July 2000 was that of a shattered rural idyll. Photographic images of the rural environment of West Sussex in which the abduction took place were seen to be iconographically irreconcilable with the attack itself (Harvey, 2000a; 2000b; 2000c; MacKean, 2000). The tragedy in this case was seen not only to be that of the death of a child, but also that such an event could occur in a rural environment.

The attack on Sarah Payne meant that two constructs were destabilized - that children in rural areas are safe and innocent, and that rural areas provide a safe and innocent childhood. These ideas were reconstructed so that dominant discourses about childhood and town and country could remain, with the case seen as so rare in *rural* areas that it could be understood as an anomaly. The notion of the innocent child was reinforced, with the need for adult protection again voiced. In contrast, the setting in which the attack on James Bulger took place, together with the visual images provided by the closed circuit television cameras, helped to locate the 'evil child' within the urban environment.

These cases demonstrate how the construction of childhood continues to vary in British society. Although the circumstances of the deaths of these children differed, the ways in which the media has responded to them shows that the ideas of 'devil' and 'angel' have extended into contemporary discourse. Increased media attention to incidents in which children either present a risk or are at risk has meant that the simple angel-devil constructions of childhood are being debated. It is increasingly recognized that contradictions occur and that childhood cannot be reduced to notions of sin and innocence.

### **2.2.2 Liminality, 'In-betweenness' and Childhood**

As well as noting that constructs of childhood change over time, academics have acknowledged that the experiences of children themselves may vary as they get older. Ideas of liminality, which have emanated from anthropology, have relevance to the ways in which childhood and childhood spaces are explored in this thesis. Using these ideas the lived realities of rural childhood can be deconstructed, with experiences seen as part of a transition from childhood to adulthood. This perspective indicates the fluid nature of childhood, and this fluidity can be linked to the dynamic rural environment.

The concept of liminality was first outlined in Arnold Van Gennep's (1977) seminal text, *The Rites of Passage*, first published in 1909, and was later developed by anthropologist Victor Turner (1969). This perspective has been widely adopted within post-colonial studies and studies of race and identity (Brooker, 1999), yet has particular relevance to understandings of childhood. Van Gennep argued that *rites of passage* accompany every change of place, state, social position and age. According to Van Gennep's conceptualization, important role transitions (such as between childhood and adulthood) generally consist of three phases.

Phase	Characteristics
<b>Phase 1</b>	<b>Comprises symbolic behaviour signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions, or from both.</b>
<b>Separation</b>	<p>Separation often occurs literally in time and space, triggered by some external force or event that cause a major shift in one's roles.</p> <p>Acts of separation are not in themselves completed transitions; they usher in the period of flux and uncertainty known as the liminoid state.</p>
<b>Phase 2</b>	<b>During the 'liminal' period the characteristics of the individual or group are ambiguous, with few or none of the characteristics of the past or coming state present.</b>
<b>Transition</b>	<p>People face the task of reconstructing congruous, integrated self-concepts; they must create new roles or emphasize existing roles to fill the gaps.</p> <p>An important aspect of this state is the tendency to play and experiment with new categories of meaning - 'identity play'.</p>
<b>Phase 3</b>	<b>The passage is concluded, with the individual or group returned to a relatively stable state and, by virtue of this, having rights and obligations towards others which are clearly defined and structured.</b>
<b>Aggregation or Incorporation</b>	<p>Successful incorporation leads a person out of the liminoid state with a revised self-concept.</p> <p>The individual or group is expected to behave in accordance with certain norms and ethical standards expected of those in such social positions.</p>

Table 2.1      *The three phases of Rites of Passage. (Derived from Van Gennep, 1977; Schouten, 1991; Teather, 1999; Turner, 1969.)*

It is the liminal phase that has most interested childhood researchers, with this 'in-betweenness' seen to represent the teenage years in which young people are neither children nor adults. Liminality is seen to involve both the acquisition of a new role, and the renunciation of roles and the demolition of structures - the renunciation of childhood and 'childish' pastimes, and the acquisition of the skills and reasoning required for adulthood to be achieved. Using Van Gennep's ideas, the behaviours and experiences of girls growing up in rural areas can be studied as instances of 'identity play' through which the girls try on and act out new roles in their transitions to adulthood. Through that showing young people explore a variety of roles and identities in their transition to adulthood, Van Gennep shows that multiple realities of childhood exist. With this in mind, the lived experiences of a group of girls in rural South Northants can be understood as comprising multiple realities rather than one universal childhood experience.

Building on these ideas of liminality and in-betweenness, places can be seen as settings for 'identity play' and transition (Alves, 1993; Fasick, 1988; Garsten, 1999; Myerhoff, 1982; Teather, 1999; Winchester *et al.*, 1999). A liminal space is one in which peer groups can re-make the cultural signs and symbols through which identity is defined (Lawrence, 1997; Schouten, 1991). Shields (1991) drew upon ideas of liminality in his analysis of Niagara Falls and Brighton. Shields argued that these places were settings in which the traveller withdrew from the usual structures of society into the special world of the traveller. Likening travel to these locations as part of the ritual of pilgrimage, Shields has shown that in removing the body from the cocoon of everyday life and exposing it to the dangers of the unknown, a state of discontinuity and ambiguity is reached, through which moments of the in-betweenness of liminality are experienced. These ideas can be mapped onto rural childhoods, with places frequented by the girls seen to be sites where transitions and 'identity play' can occur.

In cultural theory the notion of the hybrid has been used to conceptualize in-betweenness. According to Bhabha (1994) the hybrid combines two types or categories which are thought of as distinct from each other, in such a way as to merge their characteristics into a new type, or cause the separation of a single entity into two or more parts which are different from the other. It has been argued that the globalizing processes of late modernity are producing new and transitional forms of hybridity (Lupton, 1999b). These hybrid identities confuse and challenge established ideas about the distinctions between different types of cultural identity. As a result of the continual flux of hybrid identities, difference is neither One nor the Other but something in-between (Bhabha, 1994). Like liminality, the hybrid represents a transitional stage between two distinct identities.

The concept of the hybrid can be used to help understand the worlds of young people. The hybrid represents a transitional stage between childhood and adulthood, a stage in which young people may try out a series of identities. There is a spatial aspect to hybridity as since relations between selves and others are being renegotiated then so too are the meanings of space (Bhabha, 1994). Bhabha refers to this as an 'interstitial space' - a space of discontinuity and disjuncture in which the newness of the hybrid identities can be articulated (Rose, 1995). This idea of in-betweenness being played out over space can be used to examine the place use and behaviour of young people (a hybrid group) who are growing up in the countryside.

### **2.3 The New Sociology of Childhood**

The new sociology of childhood has begun to extend these debates about the concept of childhood. The 1990s saw a rapidly growing body of sociological research into children and childhood (Corsaro, 1997), through concern about the way in which the social sciences have traditionally conceptualized and dealt with 'the child' (James and Prout, 1990).

Recognition that childhood is a socially constructed phenomenon has been accompanied by a change from the 'traditional' approaches of sociological studies of childhood which placed emphasis on the socialization of children through various stages of development (Oakley, 1994). Within the new sociology of childhood researchers are challenging the relative absence of children from the research agenda. Recognizing childhood as a social construction which varies both spatially and temporally (Prout and James, 1997), researchers have made analysis of the social construction of different childhoods central to the research agenda of this new sociology. The construction, contestation and consequences of the sociological phenomenon of children are thus worthy of academic attention (Holloway and Valentine, 2000a). The new sociological studies claim an epistemological break from earlier work, studying children as social actors, as 'human beings' rather than 'human becomings' (Amit-Talai and Wulff, 1995; Brannen and O'Brien, 1996; Christensen and James, 2000c; James *et al.*, 1998; Qvortrup *et al.*, 1994).

This new sociology of childhood has formed the basis of the developing interest in the geographies of children, and provides theoretical frameworks through which the everyday lived experiences of girls growing up in rural South Northants can be investigated. In this section a paradigm shift within childhood research in the social sciences is reviewed and key features of this approach which can aid analysis of the experiences of rural youth are highlighted. Four sociological dichotomies are discussed which present frameworks through which the multiple geographies of childhood can be explored.

### **2.3.1 An Emergent Paradigm**

Rather than being marked by an absence of interest in the study of children, the study of childhood in the social sciences has been marked by their silence (James and Prout, 1997a). There has been a paradigm shift in childhood research, with children repositioned as the subjects rather than the objects of research (Christensen and James, 2000c). The emergent paradigm attempts to give children a voice through regarding children as people worthy of study in their own right. In this emergent sociology of childhood, children are becoming conceptually liberated from passive dependency on adults and elevated to the status of social actors (Brannen and O'Brien, 1996).

James and Prout (1990, pp. 8-9) outlined six key features of this emergent paradigm:

1. Childhood is understood as a social construction. As such it provides an interpretive frame for contextualizing the early years of human life. Childhood, as distinct from biological immaturity, is neither a natural nor universal feature of human groups but appears as a specific structural and cultural component of many societies.
2. Childhood is a variable of social analysis. It can never be entirely divorced from other variables such as class, gender or ethnicity. Comparative and cross-cultural analysis reveals a variety of childhoods rather than a single or universal phenomenon.
3. Children's social relationships and cultures are worthy of study in their own right, independent of the perspective and concern of adults.
4. Children are and must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live. Children are not just passive subjects of social structures and processes.
5. Ethnography is a particularly useful methodology for the study of childhood. It allows children a more direct voice and participation in the production of sociological data than is usually possible through experimental or survey styles of research.
6. Childhood is a phenomenon in relation to which the double hermeneutic of the social sciences is acutely present. That is to say, to proclaim a new paradigm of childhood sociology is also to engage in and respond to the process of reconstructing childhood.

The core features which define this new paradigm are that: childhood should be studied in its own right; children should be the units of observation; children themselves should talk about their own experiences; children should be seen as part of social structure; children should be studied in the present as well as in relation to their future as adults; and that childhood should be seen in an inter-generational context.

James and Prout (1990) argued that childhood is differentiated by variables such as class, gender and ethnicity, and highlight the fact that children growing up in the same location may experience very different childhoods. They show that childhood is place-specific and that it can be identified by the cultural norms and values of a particular society. In so doing, they reveal a multitude of childhoods and show the importance of recognizing difference and diversity in experiences of childhood. In examining girls' experiences of growing up in rural South Northants, this thesis can add to these debates, showing how characteristics such as gender, age and locality overlap to present multiple experiences of childhood.

### 2.3.2 Four Sociological Dichotomies

In *Theorizing Childhood* (1998), James *et al.* have built upon the ideas of the emergent paradigm in the hope of providing an analytical framework which will both consolidate the burgeoning array of childhood studies and indicate pointers for the development of future research into childhood. James *et al.* identified four core sociological dichotomies which can usefully orient thinking about childhood: structure and agency; identity and difference; continuity and change, and local and global (Figure 2.1). These four debates provide frameworks through which the geographies of children can be examined. The dichotomies can provide useful insights into the experiences of children growing up in Britain today. These are drawn upon later in the thesis to aid an understanding of the experiences of girls growing up in the countryside.

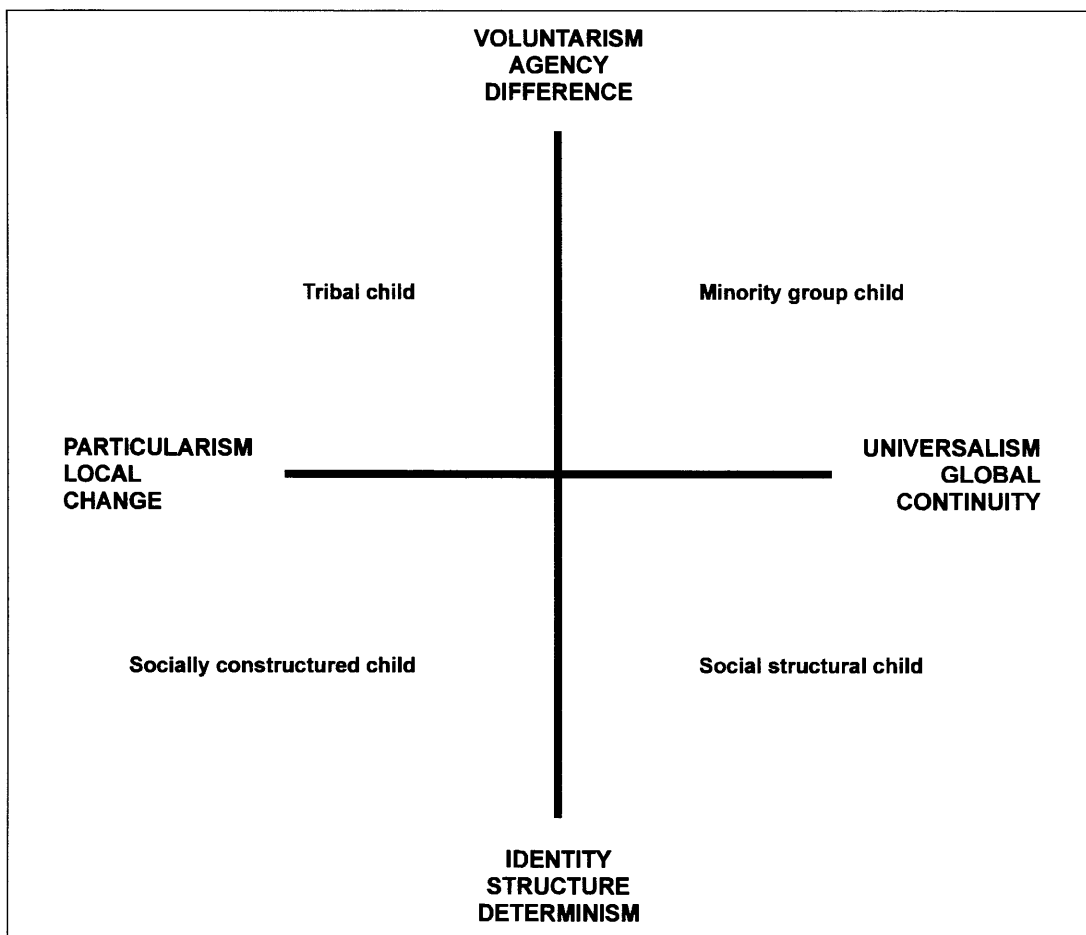


Figure 2.1 *Theoretical field for the social study of childhood.*  
(Source: James *et al.*, 1998, p. 206.)



## *Structure and Agency*

Within social theory these two positions are suspended in a relatively antagonistic fashion. They are seen to be incompatible and the source of many oppositions in accounting for social phenomena (James *et al.*, 1998). Yet real social relationships and their causality dwell perpetually in-between these extremes. Questions raised about children's competencies, rights, responsibilities and needs can be located in the dichotomy between structure and agency (Qvortrup, 1995). There is a sense in much childhood literature that it is adult society which constitutes the structure and the child which constitutes the agent. In this respect the former determines or socializes the latter.

Qvortrup (1997) has argued that societal change since the late nineteenth century has had a profound effect upon the social construction of childhood. He recognized that the ways in which children 'see' the world are in some measure constrained by those adult structures which surround them. Adult values are imprinted on the physical and built environments in which children live, and social constraints are imposed by the adult gaze (Matthews and Limb, 1999). Children mark out their own identities within these structures, and yet these identities are constrained by them. In childhood research, therefore, the ways in which children identify, interpret and respond to these macro-structures and the power relations associated with them are of particular interest (Corsaro, 1997).

In their study of youth transitions and student experiences of further education, Rudd and Evans (1998) identified three sets of structures which provide a framework through which young people act as social agents: area influences; social dimensions of gender, ethnicity and social class; and family background and peer group influences. These sets of structural influences can be used to examine girls' experiences of growing up in rural Northamptonshire. There is a spatial dimension to these sets, ranging from the overarching area influences which structure the girls' lives in similar measures, to the unique individual structures of family life.

The first set of structures, area influences, can be used to address the question of whether place - and specifically the rural - matters. Through examining the ways in which the rural is popularly understood in British society, and the ways in which locals describe and react to the behaviours and attitudes which structure their everyday life, the role of place can be explored. Area influences can be disentangled, and specifically rural (local) structures identified, in order to examine whether there are unique structures which regulate girls' experiences of growing up in rural South Northants.

The second set of structures, social dimensions, can be used to examine the influence of gender, race and class on children's experiences of rural childhoods. Rather than viewing the experiences of children in rural areas as representing a cultural universal, this set of structures enables rural childhoods to be deconstructed across various social dimensions. The impact of gender, race and class upon experiences of growing up can be examined both in terms of individual structures and their cumulative impact. In exploring multiple childhoods in rural South Northants this set of structures enables questions to be asked about whether gender and age matter.

The final set of structures, family background and peer group influences, creates an unique structure for each individual. Through exploring family background, the role of parenting strategies in creating ways of growing up in rural Northamptonshire can be determined. Acknowledging that girls' attitudes towards their rural upbringing may be influenced by those played out through their peer group, the importance of social structures created by the girls' themselves can be investigated.

Bourdieu (1977) developed the notion of the 'habitus' to aid understanding of how social worlds are structured. According to Bourdieu (1977; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), the habitus is a series of socially-mediated directives for behaviour that is bounded by invisible and implicit social understandings of what is acceptable. These directives form the 'rules of the neighbourhood'. Cahill (2000) has argued that the idea of the habitus can aid understandings of young people's worlds. Building upon Bourdieu's ideas, Cahill has suggested that adults impose this set of rules upon young people's behaviour to prevent disruption to the social order, maintaining the status quo. The notion of the habitus can therefore be used to explore conflicts between adults' and young people's use of space in rural Northamptonshire.

### *Identity and Difference*

The basis of this dichotomy is within processes of establishing *identity with* and *difference from* within the continuous issue of self and status definition and redefinition (James *et al.*, 1998). Questions of identity and difference can be seen in traditional accounts of childhood, and figure most prominently in those centred on childhood and becoming. There is a growing recognition that rather than there being an universal experience of childhood there are "plural childhoods" that are shaped and differentiated by the inequalities of age, gender, class, ethnicity and location (James and James, 2001, p. 214).

Children have different identities and these create different geographies (Wyn and White, 1997). One possible way of understanding diversity is to disentangle the ways in which place may impinge upon young people's lives. The rural is a convenient 'collective' that summarizes the essences in which some places may be different to other places. Identities may be formed to some extent through the localities in which people are based (Massey, 1998; Robinson, 2000).

Using the dichotomy of identity-difference as a starting point, the geographies of girls growing up in rural South Northants can be examined as different in a number of ways. The location in which the girls live can be constructed as different, with the characteristics of place seen to help create a diversity of identities. The rural can be constructed as different to the urban, with identity formation seen to vary accordingly. Building upon this notion of difference between town and country, the rural can also be seen to be diverse, with differences between settlements (such as location, population, economic base etc.) being acknowledged as forming the basis of multiple rural realities. Through seeing the rural as a site of difference, the experiences of girls growing up in rural South Northants can be explored with regard to both the rural (as opposed to urban) characteristics of the location and the differences between settlements. This perspective enables the childhoods of girls in rural Northamptonshire to be seen as diverse, comprising multiple realities.

This dichotomy has particular relevance to the focus of this thesis, recognizing that there may be differences in identity between and within rural areas, and between individuals. It can be used to help to deconstruct the experiences of girls growing up in rural South Northants in order to determine the extent to which place matters in creating difference and identity. This perspective presents a framework through which the importance of 'rural' as a defining characteristic of childhood experiences can be examined.

### *Continuity and Change*

Children have traditionally been regarded as an index of this dimension (James *et al.*, 1998; Qvortrup, 1994). Children have been understood to exude a newness and forward-looking perspective, while simultaneously providing us as adults with a strong and lasting sense of ourselves and our aspirations for the future (James and Prout, 1990; Jenks, 1996a; Sommerville, 1982). However, using 'cultural reproduction' as a tool we can consider both continuity and change in social experience, and regard children as 'beings' and as instances of generations (James *et al.*, 1998).

Working within this perspective researchers can explore the extent to which differences in experiences of childhood apparent in the past are becoming more or less emphatic. Comparisons can be made between localities, and between ‘types’ of children classified according to variables such as gender, class and ethnicity, in order to determine how widely instances of continuity and change can be applied.

Ideas of continuity have special relevance with regard to rural childhoods. Notions of the rural idyll are founded on ideas of permanence and continuity (Bunce, 1994; Little and Austin, 1996; Matless, 1998; Ward, 1990b; see also Chapter 3, sections 3.3 and 3.4). Rather than understanding rural life as fluid and dynamic, the rural is seen to be a site of tradition, unchanging in the modern world (Halfacree, 1995; Jones, 1997a; Valentine, 1997a). Within this idyll, rural children are seen to experience a ‘golden age of childhood’ denied to those living in urban areas (Jones, 1997a). Children are seen to participate in the games, adventures and ways of life experienced by rural children in previous generations.

Using this continuity-change perspective, the everyday lived experiences of girls growing up in rural Northamptonshire can be (re)constructed. These modern day childhoods can be compared to the rural childhood idyll and ideas of past rural childhoods in order to determine how British rural society is changing, and how the experiences of children within rural society change with this (see also Jones, 1997a).

### ***Local and Global***

As the constraints of geography recede and the notion of the world as a single place becomes closer in reality, the questions asked about identity and difference become more directed (James *et al.*, 1998). There is an increasing tendency for international politics and economics, and the exchange of information, to dominate the experience of being human (Massey, 1994). Children have often been seen as symbols in relation to issues of social identity. With moves towards globalization children have become a source of concerns about the nature of identity in a rapidly changing world (Aitken, 2001b; James *et al.*, 1998). This dichotomy places the universalization of childhood in vivid relief with its particularity.

Within this perspective childhood research is centred upon the notion of from where children acquire their identity (see, for example, Desforges, 1998; Holloway and Valentine, 2000c; Katz, 1993; 1998; Nilan, 1999; O'Donnell and Sharpe, 2000). Researchers question the extent to which the local matters. Holloway and Valentine (2000c) used notions of global and local in their analysis of children's use of the internet. They argued that the increasing interconnectivity of economies and societies has been stimulated by rapid developments in information and computer technologies, and encouraged further development of these technologies. Holloway and Valentine argued that these global processes have impact at a local level, with the ability to access such resources being spatially uneven.

In the context of rural childhoods this debate is particularly salient. The particularity of a rural experience can be explored by examining local and global influences on identity formation. The local-global debate enables researchers to question whether place matters, and move on to explore how the contingency effects of place cut across rural childhoods. In this research the local-global dichotomy is used to explore the extent to which the experiences of girls growing up in rural Northamptonshire depend upon their localities, and the extent to which their experiences depend on a national (urban) culture with which young people may identify. The roles of peers and the media in influencing young girls' identities are considered.

These four key sociological dichotomies can usefully orient thinking about childhood and can provide useful insights into the experiences of children growing up in Britain today. A number of sociologists have used these perspectives to explore the dissonance which exists between children's own experiences of being a child and the institutional form which childhood takes (Jenks, 1996a). There has been a theoretical focus on the plurality of childhoods, a plurality evidenced not only cross-culturally but also within cultures, and calls have been made for a shift of emphasis away from universal assumptions about identical children in homogeneous environments (Aitken and Herman, 1997; Miles, 2000; Oakley, 1994; Qvortrup, 1994). It has been suggested that, at the very least, the experience of childhood is fragmented and stratified by age, gender, class and ethnicity, by urban or rural locations, and by identities cast for children through ill-health or disability (Aitken and Wingate, 1993; Jenks, 1996a; Matthews and Limb, 1999; Wyn and White, 1997).

## 2.4 The 'New' Cultural Geographies of Childhood

The needs and interests of children and children's perspectives have not been a dominant research focus within geography. Until recently, children as a social grouping have been largely absent from the research and writing of academic geographers. Philo (1997) has argued that since children are not involved with important material landscape effects - they do not lay out fields, plan towns or run factories - they have seemed insignificant as a social group. As a result children have been almost invisible to the geographer's gaze (Philo, 1997). According to Aitken (1994), however, this invisibility can be attributed to the fact that geographic research on children has been 'seen but not heard' and regarded as the special concern of only a certain segment of the academic community.

In the early 1990s geographers were criticized for neglecting the worlds of children in their studies (James, 1990; 1991a; Sibley, 1991; Winchester, 1991). James (1990) argued that children have been hidden from geography, as well as from other disciplines, for too long. She claimed that little effort had been made to investigate the role that children play in society other than in terms of their adjustments to an adult-dominated and adult-orientated world. In the early 1970s Bunge had identified the need to include children in geographical studies, seeing children as the largest minority group (Bunge, 1973). He devised research programmes for a would-be geography of children, looking at those environmental forces influencing children's lives, but little came of these admirable intentions (James, 1990).

Although a significant body of research into children's attachment to place and use of space was carried out during the 1970s and 1980s (Blaut *et al.*, 1970; Blaut and Stea, 1971; Downs and Liben, 1987; Gould and White, 1974; Hart, 1979; 1984; Matthews, 1984; 1987; Moore, 1976; Saarinen, 1973), children were notably absent from other areas of geography (Valentine and McKendrick, 1997). During the late 1980s this situation began to change, with geographical research on children becoming more widespread, diverse and theoretically sophisticated (Aitken and Wingate, 1993; Katz, 1993). The focus of research changed in recognition of the importance of multiple childhoods and differences in the social and spatial constructions of these.

During the 1990s cultural geography underwent a considerable resurgence (Anderson and Gale, 1992; Jackson, 1989; Philo, 1991). With this came a growing appreciation that society comprises a plurality of social groups, each of which has its own 'ways of seeing'. This 'cultural turn' helped to define new areas of interest and inquiry (Matthews and Limb, 1999; Philo, 1992; Pile and Thrift, 1995; Sibley, 1995b). Within this new cultural geography, researchers have become concerned with discovering how different social groups make sense of their everyday worlds (Matthews, 1995).

This concern with the geographies of 'others' was the key determining factor in the development of the new cultural geographies of childhood (Valentine, 1996b). The recognition that society is not a homogeneous unit, that different groups exist within society and that these groups occupy unequal positions of power and autonomy, revived interest in the marginalization of children as a social group (Matthews and Limb, 1999). This thesis is part of the growing body of research which aims to debate, deconstruct and explore the everyday experiences of children. According to Holloway and Valentine (2000a), there are three ways in which the geographical study of childhood can aid our understanding: illustrating the importance of place and underlining the fact that constructions of childhood are spatially specific; providing a focus on those everyday spaces in and through which children's identities are made and remade; and elucidating the links between childhood as a discursive construction and a variety of spatial discourses.

In 1981 Hill and Michelson proposed that a geography of urban children should be developed in which children and their geographies should receive attention apart from the geographies of the adult world. They argued that:

"Most generalizations espoused by geographers pertain to the adult world. Children come in different sizes and shapes and with differing capabilities, but it is theoretically, empirically, and practically useful to consider the environments that concern children, quite apart from the assumptions made and conclusions drawn from adult behaviour and experience" (p. 194).

They stated that many of the premises of geographical studies rest upon assumptions of the norms of adult behaviour and experience. Showing the sheer 'otherness' of children in geography (Philo, 1997), Hill and Michelson's work was one of the first of the new geographies of childhood.

Building upon the themes and ideas which have emerged since Hill and Michelson's work, Valentine (1997d) suggested that researchers need to look beyond a simple notion of children's geographies as being those apart from the adult world, and instead recognize both 'adult' and 'child' to be unstable and fluid performances. Valentine argued that a re-invigorated geography which recognizes children's competence would be better positioned to challenge those social discourses concerning public space which continue to marginalize and exclude children. By valuing children's contribution to, and active participation in, public life such geographies could challenge adults' spatial hegemony, promoting radical interventions in public policy with the aim of creating and maintaining spaces which are accessible to all, not just adults (Valentine, 1997d; see also Matthews, 1995; Matthews *et al.*, 1998a).

Wyn and White (1997) have also called for a reconceptualization of children's geographies, recognizing that in developing an understanding of young people which is based on the realities of their lived experiences, an approach which moves beyond discipline boundaries is needed. Wyn and White proposed that the focus of childhood research should be more on the connections and links between different aspects of young people's lives.

There is now a well-established and rapidly expanding body of geographical work on and with children, and an ever growing celebration of difference amongst children (Valentine, 2000). This thesis is grounded in these new cultural geographies of childhood. In this section the development of the new geographies of childhood is examined. The distinction between the 'geography of children' and 'children's geographies' is explored, and the subject matter of the thesis defined within these parameters. Using Matthews and Limb's (1999) Agenda for the Geography of Children as a starting point, the importance of *geographical* studies of childhood is discussed, and an argument put forward for the *geographical* study of the everyday experiences of girls growing up in rural South Northants.

#### **2.4.1 The 'Geography of Children' and 'Children's Geographies'**

Hart (1984) has drawn a distinction between two types of geographical childhood research. The 'geography of children' relates to studies of children's spatial behaviour (Hart, 1984). It comprises the spatial distribution of variables and factors which affect the well-being of children. Variables such as child-care, education, family structure, and the incidence of poverty, as well as indicators of child mortality, health and housing are the focus of such research (Aitken, 1994). All four of the sociological dichotomies outlined above can be applied to the 'geography of children', with the implications of differences in the spatial distribution of variables understood in relation to positions within these dichotomies.

'Children's geographies', according to Hart (1984), comprise studies of children's spatial cognition. The significant body of research carried out during the 1970s and 1980s into children's cognitive mapping skills falls into this category (for instance, Blaut *et al.*, 1970; Downs and Liben, 1987; Gould and White, 1974; Hart, 1979; Matthews, 1984; 1987; Moore, 1976; Saarinen, 1973). 'Children's geographies' raise questions about how children grow into the world and develop a cultural, coherent self (Aitken, 1994).



The terms have also been used to indicate a focus on structure and agency, with the 'geography of children' concerned with structure and 'children's geographies' concerned with agency (Aitken, 1994; Matthews and Limb, 1999; Philo, 1997). Aitken (1994) has argued that the new geographical studies of childhood encompass children's exploration of the self (agency) within an adult-controlled environment (structure) which constantly conspires to put children in their place. Such research may explore the social, economic and racial contexts of children's development and how these contexts are mediated by and across space (Aitken, 1994). The extent to which political and economic circumstances constrain or enhance a child's development also may be examined. This approach deems the everyday experiences of place that mould children's lives worthy of study. This thesis focuses on such everyday geographies.

Hart's (1984) distinction between different types of geographical childhood study initiated a useful debate during the emergence of the new cultural geographies of childhood. Hart drew attention to the ways in which geographers could explore children's worlds. As the new geographies of childhood have developed the distinction between these two types of study has become blurred, with the terms used interchangeably. For instance, Matthews and Limb (1999) have presented an agenda for 'geography of children' which encompasses both of Hart's categories.

#### **2.4.2. Defining an Agenda for the Geography of Children**

Matthews and Limb (1999) have argued that there is "only a limited development of a solidly grounded social and cultural geography prepared to conceptualize children as a neglected social grouping undergoing various forms of sociospatial marginalization" (p. 61). With this in mind they defined an agenda for the geography of children which draws upon earlier studies, as well as work being undertaken by feminist and critical geographers and ideas from sociology, anthropology and cultural studies. In so doing they help to define new areas of interest and inquiry within geography which build upon the ideas of difference and diversity central to the 'new' cultural geography.

Matthews and Limb suggested that there is a need to investigate the environment as children ‘see it’, as only then do they become full and integrated users of places. In so doing they demonstrated the importance of *geographical* studies of childhood. They proposed an agenda which is based upon a set of seven generic propositions which highlight different aspects of children’s relationships with their physical and built environments:

1. children’s ‘ways of seeing’ differ from those of adults;
2. children’s place use differs from that of adults;
3. children’s free-range differs from that of adults;
4. children’s environmental fears and sense of danger differ from those of adults;
5. children’s place feelings differ from those of adults;
6. children’s relationship to environmental decision-making differs from that of adults;
7. children’s democratic responsibility differs from that of adults.

One of the most important contributions that geography can make to the new social studies of childhood is to illustrate the importance of place (Holloway and Valentine, 2000a). The emphasis of geographical work on place is also useful in underlining the fact that constructions of childhood are spatially specific (Holloway and Valentine, 2000a). Each of these seven generic propositions can be used to demonstrate the relevance of a geographical study of the everyday lived experiences of girls growing up in rural South Northants.

*children’s ‘ways of seeing’  
differ from those of adults*

Assumptions are made by adults about what environments children need. The assumptions made by parents moving from urban to rural areas have been well documented (Bolton and Chalkley, 1990; Halfacree, 1994; 1995; Newby, 1985), yet the realities of children’s experiences in rural environments, and how these match up to adult assumptions, have not been investigated.

*children’s place use differs  
from that of adults*

The places and facilities used by children in rural areas are often shared with adults. Children and adults may use these places in different ways and for different purposes. Through examining the experiences of girls in rural South Northants, differences in children’s and adults’ conceptualizations of place use can be examined and instances of collision and conflict explored.

*children's free-range differs  
from that of adults*

The free-range of children and the types of spaces which they may enter are often more restricted than those of adults. Children in rural areas are perceived to have great spatial freedom (Aitken, 1994; Jones, 1997a). Through examining the free-range of girls in rural South Northants, the realities of children's spatial freedom, and the limits placed upon this by family members and other adults can be gauged.

*children's environmental  
fears and sense of danger  
differ from those of adults*

In their everyday lives children commonly encounter threats which often go unnoticed by adults, and many hazards presented to children are not hazards in later (adult) life. In this thesis the real and perceived fears, threats and dangers encountered by girls in rural Northamptonshire are reviewed.

*children's place feelings  
differ from those of adults*

Children and adults often differ in the ways in which they see, feel about and react to places. Thus their perceptions of appropriate place use and environmental planning are unlikely to coincide. By examining how girls in rural South Northants feel about and react to local places, suggestions can be made as to how facilities and environmental planning can be developed in order to make public spaces accessible to all, not just the adult population.

*children's relationship to  
environmental  
decision-making differs  
from that of adults*

In many environments children's participation in local decision-making is limited. Studying the leisure wants and needs of girls in rural Northamptonshire, comparisons can be made between what adults deem is appropriate for girls and what the girls themselves desire.

*children's democratic  
responsibility differs from  
that of adults*

Involving children in the design and management of their local environment is an important step in recognizing children as citizens who have competence and value. In this thesis the ways children think about their environment is examined.

Using the agenda set out by Matthews and Limb (1999), many facets of the geographies of girls growing up in rural South Northants can be investigated. Building upon the adult-child construction set out in this agenda and conceptualizing the categories of 'child' and 'adult' as fluid and unstable (Valentine, 1997d), a multitude of geographies can be identified. In these multiple childhood geographies (Matthews *et al.*, 1998a) the everyday experiences of girls growing up in rural Northamptonshire can be understood to reflect difference and diversity amongst children.

## 2.5 Invisible Geographies of the Rural Experience

According to Oldman (1994), childhood can be thought of as 'invisible' in three ways. Firstly, there is the subsumption of *information* about children in Western societies under categories that relate to adults or the institutions that adults control (Sgritta and Saporiti, 1989). Secondly, there is a hegemony of *perspectives* on childhood which reduce the child to a 'human becoming' detached from the social life of which he/she is manifestly a part. Thirdly, there is an absence of systematic information on the *experience* of childhood in any given society.

The new sociology and geographies of childhood have made children more 'visible' by tackling these issues. Through exploring the invention of childhood, researchers have highlighted the fact that understandings of the child vary across time and space. In so doing they have drawn attention to the construction and reconstruction of childhood, and have portrayed children as 'human beings' rather than 'human becomings'. The theoretical developments detailed by James and Prout (1990) and James *et al.* (1998) have facilitated research into the experiences of childhood, and led to calls for a shift of emphasis away from an universal childhood towards a plurality of childhoods. It is within this context that the new cultural geographies of childhood have emerged, and some 'invisible' geographies of childhood identified.

Recently scholars interested in the social study of childhood have begun:

“to take more seriously than hitherto the importance of diverse spaces (types of setting for interaction), places (specific sites of meaning), environments (surroundings full of nature and humanity) and landscapes (visible scenes and prospects). These scholars have emphasized the *physical* aspects of these geographies, as given by the material configurations of natural and human worlds found in the forms and layouts of forests, fields, farms, streets and buildings.... they have also gone on to emphasize both the *social* aspects of these geographies, their close connections with the workings of society as it touches on the lives of children, and the *imaginative* aspects, their status in lived experiences, feelings, stories, hopes and fears of children themselves” (Philo, 2000a, p. 245).

Recognizing the diverse spaces, places, environments and landscapes of the rural, this thesis explores the social and imaginative aspects of the everyday experiences of a group of girls growing up in South Northants.

In the early 1990s Philo drew attention to the paucity of studies on rural childhoods (Philo, 1992). In his review of Ward’s (1990b) *The Child in the Country*, he identified the value of “uncovering something of the worlds inhabited by rural children” (p. 198). However, nearly ten years later there are still few studies which have explicitly focused on what it is like to grow up in the countryside, particularly in the United Kingdom today. Despite Philo’s observations there is still a paucity of studies of the geographies of children in the countryside, especially that which draws upon their disparate lifestyles (Matthews *et al.*, 2000c).

Few studies have examined girls’ use of outdoor environments, particularly in rural settings. Girls’ experiences have often been ignored or romanticized, and those studies which have explored girls’ outdoor behaviour have focused on the extraordinary rather than the ordinary (Breitbart, 1998; McRobbie, 1991; Pearce, 1996). It is as if girls’ use of outdoor space is of little significance and so justifiably ignored, or is something that concerns only a minority of troublesome ‘others’ (Matthews *et al.*, 2000c). The predominance of studies of urban male childhoods has hidden those geographies of girls growing up in rural areas.

In the context of the burgeoning research coming out of the new sociology and geographies of childhood, this thesis draws attention to the invisible geographies of children’s rural experiences. Focusing on the everyday experiences of girls in rural South Northamptonshire, the thesis begins to breach gaps in our knowledge of the geographies of rural children and of the outdoor geographies of girls. This chapter has set out a rationale for the geographical study of children. In Chapter 3 attention is paid to the need for research on rural childhoods.

## Chapter 3 Investigating Country Childhoods

### 3.1 Introduction

Although there has been a recent surge of academic interest in the study of young people within the social sciences, much of this research has been conducted within the urban environment (Matthews *et al.*, 2000c), implying that childhood is entirely a metropolitan experience (Chambers, 1986). Young people, it seems, are ‘invisible’ in the rural landscape, although as Philo (1992) argued in his seminal review of Ward’s (1990b) *The Child in the Country*, there is much to be gained by “uncovering something of the worlds inhabited by rural children” (p. 198). Although this has led to increased attention being paid to the diversity of young people’s experiences, there remains a paucity of studies of children living in the countryside (Matthews *et al.*, 2000c).

Those investigations, whether from the standpoint of rural geography or the sociology of childhood, which have considered rural young people exist mainly as isolated papers (Cooke, 1995). The majority of research on rural young people has been carried out by rural or youth agencies (for example, Callaghan and Dennis, 1997; Couchman, 1994; Davis and Ridge, 1997; Phillips and Skinner, 1994; Rural Development Commission, 1998b; Streich, 1999) and has generally taken the form of fact-finding investigations. These studies are valuable contributions to an understanding of rural childhoods and children’s lifestyles, yet these are studies *on* not *with* children - the voices of children themselves are missing (Matthews *et al.*, 2000c). Furthermore, such work is neither theoretically robust nor does it feed into our understanding of the processes and meanings of growing up.

To place this study into context, this chapter begins by defining ‘the rural’. Notions of the rural idyll are investigated, and social constructions of the country childhood idyll are examined. Studies of children in the countryside are reviewed in an attempt to disentangle (adult) notions of country childhoods and the experiences of those children living in rural areas.

## 3.2 Defining ‘the Rural’

The concept of ‘the rural’ is a slippery one (Ilbery, 1998). Definitions of the rural are manifold (Cloke and Thrift, 1994; Phillips, 1998d), although Halfacree (1993) suggests that they can be grouped in four ways: descriptive definitions; socio-cultural definitions; the rural locality; and social representations of space.

### 3.2.1 Descriptive Definitions

Halfacree (1993) has argued that various forms of socio-spatial data can be used to produce descriptive definitions of the rural. This empirical method of defining the rural focuses upon observable and measurable data; it accepts that the rural exists and is concerned with identifying those parameters that define it (Pratt, 1996). Halfacree (1993) provided evidence of descriptive definitions based on statistical parameters, administrative boundaries, built-up areas, functional regions, agricultural land and population size and density.

Cloke’s (1977) Index of Rurality for England and Wales is most frequently cited as a descriptive definition (Ilbery, 1998). This classification was based upon sixteen statistical variables derived from census data and embraced employment, population, migration, housing conditions, land use and remoteness. From these data Cloke was able to create a simple quartile classification, enabling places to be described as *extreme rural*, *intermediate rural*, *non-rural* or *extreme non-rural*. Cloke’s index enables comparisons to be made over both space and time.

Other examples of descriptive definitions include Cloke and Edwards’ (1986) replication of Cloke’s (1977) Index of Rurality, and Denham and White’s (1998) interpretation of census statistics of urban and rural Britain. The Countryside Agency’s empirical classification of a ‘rural area’ as a census ward with a population of less than 10,000 is now a widely accepted standard on which current rural policy making is based (Countryside Agency, 2001).

Many criticisms can be levelled at these descriptive definitions of the rural. Descriptive methods express the rural rather than define it (Halfacree and Boyle, 1998). These methods fit a definition to what is already considered to be rural, and the sensitivity of the classifications depends upon the choice of variables, the quality of data, the statistical techniques used and the spatial unit (Halfacree, 1993). Being linked to census data of a particular year, the definitions are historically-specific, and the use of such data means that qualitative aspects are neglected. Descriptive definitions are insufficiently grounded in theory, with little or no justification given to explain why particular indicators should be used. Further, the definitions often relate to a specialized use and are not therefore suitable as general measures of rurality (Hoggart, 1990).

### 3.2.2 Socio-cultural Definitions

Socio-cultural definitions of the rural are built on the assumption that population density shapes behaviour and attitudes (Halfacree, 1993; Phillips, 1998d) and have their basis in the work of sociologists from the late nineteenth century, examining the impact of the urbanization process on patterns of human behaviour and interaction. At the heart of this argument was the view that urban and rural societies could be characterized as discrete, dichotomous entities with clear distinctions in terms of their patterns of social consumption, social organizations and relationships. Table 3.1 shows some early rural-urban typologies and their terminologies.

Author	'Rural' or 'non-urban' terminology	'Urban' terminology
Sir Henry Maine (1861)	Status	Contract
Herbert Spencer (1862)	Military	Industrial
Ferdinand Tönnies (1887)	<i>Gemeinschaft</i>	<i>Gesellschaft</i>
Emile Durkheim (1893)	Mechanical solidarity	Organic solidarity
Max Weber (1922)	Traditional	Rational
Robert Redfield (1947)	Folk	Urban
Howard Becker (1950)	Sacred	Secular

Table 3.1 *Rural-urban continuum typologies and terminologies.*  
(Source: Jones, 1973, p. 10.)

For many, the clearest expression of these “so-called theories of contrast” (Reissman, 1964, p. 123) came from the work of Louis Wirth and his seminal paper *Urbanism as a Way of Life*, in which he argued that “the city and the country may be regarded as two poles in reference to one or the other of which all human settlements tend to arrange themselves” (1938, p. 47). Not surprisingly, such a view laid the basis for a succession of community studies (Murdoch and Pratt, 1993), some attempting to place their research along this continuum (for example, Frankenberg, 1966) and others challenging the whole notion of linking place to behaviour.



Indeed, Pahl's research (1966; 1975) into the recomposition of rural communities in London's metropolitan fringe went so far as to suggest that the in-migration of affluent newcomers had introduced sets of national values into rural localities, with patterns of behaviour shaped along lines of social class. Pahl (1966) suggested that "any attempt to tie particular patterns of human relationships to specific geographic milieux is a singularly fruitless exercise" (p. 322).

Geographers have challenged this view, arguing that social change in rural areas, whether in the form of the spread of ideas or movement of population, has both a distinctive time and space dimension and that "access [to facilities and amenities] plays a vital role in differentiating certain movements and activities, whilst size forms the basis for determining face-to-face relationships. In other words there appears to be spatial selectivity of behaviour occurring in the countryside" (Lewis and Maund, 1979, p. 145).

### **3.2.3. The Rural Locality**

Definitions which fall into this category are concerned with defining the rural as a distinct form of locality (Halfacree and Boyle, 1998). Rural localities are defined according to that which makes them rural (Lewis, 1979). In order for a place to be designated as rural, distinctive causal forces must be identified. Three key features are typical of these definitions: a link between rural spaces and primary production; a link between rural spaces and low population densities; and a link between rural spaces and particular forms of both collective and privatized consumption (Halfacree, 1993).

Rural locality definitions emanate from a political-economy perspective which is based on the premise that the forces that mould rural areas are rooted in the underlying political-economy. Society is understood to be increasingly organized over large spatial scales. Rural locality approaches are concerned with identifying socio-economic causal processes (Hoggart, 1988; 1990). The relationship between production and consumption is a key issue, with rural areas increasingly understood to be 'spaces of consumption' as opposed to 'spaces of production' (Phillips, 1998d). Economic structuring and class relations are also significant factors in rural locality definitions (Phillips, 1998c).

As with descriptive and socio-cultural definitions, criticisms have been made of the rural locality viewpoint. Places defined as rural according to this approach do not on the whole represent distinct localities (Cloke and Thrift, 1994). The approach is reductionist and is concerned with grandiose theory at the expense of considering the importance of place. Further, as Hoggart (1990) has argued, local (causal) processes cannot be generalized into rural and urban.

### 3.2.4 Social Representations of Space

Crouch (1992) has argued that there is considerable scope for interpretation of the connections between popular culture, the image of the rural and what people understand the rural to be (see also Cloke, 1994; Jones, 1997b; Little and Austin, 1996). This fourth group of definitions comprises those which view the rural as a social construct and stresses the differences between places and between people. Unlike the 'academic discourses' of the other definitions, these ideas hinge upon 'lay narratives' or 'lay discourses' (Halfacree, 1993; 1995; Jones, 1995). Within geography there is a growing realization of the need to study people's accounts of the form and context of their daily lives (Cloke and Thrift, 1994; Crouch, 1992; Halfacree, 1993; Jones, 1995). This approach stems from the observation that "the rural and its synonyms are *words and concepts understood and used by people in everyday talk*" (Halfacree, 1993, p. 29, emphasis in original).

Lay discourses are uniquely person, group and place based (Jones, 1997b). Unlike academic discourses, they are shaped by the particular circumstances or locales in which people live and so are much more sensitive to contingency effects (Jones, 1995). Lay definitions of the rural are complex and often contradictory, lacking the consistency of academic discourses (Jones, 1995; Phillips, 1998d). Furthermore, lay discourses may even contradict academic discourses with, for example, some locations considered 'rural' within lay discourses yet falling outside the scope and bounds of academic (rural) classifications (Jones 1997b).

Although lay discourses may not exhibit the apparent academic 'rigour' of the other definitions, they do provide a 'common-sense' underpinning to interpretation and offer a glimpse of the diversity of the 'rural experience' (Halfacree, 1993). There is a growing recognition of the necessity of studying people's accounts of their everyday lives - rural researchers have often neglected 'the ordinary' when attempting to disentangle the meanings of rural space (Halfacree, 1993).

### **3.2.5 Defining the Rural in this Study**

Although this study is sensitive to all of these definitions, the term rural is interpreted largely as a social construct and is defined principally in terms of the fourth approach outlined above. In so doing, recognition is given to the complex and unique interactions of person, group and place. Individuals' own accounts of the structure and content of their everyday lives are considered. Within rural geography there has been a tendency for researchers to assume that members of a particular social group will perceive and value their local environment in similar ways (Phillips, 2001). There is now a growing recognition that the rural is understood in different ways by different people: that an individual's own interests, beliefs and background may influence their perceptions. Phillips (2001) has called for more research into these complex 'obese ruralities'. In this study some 'obese ruralities' are considered. The research develops from the premise that just as there is diversity in perceptions of the rural, there is diversity in people's experiences of the rural, and that differences may exist in the ways young people understand their local rural environment.

It has been argued that 'rural' is not a term used widely outside academic circles (Jones, 1995; Pratt, 1996), with preferred nomenclature either 'country' or 'countryside'. In this research, the term 'rural' is used to refer to a location or an experience as understood in academic text; the terms 'country' and 'countryside' are used to indicate lay understandings or experiences.

### **3.3 The Rural Idyll**

Pratt (1996) has stated that we should be aware of the 'multiplicity of meanings' that may be bound up with the concept of the rural - that language is invested with many meanings. Using a cultural approach which explores lay narratives of the rural it can be argued that although the rural may have a multiplicity of meanings, there exists a popular 'myth' of the rural within which particular landscapes, occupations and social structures are popularly perceived to be rural (Crouch, 1992). This rural myth is also known as the 'rural idyll'.

Nostalgia for pastoral golden ages - a rural idyll - is not new. It is intricately bound up with the development of modern urban civilization (Bunce, 1994; Scutt and Bonnett, 1996; Short, 1991; Short, 1992) although, as Williams (1985) has argued, perceptions of the city and countryside in Britain, as portrayed in the literature, have varied widely through time, with the same descriptions being assigned to both environments at different, or even the same, periods of history. However, he observed that at times of great crisis “the temptation is to reduce the historical variety of the forms of interpretation to what are loosely called symbols or archetypes” (p. 289) in which the rural equates to innocence, authenticity, communion with nature, tranquillity and harmony.

Following this line of argument, the rural idyll can be defined using both ‘pro-rural’ and ‘anti-urban’ factors. Pro-rural definitions express qualities of the rural which are understood to be distinctively rural (for example, communion with nature); anti-urban definitions make reference to the non-urban aspects of the countryside (for example, less traffic). Ideas of rural utopia and urban distopia also contribute to our understandings of the rural idyll. (This theme is further discussed below with reference to rural utopia childhoods and urban distopia childhoods - section 3.4.2. See also Jones, 1997a; 1997b.)

According to Cloke (1994), the rural idyll is constructed at three levels. *National level* constructs draw upon meanings of a timeless and natural landscape. The countryside becomes part of the national identity and is an expression of natural homeland or territory. *Regional level* constructs of the rural idyll influence the behaviour and expectations of rural people. Tourism marketing, political identities and literary and media representations reinforce a sense of cultural belonging (for example, Wordsworth Country, Constable Country, Shakespeare’s County). This ‘culture industry’ perpetuates images of a rural idyll, and where idealized rural spaces have become centres of tourist consumption, the imagined and the real are often absorbed into each other to create a ‘packaged’ rural experience for both residents and tourists (Mordue, 1999). *Local level* constructs of rurality are associated with different experiences of and strategies for living in and adapting to rural places. Local differences in, for example, landscape, heritage or organization contribute to different experiences of belonging and cultural affinity in rural lifestyles in particular places (Cloke *et al.*, 1998). The following discussion of the rural idyll draws upon each of these constructs.

Bell (1997) has argued that the rural idyll equates with tranquillity, innocence, communion with nature, 'authentic' community life and a place of retreat from the quickening pace of urban living. It is useful to look at some of these aspects of the rural idyll in more detail in order to understand better the sorts of issues tied up with lay discourses of the rural.

The contemporary myth of the countryside comprises ideas of a less hurried lifestyle where people follow the seasons more than the stock market; where people have more time for one another and exist in an 'organic' community where people have a place and an authentic role (Short, 1991). Within this rural idyll the countryside is understood to be a refuge from modernity, with rural areas viewed as "islands of stability in a frenetic capitalist world" (Murdoch and Day, 1998, p. 191). The rural idyll incorporates ideas of a timeless, stable and enduring sanctuary from the city; a place that is detached from contemporary culture and instead firmly anchored in a vision of the past (Scutt and Bonnett, 1996). The rural idyll is caught up with notions of rapid (urban) change, with country life perceived to be opposite to urban life. The rural idyll conjures up images of the agricultural landscapes of southern England rather than the 'wilder' upland landscapes of the north (Mordue, 1999); the countryside of the idyll is well-ordered pastoral-agricultural rather than remote wilderness.

Newby (1985) has suggested that the rural is seen to be 'authentic', to be 'real' in comparison with urban life. He pointed to many aspects of the rural idyll which show this desire for authenticity - a desire for 'real' natural landscapes, 'real' communities and 'real' relationships with the land. Ideas of authenticity can be linked with those of the rural being the 'true' face of the nation, the homeland. 'Country' is a powerful word as it can mean both nation and rural land (Williams, 1985). The word evokes images of the rural as the scene of national harmony, peace and stability - a backward glance to the traditions that bond people to their territory (Short, 1991). The English countryside has become an image of the nation, the 'green and pleasant land' of Blake's *Jerusalem*. Although most people's experience is an urban one, the ideology of England and Englishness is rural (Scutt and Bonnett, 1996). The countryside has become the image of England, to the exclusion of all other images.

The cultures of national identity inherent in the rural idyll filter the acceptability of particular ideologies, gender roles, ethnicities and sexual preferences (Cloke *et al.*, 1998). Hence the rural idyll is one of heterosexual and monogamous relationships (Bell and Valentine, 1995; Valentine, 1997b) and of 'anglocentric' culture rather than the multiculturalism increasingly seen in Britain's cities (Murdoch and Pratt, 1997). The rural idyll conjures up the image of a white landscape populated by white people (Agyeman, 1989); a homogeneous social space, a 'purified' landscape, a 'zone of Sameness' where diversity is discouraged.

In the rural idyll everyone knows their place and there are 'natural' gender differences which help prescribe this place (Rose, 1993). Studies of rural gender relations, the domestic and rural idylls and the day-to-day experiences of rural women have been carried out since the late 1970s (for example, Agg and Phillips, 1998; Dahlström, 1996; Davidoff *et al.*, 1979; Hughes, 1997b; Leckie, 1996; Little, 1987; 1997a; Little and Austin, 1996; Middleton, 1986; Stebbing, 1984), and many suggest that women's role within the rural idyll is almost entirely domestic. Women in this (rural) domestic idyll are seen to be at the centre of the home. More recent work expands upon such ideas. According to Scutt and Bonnett (1996), for example, rural living has been recast within a middle-class fantasy of stable nuclear families embedded in 'authentic' communities. Gender roles within the rural idyll are thus tied-up with broader notions of 'ideal' family life and 'ideal' social life.

The rural idyll is not a static image but a dynamic, changing concept (Mingay, 1989). Each generation sees what it wants to see in the land - romantic beauty, nostalgic traces of a rustic past, a place of peace, an escape from modernity. Notions of the rural idyll colour our ideas both of the rural and the urban. Praise of the countryside through the rural idyll can be viewed as a criticism of urban society and urban life.

### **3.4 Social Constructions of the Rural Childhood Idyll**

Little and Austin (1996) have suggested that the rural idyll is created *by adults for adults*. An integral aspect of the idyll is the rural childhood idyll. Rural children are popularly understood to be able to run freely across fields and through woods, being able to explore distant hills and forests (Aitken, 1994), where they develop a close association with the 'natural' environment in which they live. Representations of rural childhoods in literature ('rural writings'), the media and adult recollections (nostalgia) contribute to the development of this 'myth'.

#### **3.4.1 'Rural Writings'**

Many of the most durable and stereotypical images of the countryside (and country childhoods) come from the literature of our childhood (Bunce, 1994; Jones, 1997a; Scutt and Bonnett, 1996; Ward, 1990b). The rural idyll is reflected in both stories *about* country childhoods and stories *for* childhood (Jones, 1997a; 1997b). 'Rural writing', such as Flora Thompson's *Lark Rise to Candleford* and Laurie Lee's *Cider with Rosie*, helps to promote a image of a 'purified identity' of rural childhood, one uncontaminated by urban influences. These rural childhood discourses have played an important role in the development of rural childhood stereotypes (Ward, 1990b) and have coloured ideas about what it is like to grow up in the countryside (Matless, 1998).

In Flora Thompson's (1984) *Lark Rise to Candleford* rural children were understood to be "little savages" (p. 41 and p. 174) who "were strong lusty children, let loose from control ... there was plenty of shouting, quarrelling, and often fighting among them" (p. 173). Unsupervised, they were able to "revert to the state of Nature" (p. 174); they were "overflowing with energy and high spirits" (p. 320). These "strong, well-grown children" ran, shouted and pushed each other on their way to school, stopping "to climb into the hedges, or to make sorties into fields for turnips or blackberries, or to chase the sheep" (pp. 318-319).

Alongside this 'wild' behaviour, rural children were understood to be knowledgeable about and appreciative of the surrounding environment. They "had no need to ask the names of the birds, flowers and trees they saw every day, for they had already learned these unconsciously" (p. 21). They knew "the sounds of the different seasons", the outline of each tree and "every slight rise in the fields" (p. 265). Contact with nature was linked with children's well-being, as:

"No country child could be unhappy for long together. There were happy hours spent blackberrying, or picking bluebells or cowslips with a friend, or sitting in the long meadow grass making daisy or buttercup chains to be worn on the hair as a crown" (p. 325).

Laurie Lee's (1973) *Cider with Rosie* presents the countryside as a place for exploration, discovery and adventure. Plants and animals - "a new tuft of grass, a fern, a slug, the skull of a bird" - were examined time and time again (p. 14). The farmyards, barns, hilltops and woods were transformed into jungles, swamps and tundras in which to run and play. A derelict cottage, a "damp dark ruin in the damp depth of the wood" (p.34), was an ideal place in which to play, hidden from adult eyes.

Within this setting, Lee showed rural children to be governed by the seasons: hay-making, blackberrying and skating on the frozen lake were "seasonal perks" (p. 142) and "winter and summer dominated our every action, broke into our houses, conscripted our thoughts, ruled our games, and ordered our lives" (p. 136). As with Thompson's *Lark Rise to Candleford*, children were understood to be in-tune with their environment. School work was described as "prison-labour" preventing children from following "the normal pursuits of the fields" and fulfilling their "primitive hungers" for the outdoors (p. 50).

Jones (1997a), in his analysis of country childhood texts such as *Lark Rise to Candleford* and *Cider with Rosie*, has argued that country childhoods are seen in terms of:

“a synthesis of innocence, wildness, play, adventure, the companionship of other children, contact with nature, agricultural spaces and practices, healthiness, spatial freedom, and freedom from adult surveillance” (p. 162).

Country childhoods are associated with being outdoors. A prominent idea of country childhoods is that of children being together, playing together and having adventures together (Jones, 1997a). Isolation and loneliness are contrary to the rural idyll.

Country children’s proximity to nature, and their interaction with it, are understood to be ‘blessings’ (Jones, 1997a; Jones, 2000a). Nature is seen to provide spaces and materials for play, and is also associated with healthiness (Jones, 1997a; see also Valentine, 1997a). The innocence of children is believed to be best preserved and expressed within the innocence of nature and the countryside (Jones, 1997a). The country childhood idyll shows young people as free to explore their local area, able to use spaces apart from the ordered adult world.

Jones (1997a; 1997b) identified two major themes within ‘rural writing’ discourses: stories *about* country childhoods and stories *for* childhood. According to Jones (1997a), stories *about* country childhoods, such as *Cider with Rosie* and *Lark Rise to Candleford*, are powerful evocations of recollected country childhoods which have become assimilated into the ongoing re-reading of discourses as they are read by subsequent generations. These stories about country childhoods idealize and celebrate rural upbringings.

There is also a wealth of stories *for* childhood which have the countryside as their setting or theme (for example, ‘classics’ such as A. A. Milne’s *Winnie the Pooh*, stories by Beatrix Potter, Kenneth Grahame’s *Wind in the Willows*, Arthur Ransome’s *Swallows and Amazons*, F. H. Burnett’s *The Secret Garden* and Enid Blyton’s *Famous Five* series, and more recent texts such as Colin Dann’s *Animals of Farthing Wood*, Brian Jacques’s *Redwall* series and many of the stories by Dick King-Smith). The views and associations in these texts become forcefully encoded in processes of consumption and commodification, and such stories reflect not only how children are seen, but also how the countryside is seen (Jones, 1997a).

Jones (1997a; 1997b; 1999b) has highlighted the powerful and pervasive ideologies which surround country childhoods. He has deconstructed adult discourses of the rural in order to consider how stories about country childhoods present and reinforce notions of the rural childhood idyll. Jones has unravelled and challenged the notion of an enduring rural idyll, identifying another rural defined by poverty, isolation and a strong sense of remoteness.



The contemporary lives of young people resident in rural areas are lived “within the shadows of the figures of children that play throughout the sunlit landscapes of popular and literary imaginations” (Jones, 1997a, p. 159). Underpinning much of the structuring of young people’s worlds are bodies of discourse which portray childhood in the countryside as an ideal. These country childhood discourses reflect how both young people and the countryside are perceived (Jones, 1997a; 1999b), and this has implications for how urban childhoods and urban environments are regarded.

### **3.4.2 Media Images - Rural Utopia and Urban Distopia**

“Rural children often have a different kind of outdoor experience [than that of urban children], more intimately tied to natural systems. They do not usually have to share their play spaces with other groups of children or adults, and as they get older they can range extensively away from home exploring distant forests and hills” Aitken (1994, p. 58).

Aitken’s ideas demonstrate a key feature of the country childhood idyll - that the rural is seen as a favourable environment in which to live when compared to the urban. Ward (1990b) has argued that urban childhoods are often contrasted with underlying notions of the rural childhood idyll; alongside the idea of a rural utopia is one of urban distopia.

The urban is often used to illustrate childhood crises. Jones (1997b) has shown how media reporting of concerns such as violence, crime, drugs, unemployment, family breakdown and environmental degradation has a strong urban bias. In a BBC television documentary broadcast in autumn 1999 (*Eyes of a Child*) a similar form of reporting is used. The programme attempts to record the suffering of Britain’s underprivileged youth through the eyes of the young people themselves. However, the programme has a pronounced pro-urban bias, with experiences of rural deprivation neglected in favour of images of inner city urban decay. In such media reports young people are often used as emotive icons, linking images of urban crisis with childhood crisis. This association reinforces notions of rural utopia and urban distopia (Jones, 1997b).

Academic writings also help to perpetuate the country childhood idyll discourse. Research into youth sub-cultures, gangs and youth crime, for example, often has an urban setting (for instance, Blackman, 1998; Boëthius, 1995; Corrigan, 1979; Esman, 1990; Franklin and Petley, 1996; Garratt, 1997; James and Jenks, 1996; Shaw, 1974; Thrasher, 1966; Watt and Stenson, 1998; Whyte, 1981; Wirth, 1969). The pervasiveness of the notion of rural utopia-urban distopia means that the problems of young people living in rural areas have been overlooked (Davis and Ridge, 1997; Jones, 1997a).

Williams (1985) has argued that the image of the countryside as reflecting a 'golden age' (the rural idyll) becomes more prevalent whenever social fears and tension increase. With increasing fears for children's safety, the country childhood idyll has become more prevalent (Valentine, 1997a). It can be suggested, therefore, that these fears for children have also added to the notions of rural utopia-urban distopia, with much media reporting of youth crime in urban environments (see Chapter 2, section 2.2.1) and with a growing discourse of adult nostalgia.

### **3.4.3 Adult Nostalgia**

Adult views of country childhoods relate back to individuals' own childhoods, and help to reproduce ideas of the rural childhood idyll. These views are very much tied in with 'rural writing' and media images of rural and urban childhoods (see for example Smith's (1999) collection of adults' recollections of their country childhoods), although the ideas of these discourses are moderated by individuals' own experiences of growing up. Adult views of childhood structure the lifestyles of both rural and urban young people. A number of surveys have explored adult views of rural childhoods (see, for example, Halfacree, 1995; Little and Austin, 1996; Valentine, 1997a). In outlining the perceived characteristics of rural children, respondents often look back upon their own childhood to provide evidence to support their views.

Halfacree's (1995) questionnaire survey of adults living in rural areas demonstrated that young people living in the countryside were regarded as more community-minded and neighbourly than those living in urban areas. Rural young people were believed to be better behaved and to treat adults with more respect; to be friendlier, politer and more helpful, and to be kind and honest. The adults participating in the survey thought that there were fewer gangs of hooligans in rural areas, giving country children a better start in life. In Halfacree's (1995) survey young people in rural areas were understood to have little of the 'sharp abrasiveness' perceived to be characteristic of urban children, and to hold more substantial values such as an appreciation of peace and quiet, the family, tradition and Christian values. A sense of belonging and a pride in one's origins were also seen as characteristic of country children.

Young people living in rural areas were believed to have a heightened awareness and appreciation of nature, and to be independent and not afraid of hard work. On the other hand, they were also seen to be naive, retaining their innocence (and childhood) for longer than their urban counterparts. Participants in Halfacree's (1995) survey also stated that rural young people were less 'street-wise' and less affected by peer pressure and fashion.

In Little and Austin's (1996) research into the attitudes of women living in rural areas, villages were believed to offer a 'better environment' in which to bring up children (see also, Bonner, 1997; Jones, 1997a; 1997b; 2000b; Little and Austin, 1996; Matthews *et al.*, 2000c; Valentine, 1997a; Ward, 1990b; Winsor, 1999). The participants cited a lack of pollution, a reduced threat of crime and violence and a more friendly society as key factors in this. By inference, country children are understood to experience a degree of freedom denied to their urban counterparts, and to be cocooned from the dirt and dangers of urban living.

#### **3.4.4 The Rural Childhood Idyll**

There is a considerable literature which suggests that young people value the outdoors (Matthews, 1992; 1995; Valentine, 1997a; Ward, 1990b). There are many accounts of how young people, especially those under ten years of age, prefer to play and meet in 'natural' places (Owens, 1988; Pellegrini, 1992; Percy-Smith, 1999b). One of the most commonly cited benefits of a rural upbringing is that young people can grow up in settings which have a close association with the natural (Kong, 2000; Little and Austin, 1996; Matthews *et al.*, 2000c; Valentine, 1997a). This communion with nature adds to the sense of a rural utopia, where innocent, healthy children thrive in a 'pure' environment, where they are never bored nor lonely, and where they have a freedom not believed possible in an urban setting.

The construction of the rural childhood idyll through 'rural writing', media images of rural utopia-urban distopia and adult nostalgia contributes to a popular perception of the rural as a good place in which to bring up children. Country children are believed to be sheltered from commercial and peer group pressure; the countryside is seen to be a 'pure' environment where young people are safe from such 'urban evils' (Valentine, 1997a; Valentine and McKendrick, 1997).

### 3.5 Rural Childhoods: Invisibility and Neglect

According to Lewis, writing in 1983, the study of rural communities by academics in the post-war period has passed through three cycles of interest. However, it is clear from more detailed analysis of key texts which reflect these cycles that little interest has been shown in the experiences of children. It is as if rural children are considered as a homogeneous group confronted with situations that can only be part of a rural idyll.

In the first cycle, focusing upon rural community studies, detailed attention was given to the ethnographic description and analysis of life in small communities in the countryside of remote rural Britain (Frankenberg, 1957; Jenkins *et al.*, 1962; Littlejohn, 1963; Rees, 1961; Williams, 1963a; 1963b; 1964). A number of these studies do refer to some of the social activities in which young people (usually teenage boys) are involved, such as youth clubs, football teams and the Young Farmers' organization; some provide accounts of rural schooling or the role of children in the family and rural economy. However, there is virtually no engagement with the young people themselves and not a single instance of the voices of these young people being heard, even though they provide a substantial proportion of the local population.

Frankenberg's (1957) *Village on the Border* is a study of a North Wales community which highlights differing lifestyles within the parish according to both 'insider-outsider' status and gender, yet fails to take into account how lifestyles are structured by age. Children and young people are mentioned in relation to the Young Farmers' Club, a church youth group, and schooling. Some reference is made to young people's social activities, but at no point in Frankenberg's study are young people shown to be a distinct social group with their own experiences, needs and opinions.

In Rees's (1961) *Life in a Welsh Countryside*, young people are understood and described through their roles in the rural economy and as part of the family unit rather than as a distinct social group. Rees's book includes a chapter entitled 'Youth' but this fails to recognize diversity of experiences, focusing on one group of young men. Moreover, in Rees's Welsh countryside, youth is synonymous with male.

In a further study of Welsh rural communities, Jenkins *et al.* (1962) detail four separate communities in west Wales. However, in each of them little attention is paid to the experiences of young people, other than on their schooling and roles within the local economy. As with Rees's (1961) study, youth is very much seen to be a male experience, and no recognition is made of different experiences whether according to gender, age, social class or ethnicity.

Littlejohn's (1963) *Westrigg - The Sociology of a Cheviot Parish* is very much a sociology of adults' experiences. Young people are occasionally referred to, but Littlejohn gives no in-depth consideration to the sociology of youth. Unlike the rural community studies outlined above, Littlejohn made some initial distinctions between rural young people in terms of class and gender, but these referred to place of education and economic roles respectively. There is little consideration of their experiences of everyday life, and the voices of young people are absent.

Williams's (1963a) paper on *The Social Study of Family Farming* called for a more objective study of the rural, arguing that views of English country life had been obscured by sentimental or romantic views of rural areas. Although Williams's (1963b) study, *A West Country Village: Ashworthy*, tried to take a more objective view of farming, young people were 'invisible' in this rural landscape. Examination of the text reveals just two references to young people (apart from discussion on the size of families): Williams mentions that the village school has fifty pupils up to age eleven years, and states that the village has a youth club and a boy scout troop. This is essentially an 'adultist' study which fails to recognize the diversity of rural inhabitants.

Williams's (1964) study, *The Sociology of an English Village: Gosforth*, gives greater prominence to the experiences of young people. Williams gives details of children's roles as part of family farming enterprises, and highlights gender differences in these roles. Sources of conflict between young people and adults are outlined, and the issue of children's dependency is raised. Of all the rural community studies reviewed this work gives the most detailed picture of young people's lifestyles, though in common with the studies cited above the voices of young people are missing.

In the second cycle, dating from the 1950s and 1960s, much interest focused on the patterns of rural depopulation and the impact of population losses upon not just the local economy and society but the long-term viability of rural communities. To be fair, many of these studies did draw attention to the selective out-migration of young people, particularly those more able persons in their late teens and early twenties, and to the reasons why they were leaving the countryside for a life elsewhere (for instance, Crawford, 1966; Hannan, 1969; 1970; Planck, 1960). However, such studies were limited geographically to the more remote parts of Britain where rural out-migration was strongest, limited socially to those older teenagers most likely to move, and limited economically to the study of a specific dimension to the rural lifestyle and how the problem could be addressed.

Lewis's third cycle dates from the mid-1960s and reflects an era when counter-urbanization became the dominant theme to much rural research. The period gave rise to numerous geographical texts, analyzing in detail the elements of the demographic recomposition of rural communities and the impacts of this process on other aspects of rural life such as the provision of services and amenities (for example, Elias and Scotson, 1965; Pahl, 1965). At best, children were seen as elements of family households moving to rural areas which were seen as safe environments in which to raise them. Little was ever said of the experiences of those children who formed part of this migration, except in one study (Crichton, 1964) which included the views of a selected group of young people.

More recent 'standard' rural social geography texts have also failed to recognize the experiences of young people to a great extent. There is no mention at all of young people in Lewis's (1979) *Rural Communities* or Pacione's (1983) *Progress in Rural Geography*. Phillips and Williams (1984) and Pacione (1989) both recognize that young people are 'transport poor', yet fail to go on to consider how this affects the lifestyles and experiences of rural children.

A more recent text, Cloke *et al.* (1994a), recognized Philo's (1992) call for work on 'neglected rural geographies', but the possibilities of uncovering young people's rural worlds were not discussed. Recent major investigations into rural society such as the Rural Lifestyles project (Cloke *et al.*, 1994b) and the Archbishop's Commission on Rural Areas (ACORA, 1990) also made only passing references to youth. By failing to consider young people to a great extent these texts - whether intentionally or not - present the countryside as a place for adults.

These 'academic' discourses rarely challenge the notion of the rural idyll. Although they do not construct the rural childhood myth in the same way as the social discourses described above, these studies have very much bought-into the rural childhood idyll and in the main fail to recognize any other experience of a country childhood than that of the idyll.

The rural childhood idyll neglects the diversity of rural childhood experiences and fails to take into consideration differences between places and between individuals - it recognizes one rural experience in one type of rural area. The idyll emerges through the accounts of adults since both recollections of childhoods and academic and social representations of childhoods are adult 'voices'. Little attention has been paid to the experiences of young people themselves - the realities of country childhoods have been neglected.

### **3.6 The ‘Reinvention’ of Rural Childhoods**

Philo (1992), in his review of Ward’s (1990b) *The Child in the Country*, highlighted the absence of studies that have explicitly focused on what it is like to grow up in the countryside. Philo’s call for research into this neglected rural geography has prompted a growing body of research into the everyday experiences of young people in rural areas. The rural childhood is being ‘reinvented’, with new research falling into three categories: studies of youth migration from rural areas; rural and youth agency publications; and an emerging body of work within cultural geography. In total, this research not only uncovers facts and issues concerning contemporary rural childhoods, but also examines some of the ‘hidden geographies’ of rural young people.

#### **3.6.1 Studies of Youth Migration from Rural Areas**

Research focusing on youth migration from rural areas has a considerable pedigree (Matthews *et al.*, 2000c; see for example Hannan, 1969; 1970). More recent work examines migration over a life-path or life-course (Ford *et al.*, 1997; Jamieson, 2000; Jones, 1992; Lewis and Sherwood, 1994; Mooney, 1993; Ní Laoire, 2000a; 2000b; Pavis *et al.*, 2000; Rugg and Jones, 1999; Warnes, 1992).

Mooney (1993) has explored the issue of access to housing in rural Scotland. Examining this issue from the perspective of the individual household, Mooney unravelled the complex temporal and spatial interactions of factors such as the availability of housing, employment and income, previous housing experiences, and personal desires and perceptions. Following the life-path of individuals, this research highlights the diversity of needs and experience of rural youth.

Jones (1992) has examined how structural and motivational factors combine to result in youth out-migration from rural areas. While youth out-migration is seen to a great extent to be a response to a lack of local opportunities, there is variation at the individual level. Family histories of migration and ‘rootedness’, as well as a sense of acceptance and belonging to the local community, were found to impact upon rural young people’s residential needs and expectations. Migration from rural areas, Jones argued, is not a simple response to local disadvantage.

Burrows *et al.* (1998), Button (1992), Rural Development Commission (1998b) have approached the issue of rural youth out-migration from a different perspective. In these studies, attention was paid to the problems faced by rural young people which lead to these moves to urban areas. Button (1992) outlined evidence for, and issues of, youth homelessness in rural areas. Lack of available appropriate housing was shown to be central to the problem of rural homelessness, together with a lack of support for the most vulnerable young people. Button's (1992) report suggested a range of solutions in order to meet young people's needs.

Burrows *et al.* (1998) focused on young people's housing needs and preferences and the realities of housing provision. Four groups of rural young people were identified with regard to their preferences and expectations of staying in rural areas in the medium-term future. *Committed leavers* are those looking to move away from the area and expect to do so; *reluctant stayers* are those looking to move away from the area but think it will be hard to do so; *reluctant leavers* would prefer to stay in the area but think that they will be unable to; *committed stayers* would prefer to stay in the area and expect to do so (Burrows *et al.*, 1998). This deconstruction and exploration of the lives of rural young people recognized the different experiences, expectations and motivations of individuals, clearly demonstrating that there is no single voice of rural youth.

Pavis *et al.* (2000) and Rugg and Jones (1999) have used multiple variables to explore young people's attitudes towards housing and employment in rural areas. Pavis *et al.* (2000) used a life-history approach, exploring the spheres of family life, housing, education, employment, health, leisure and community and the role of these in the transitions of rural youth towards adulthood. Rugg and Jones (1999) examined young people's employment history, housing biography and general attitudes towards rurality; however, rather than seeing these in relation to a transition to adulthood, these variables were discussed in terms of young people seeking independence.

Although this research draws attention to the experiences of young people in rural areas, these are mainly studies of exodus, and of young people in and beyond the late teenage years (Matthews *et al.*, 2000c). Some of the more recent research relates the out-migration of young rural people due to limited housing and employment opportunities in the countryside, yet this inevitably deflects attention away from those who remain in rural areas and from their continuing rural experiences (Matthews *et al.*, 2000c).



### **3.6.2 Agency Publications**

There is now a well-established body of research into rural childhoods which has been carried out by both youth and rural agencies. Research carried out by Callaghan and Dennis (1997), Couchman (1994), and Davis and Ridge (1997) on behalf of the Children's Society has challenged the rural childhood idyll by illustrating how many young people are marginalized within rural society. These reports have drawn attention to issues of deprivation and exclusion within the rural landscape.

Using a child-centred methodology Callaghan and Dennis (1997) examined the experiences of rural children in East Cleveland, revealing a complex understanding of and use of the local environment. Callaghan and Dennis suggested that for children aged up to eleven years rural living "easily allows a deep association with their immediate surroundings" (p. 42). The young participants in this research were understood to hold a positive attitude to rural life and were seen to take advantage of the range of opportunities presented by their environment. However, a 'darker rural' is also suggested, with young people raising concerns about pollution, the erosion of play spaces through the building of new houses, and the removal (without notification or explanation) of play equipment.

Couchman (1994) has deconstructed the rural idyll by systematically addressing issues associated with rural living. In Couchman's report issues of transport and accessibility, child care provision, education and training, employment opportunities, health and social welfare, housing and homelessness, youth services, law and order, and discrimination were explored and any 'rural disadvantage' noted. Couchman presented images of the rural idyll and then challenged them using evidence of rural realities.

Using the 'voices' of young people to great effect, Davis and Ridge (1997) explored country life, opportunities for play and socializing, school activities, friendships and transport, the use of public space and relationships with adults from the viewpoint of children from low-income families. In examining this wide range of issues, the complexities of rural children's geographies were highlighted, and examples given to show how circumstances overlap to exacerbate problems. By using the 'voices' of young people wherever possible, Davis and Ridge used real lived experiences as evidence to support their arguments.

Work for and by the Rural Development Commission (Phillips and Skinner, 1994; Phillips, 1994; Rural Development Commission, 1998b) and the National Youth Agency (Streich, 1999) has focused on policies and practices which may ameliorate some of the problems faced by young people in rural areas. Phillips and Skinner (1994), for example, outlined the role of youth work and considered those factors which affect the delivery of youth work in rural areas. They identified a framework of the needs of young people (encompassing issues of isolation, identity and access) and considered how rural youth work could be improved in order to better meet these needs (see also Banks [no date]; Fabes and Banks, 1991).

Streich (1999) has suggested that the problems faced by young people should be considered from both the child's and the adult's point of view. In her report, Streich argued that young people in rural areas often feel restricted by poor access to recreational and social facilities, and that where there is nothing for young people to do there are few alternatives to 'hanging around'. From the child's point of view the problem is 'nothing to do'; from the adult's point of view the problem is 'a gang' which may be seen as a threat. The way forward, according to Streich, is for problems and needs to be identified locally, and for parish councils and other agencies to work with young people to develop solutions.

Although such research does contest country childhood idylls, most is concerned primarily with fact-finding. The research is not, therefore, theoretically robust nor does it feed into our understanding of processes and meanings of growing up. The voices of young people are often absent (although the work of Davis and Ridge, 1997, is an exception). Agency work is often geared towards making recommendations for change, meaning that the most vulnerable groups of young people are often singled out and a rather restricted range of 'voices' is presented. There is a danger of homogenizing childhood experiences.

### **3.6.3 Cultural Geography and the 'Hidden Geographies' of Rural Children**

Research into the hidden geographies of rural children, much of which takes a child-centred approach, has developed considerably both in volume and scope in recent years. In order to illustrate some of the issues tackled and techniques used in such research, a number of studies carried out in the UK are outlined below. These studies have examined how social constructions of the rural childhood idyll structure the real lived experiences of young people in rural areas, and have explored the realities of young people's experiences within the context of the 'fourth environment' (those places beyond the home, school and playground - see Matthews and Limb, 1999).

Little and Austin (1996) have considered how rural women interpret the idyll in terms of their children's upbringing. Many of the households who participated in this survey had moved to the countryside on or just before the birth of children or as children reached school age. Women from such households conformed to some facets of the idyll, classing the countryside as a 'better environment' in which to bring up children. Factors such as a lack of pollution, the 'freedom' available to young people and reduced crime and violence were cited as central to this.

Little and Austin demonstrated that the image of the countryside as a better environment in which to bring up children produces strong views and expectations of the roles of women. These views and expectations not only structure the roles of the women themselves, but also structure the roles of young people through parenting strategies and perceived 'norms'. The imagining of the rural as an ideal place in which to grow up is used to justify decisions on residential location and bounds of (both mother and child) behaviour. Little and Austin recognized a complexity to this geography, showing how social and class characteristics can cut across the views and experiences of rural women.

Valentine (1997a) has explored how an 'imagining of the countryside' as an ideal place in which to bring up children is constructed and contested by rural parents. Valentine's research showed how parents mobilize popular understandings of the rural idyll in their accounts of their children's lifestyles, yet simultaneously challenge this view in their accounts of children's safety - on the one hand the rural was seen as an idyllic and safe place for young people, on the other hand the countryside was seen (like urban space) to be potentially fraught with dangers such as from traffic and strangers.

Using the voices of rural parents to illustrate her arguments, Valentine outlined the justifications parents gave for their moves to rural areas, as well as their perceptions of country life. Both incomers and long term residents were found to hold an image of the village as a location where a more innocent, less worldly and purer experience of childhood was offered than could be found in an urban environment. The parents contrasted their own children's play behaviour with that of urban children to justify such claims.

In contrast to this, however, the rural parents interviewed used national and international accounts of child murders and abuse to justify the spatial restrictions they imposed on their offspring. Parents claimed that, like the city, the countryside was a potentially dangerous place, and concerns over 'stranger-danger' were voiced. Although parents expressed concern for their children's safety, they still regarded the rural environment as a safer place for their children than an urban one. Valentine uncovered a complexity in children's rural experiences according to parenting strategies, social class and gender.

Maguire (2001) has examined both adults' and young people's perceptions of risk in the rural mid-Ulster region of Northern Ireland, the legacy of 'the Troubles' being for many a deeply-seated fear. Outdoor play practices reported by the young participants illustrated that both parents and schools have a low fear of 'everyday' risks, yet the lasting impacts of 'the Troubles' mean that fear and mistrust of 'the other' are reconstructed in the lives of young people. Maguire's research has contested the notion of the rural childhood as 'safe' through deconstructing the rural childhood idyll. Maguire has drawn attention to diversity within rural childhoods in the UK generally and within a district specifically. By reflecting on a 'different' rural childhood in a 'different' rural, Maguire has shown that diversity and difference not only impact through a variety of rural conditions, but also that the ways in which young people experience and respond to these vary.

Matthews *et al.* (2000c) have explored some of the ways in which young people encounter the countryside, and (re)examined the rural idyll from the viewpoint of young people aged between nine and sixteen years. Results from their work suggest that for many young people rural childhoods are not necessarily distinguished by a close affinity to nature. The majority of young people were found to meet their friends in local parks and streets - few reported playing in woods and fields or near to rivers and ponds, aspects of the countryside highly prized by adults. Many woods and fields were found to be spaces 'fenced off' by adults as private land, this preventing the access to nature and freedom associated with the rural childhood idyll.

Contrary to the idyll, many young people felt dislocated and detached from village life, and there was a strong sense of alienation and powerlessness. An alternative, 'darker rural' was uncovered where the needs and aspirations of young people are rarely being met and where there is a lack of appropriate service provision. The study also reported feelings of isolation and boredom, and indicated that many young people seldom find autonomous social space away from the adult gaze. The young participants also expressed resentment about their lack of involvement in local affairs: only a minority felt that they were accepted by and belonged to their local community.

Working with young people in South West England, Leyshon (2000) has explored the ways in which rural identities are constructed, negotiated and perceived. Based on the assumption that the relationship between identity and place is dependent on an accumulation of experiences, Leyshon has conceptualized young people as active agents in their own decision-making and identity formation. He has argued that by constructing an identity for their urban counterparts, rural youth are destabilizing the notion of marginalization within the countryside. Far from aspiring to the condition of urban youth, rural young people build an image of the urban as different, unsophisticated and inferior.

The participants in Leyshon's research voiced concerns over the ways in which adults regulated their use of space within the countryside. These rural young people developed tactics of invisibility (either physically removing themselves from the village or hiding within it) in their efforts to obtain autonomous social space. In this research rather than being part of the 'community' expressed in the rural idyll, young people were found to be marginalized and excluded, 'outsiders' in an idyllic rural setting.

Leyshon's research moves towards destabilizing conventional views of young people's marginality in rural areas. He has shown that their experience of marginality is not exclusively related to distance from urban centres or being 'othered' by urban youth - it is also founded upon adult surveillance and regulation of spaces within the countryside. This research challenges the rural childhood idyll through showing how the experiences of 'real' rural childhoods are incongruous with it.

Although there is an emerging body of research into the neglected rural geographies of young people, this research remains fragmented. Furthermore, the findings of the research outlined above must be viewed in relation to the rural landscape within which it is set. It is not enough to (re)examine the rural from the perspectives of young people - we must recognize that the stories these young people tell us may differ greatly according to the social, political and economic circumstances of their rural setting (both within and outside the UK) and according to the different ways in which children experience, perceive and interpret these conditions (Matthews *et al.*, 2000c).

### **3.7 Summary**

Through exploring notions of the rural and the rural idyll, this chapter has shown how discourses of the rural childhood idyll are constructed and reproduced. Many of the most durable and stereotypical images of rural childhoods come from 'rural writings', with the countryside often portrayed as an ideal place in which to bring up children. Rural children are seen to be happy, healthy and innocent, with greater spatial freedom than their urban counterparts and a close affinity to nature. Media images of urban distopia have helped perpetuate such ideas. Nostalgic accounts by adults also reproduce the rural childhood idyll.

‘Academic’ discourses have rarely challenged the notion of the rural idyll. Young people have been neglected or deemed invisible in academic discourse, and studies of the rural condition have largely failed to recognize any experience other than that of the idyll. Recently, however, an awareness of the absence of studies that have explicitly focused on what it is like to grow up in the countryside has led to an emerging body of research into the everyday experiences of rural young people. Studies of youth migration from rural areas, rural and youth agency publications, and the new cultural geographies of rural children are beginning to build up images and ideas of rural childhoods contrary to the idyll.

Although this research remains fragmented, there is now an awareness that there are many stories to tell about rural young people and the diversity of their childhoods. A forthcoming review of progress in rural childhood and youth research by the Limited Life Working Party - Geographies of Children, Youth and Families (set up within the Royal Geographical Society) will promote an awareness of such issues, as will a special theme issue of the *Journal of Rural Studies* focusing upon the experiences of rural young people.

This chapter has highlighted the need for further research into the experiences of young people growing up in a rural area. Chapter 4 focuses on the neglected rural childhood geographies of gender.

## **Chapter 4 Gender and Childhood Geographies**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In the preceding chapters a rationale for the study of the experiences of girls growing up in rural South Northants has been presented, focusing on the neglected geographies of children, particularly those living up in rural areas. Valentine *et al.* (1998) have argued that there has been a pro-urban bias in much childhood research, with the experiences of rural young people being neglected. Equally, within childhood research there have been relatively few studies of the ways in which girls use outdoor (public) spaces. In consequence, the everyday experiences of girls growing up in rural areas in particular have received scant attention.

This chapter exposes the 'malestream' bias of existing research in the social sciences on (rural) children, and focuses in particular on the paucity of research into girls' use of outdoor space. The chapter begins by considering the history of childhood research into the experiences of girls. Those studies which have examined girls' use of outdoor (public) space are then discussed. The chapter concludes by examining research on constructions of rural femininity.

### **4.2 The 'Invisibility' of Girls in Childhood Research**

During the mid-1970s feminist researchers began to challenge the male focus of youth research in Britain (Alanen, 1994; Griffin, 1993). Feminist researchers argued that youth research had been predominantly about boys - usually white, urban, working-class boys - and that girls were rendered visible only where they are pertinent to the experience and perceptions of boys (Nava, 1992). Although research on the experiences of girls has been carried out since the 1970s, there is a continuing neglect of the experiences of girls in outdoor environments (Skelton, 2000), particularly those beyond the urban domain.

#### 4.2.1 'Malestream' Research

From the mid-1970s feminist researchers began to challenge the male focus of most 'youth' research (Campbell, 1981; 1991; Griffin, 1993; Kotash, 1987; McRobbie, 1982; 1991; McRobbie and Garber, 1976; McRobbie and Nava, 1984; Nava, 1984; 1992; Tinkler, 1995). McRobbie and Garber (1976) have been credited with bringing the lack of research on girls to the attention of social scientists. In their seminal paper, McRobbie and Garber asked why girls were absent from analyses of youth subcultures and queried whether girls were really absent from these subcultures (and if so, why?), or whether they had been not noticed by researchers (and if not, why not?). They showed that very little research had been carried out about the role of girls in youth cultural groupings, and that existing youth research focused on the experiences of white, working-class, urban boys to the exclusion of all other experiences. Griffin (1993) has described this youth research as 'malestream'.

In response to calls by feminist researchers for a more inclusive study of childhood and youth, researchers began to focus on extraordinary youth actions as well as the everyday social and public places girls used. Campbell (1981; 1991), for example, explored delinquency and gang membership - two issues which were central to much early youth research (Corrigan, 1979; Shaw, 1974; Thrasher, 1966; Whyte, 1981; Wirth, 1969) - from girls' points of view. Rather than viewing girls as absent from or irrelevant to these youth cultures, Campbell explored power relations between boys and girls and demonstrated that some girls were active members of gangs.

Much of this early feminist research was concerned with examining how masculinist constructions affected girls lives (Griffin, 1993; 1997a). McRobbie (1982) explored the ways in which a girls' magazine, *Jackie*, created an ideology of adolescent femininity. Considering the magazine as a system of messages and a bearer of a certain ideology, McRobbie concluded that it focused exclusively on the personal, locating it as the prime sphere of importance to the teenage girl, with everything else being of secondary importance. The magazines presented 'romantic individualism' as a goal; female solidarity was portrayed as an unambiguous sign of failure (McRobbie, 1982).



The 1980s saw an increase in the number of studies of girls' experiences (for example, Kotash, 1987; McRobbie and Nava, 1984; Nava, 1984). Attention began to focus on girls' leisure experiences as experiences in and of themselves (Griffin, 1993). Nava (1984) explored variations in boys' and girls' use of youth service facilities, noting differences in the types of leisure spaces valued by them, and considering the ways in which gendered power relations influenced girls' use of space. She concluded that girls' are a marginalized group, since mixed service provision is in reality predominantly male. Research such as that of Nava (1984) concluded that girls' leisure was more restricted than that of boys with regard to both spatial range and variety (Valentine *et al.*, 1998). Research carried out during this period often argued that for majority of adolescent girls the main objective was to find a boyfriend, and that femininity was constructed to secure a future married life (Kotash, 1987; McRobbie and Nava, 1984).

Recently the focus of geographical studies of girls has moved away from the domestic sphere and heterosexual romantic notions. Studies have explored the composition and dynamics of girls' friendship groups (Blackman, 1998; Griffiths, 1995; Hey, 1997; Morris, 1997; Morris-Roberts, 2001), issues of ethnicity and contested identities (Dwyer, 1998; Hyams, 1999; 2000; Watt and Stenson, 1998; Wulff, 1995a), and the role of power relations in girls' identity formation (Heilman, 1998; Krenichyn, 1999; Leonard, 1998).

Contemporary work is attempting to ensure that while youth as a category within geography is placed firmly on the agenda, it is done so in ways which reflect the lived realities of young people in all their complexities (Griffin, 1993). Through exploring the experiences of a group 'other' than that of traditional youth research - rural girls as opposed to urban boys - this thesis adds to the growing body of research which recognizes both difference and diversity between children.

During the 1980s Nava (1984) argued that much feminist research had concerned itself with the culture and circumstances of girls, or had compared the social circumstances of girls and boys. She suggested that in focusing on these aspects, the power relations which connect and define girls and boys as distinct categories have been neglected. In exploring conflict and collision between boys and girls over the use of leisure spaces some recent geographical studies (Matthews *et al.*, 2000a; 2000b; Skelton, 1996; 1998; 2000) have responded to Nava's call for a more sophisticated understanding of the power relations that exist between girls and boys. In exploring girls' experiences of growing up in rural South Northants, and the ways in which these experiences are gendered, this thesis will add to this literature.

#### 4.2.2 Girls and Outdoor (Public) Spaces

According to Van Roosmalen and Krahn (1996), the private/public paradigm is still central to an understanding of how Western societies are structured. Traditional and feminist theories of youth appear to share a common premise about the division between street- and home-based youth cultures, contrasting the public world of the street with the private world of the home. McRobbie and Garber (1976), for example, suggested that girls do not hang about or become involved in street corner activities, instead spending their leisure time in private indoor environments, particularly their own home and those of their friends. Childhood research has often reflected the notion that the “home and the private, intimate sphere have... always been important for girls, and public spaces have been the most important gathering places for boys” (Ganetz, 1995, pp. 88-89), making interpretations and understandings of youth distorted and incomplete (Van Roosmalen and Krahn, 1996).

By viewing use of the ‘street’ (the term understood as a metaphor for a range of public outdoor spaces such as alleyways, cul-de-sacs, vacant plots, for example) as exclusively male, researchers have failed to deal adequately with issues of gender. The “omission, trivialization, and marginalization of girls suggest that what girls do is uninteresting” (Van Roosmalen and Krahn, 1996, p. 5), and girls’ behaviour was seen to pale in significance when compared with the active street culture of boys.

In early youth research the participation and involvement of girls in group activities and street life were, at best, viewed as contained within existing male cultures and, at worst, overlooked. Girls were never referred to in their own right. McRobbie (1991) argued that underpinning this marginalization of girls was the central question of street visibility. She argued that “the street remains in some ways taboo for women (think of the unambiguous connotations of the term ‘streetwalker’)” (p. 29). Girls have traditionally been seen to be passive, conformist, and not interested in joining groups, so girls active in the ‘street’ have been understood as ‘abnormal’ (Esbensen *et al.*, 1999; Evans *et al.* 1999; Frith, 1984).

The assumption that girls are firmly located within the domestic, private sphere continues to be repeated in many contemporary texts (Skelton, 2000). Pearce (1996), for example, explored the divisions which exist between the ways in which young men and women have access to and across inner city spaces. Pearce concluded that young women tend to frequent familiar ‘private’ indoor spaces (such as the home, friends’ houses, and local shops), whilst young men tend to occupy ‘public’ outdoor and indoor spaces (such as streets, estates, pubs and clubs). This research thus repeats the assumption that shows young men to be credible on the street, and young women to be credible in the home.

There is, however, growing recognition that young people's use of outdoor spaces is actually more complicated. Some researchers are beginning to recognize that girls are more active in public areas than previously thought, and that more of boys' leisure activities take place in the home (Ganetz, 1995). Studies within the urban environment have begun to deconstruct the notion of the 'street' as a male domain, exploring the ways in which girls use such spaces. Similarly, studies of the private environment of the home have begun to examine how the increasing amount of home-based leisure for boys (such as the growth in use of computer-based games) has impacted upon the ways in which spaces traditionally understood as belonging to women and girls are being contested (Bingham *et al.*, 1999; McNamee, 1998; 1999; O'Donnell and Sharpe, 2000; Valentine, *et al.*, 2000).

In her study of girls' use of public space in the Rhondda Valleys, Skelton (2000) argued that in many ways teenage girls are conceptualized as being the 'wrong' age, the 'wrong' gender, and in the 'wrong' place. Skelton (1996; 1998; 2000) recognizes that there is a gendered element to children's experience of public space, with girls using space in different ways to boys - for instance, talking with friends rather than playing football. Girls were shown to make a positive choice to use the 'street', disrupting Corrigan's (1979) notion of the 'street' only being a space for boys. The girls in Skelton's study felt that they had every right to be out on the streets, meeting their friends and hanging around.

Studying children's use of public space in Northamptonshire, Matthews *et al.* (2000a) understood the 'street' as a place of meaning for young people. As with Skelton's study, girls were found to use these outdoor spaces in different ways to boys. Girls were found to be habitual users of the 'street'. The 'street' was a key domain for many young girls, and rather than being unimportant or undesirable users of public space, girls were shown to use the outdoors in a variety of ways.

Matthews *et al.* (2000a) attributed the 'invisibility' of girls in outdoor spaces in discourses of youth cultures to the particular characteristics of girls' use of space. Much of girls' street behaviour is not spectacular, dirty or dangerous; the girls did not use the 'street' as a site for cultural resistance - they did not contest social norms. Rather, the 'street' comprised places where girls could get on with the ordinary and do what they wanted to do. In this context girls' use of outdoor spaces does not relate to the she-devils of urban folklore (see Griffin, 1993; McRobbie, 1991).

The domestic space of the home has traditionally been considered the province of girls and women (McNamee, 1999). One way in which girls have been seen to take part in youth culture, and resist boys' domination of the 'street', has been through using the home as a base from which to explore aspects of teenage culture (Lieberg, 1997). However, McNamee (1998; 1999) has traced a 'retreat from the street' which has moved boys' leisure into the home. McNamee showed how the increasing amount of leisure time boys spend on computer and video games has transformed domestic space into a contested space when both boys and girls are using the home as a space for leisure. She found girls' use of leisure space within the home to be more constrained than that of boys, and argued that girls are pushed to the margins in this traditionally female domain.

Although these studies have broadened ideas about both girls' and boys' use of public and private spaces, there still remains a pro-urban bias to this research. The everyday experiences of girls in rural areas have yet to be explored and deconstructed in this way. There is considerable scope for research which reflects upon these issues in the rural environment. In this thesis, through focusing upon the everyday lived experiences of girls growing up in rural South Northants, girls' use of outdoor spaces within a particular rural landscape is examined.

### **4.3 The Neglected Rural Geographies of Girls**

Rather than merely replicating research carried out in urban areas on girls' use of outdoor (public) spaces, it is useful also to consider the ideological background of the rural which may colour girls' outdoor experiences. The traditional image of women in the domestic sphere has endured with little questioning or change, largely as a result of the dominant discourse of the rural idyll (Little and Austin, 1996). In this section some constructions of rural femininity are explored, and suggestions made as to how these are mapped onto the 'imaginings' and real lived experiences of girls use of outdoor spaces in rural areas. Research into representations of rural 'girlhood' is then reflected upon, and the different roles rural girls need to adopt to make themselves credible in outdoor space discussed.

#### 4.3.1 Constructions of Rural Femininity

Within the discourse of the rural idyll the traditional image of women's place being in the home has endured with little questioning or change. Aspects of the rural idyll operate in support of traditional gender relations, prioritizing women's mothering role and fostering their centrality within the rural community (Davidoff *et al.*, 1979; Little and Austin, 1996; Stebbing, 1984). The rural idyll shapes and sustains patriarchal gender relations, incorporating strong expectations concerning gender roles which consequently restrict the lifestyles and limit the experiences of women within rural communities (Little, 1986; Little and Austin, 1996)<sup>1</sup>.

Middleton's (1986) study of boundaries between men's and women's spaces in rural Yorkshire suggested that rural women are 'out of place' in the majority of public spaces (such as the pub, the village hall, and the sports field), and that the time women can spend in such places is strictly defined by the constraints of their domestic roles. In a similar way to the traditional study of youth in outdoor places, the outdoors is deemed to be male space. This spatial segregation reduces women's access to knowledge used by men to produce and reproduce power and privilege (Spain, 1992).

In her study of the migration of young women from rural areas Dahlström (1996) argued that the rural remains dominated by male economic and leisure activities. Dahlström noted that although rural life, the family and gender relations are all undergoing major transformations in Western countries at present, for "young women growing up in rural Scandinavia, the contrast between the rurality around them and the picture of everyday life, family and gender relations transferred in media and in the education system, is sharp" (p. 260). With modern rural life rarely visible in the media, Dahlström argued that there are few role models for rural young women and that traditional views of women's place may be reproduced. It may be, therefore, that notions from the rural idyll of women's place in the domestic sphere, together with the traditional view of only boys being credible on the 'street', combine to impact strongly upon girls' presence and behaviour in outdoor spaces.

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1 Little has published widely on a range of rural issues, adopting a feminist perspective (see for example, Little, 1986, 1987, 1997a and 1997b). However, there is an absence of a 'child' perspective - whether explicit or implicit - in her work.

In response to Little's (1986; 1987) call for feminist researchers to document the experiences of women in rural areas and analyze how definitions of femininity and masculinity are constructed in rural space, research has been carried out into understanding and explaining the multiple realities of the contemporary rural experience (Agg and Phillips, 1998; Hughes, 1997a; 1997b; Leckie, 1996; Little, 1997a; Little and Austin, 1996; Whatmore *et al.*, 1994; Woodward, 1998). However, scant attention has been paid to the impact of these constructions upon the experiences of rural girls, particularly with regard to their use of public spaces.

#### **4.3.2 Constructions of Rural 'Girlhood'**

It has been suggested that from early childhood girls are brought up to conform to female role models which reward the development of social and personal interactive skills and the reliance on others for self-esteem (Cunningham and Jones, 1991; Hudson, 1984). It has also been suggested that boys, on the other hand, are encouraged to be self-reliant and are therefore treated differently in their propensity to explore and enlarge their territory (Cunningham and Jones, 1991; 1994; 1999; Prendergast, 2000). Although others have shown that parents' heightened fears about 'stranger-danger' have meant that less gendered care-taking practices are beginning to emerge (Valentine, 1996b; Valentine and McKendrick, 1997), there appears to be a consensus that whilst it is acceptable for boys to hang out in outdoor environments it is unacceptable for girls to do so (Matthews *et al.*, 2000c; Pearce, 1996). Jones (1999b), in his analysis of popular portrayals of country childhoods in literature, on television and in print media, has suggested that the dominant image of rural 'girlhood' defines girls as particularly 'out of place' in the rural outdoors.

A number of constructions of rural childhoods are based on male children doing what boys are supposed to like doing (Jones, 1999b). Girls who take part in "iconic outdoor childhood activities such as tree climbing, den building, scrambling through hedges, exploring and so on... often become identified as quasi boys through the label tomboy" (Jones, 1999b, p. 126). For girls to partake fully in this ideal childhood of the rural outdoors they must become nominal boys. Although the 'tomboy' identity is to some extent a favoured role, it suggests that for girls to be accepted in the outdoor environment they must take on a male role. Through participation in these iconic outdoor childhood activities, girls may attempt to break out of the tightly constructed identities available to girls. However, they end up taking refuge in the symbolic spaces of male childhood because linking 'natural' childhood with femininity is so problematic.

Aitken (1994) and Ward (1990b) have also argued that the more physical, independent, and adventurous elements of country childhoods are activities more often associated with boys than girls, and that the range of activities thought appropriate for boys in the countryside is far wider than that of girls. Further, Trimble's (1992) observation that 'tomboys' are acceptable only until they reach the threshold of adolescence, at which point cultural barriers and fears keep many girls away from fields and woods, suggests that the 'acceptability' of girls' outdoor behaviour may alter with age. Nava's (1992) observation that research has neglected the issue of how the power relations which connect and define girls and boys as distinct categories vary according to the context, discourse and place in which they are situated, suggests that there is a need for research into how girls' use of outdoor space is influenced by these perceptions of rural childhood.

A recent best-selling and award-winning book, Lorna Sage's (2000) *Bad Blood*, has focused on rural girlhood. In her autobiography Sage has presented an image of rural girlhood that both draws upon the notion of 'tomboy' behaviour and illustrates a disaffection for rural living. She has described how in her middle childhood years she became "truly a country child, a native of Hanmer, wandering the fields and footpaths in squelching wellies" (p. 98) and spending time on a farm. However, this is contrasted with her teenage years in which she would seek to spend time away from the village, visiting the local town (Whitchurch, in north Shropshire) in order to access 'urban' facilities such as coffee shops:

"Gail and I deliberately missed the school bus on many afternoons and caught instead the later one... This gave us an extra hour in which to chase boys we pretended were chasing us, and sit spinning out plastic cups of grey, frothy coffee as we watched the coloured lights pulse between plays in one or other of the town's curvy new jukeboxes" (p. 199).

"...on Saturdays... I'd catch the early-morning bus all on my own, pick up my copy of *New Musical Express* at W. H. Smith's, and go and sit at the corner table by the window in Edward's café, above the big old-fashioned grocery... The corner table was a kind of crow's nest or lookout from which you could oversee half of the High Street, and various moody boys and girls (but mostly boys) climbed up to observe the passers-by" (p. 217).

## 4.4 Summary

In childhood research little work has been undertaken on the ordinary, everyday behaviour of girls in outdoor environments, especially beyond urban settings (McRobbie, 1991; Pearce, 1996; Wulff, 1995b). Teenage girls, who are at an in-between age - not really children anymore and yet not adult women - have rarely been studied outside of the context of home spaces and domestic relations (Skelton, 2000). The rural outdoor geographies of teenage girls are thus doubly 'hidden', with both girls and the rural outdoors neglected.

Girls have traditionally been seen as credible in private space (the home), whilst boys have been seen as credible in public space (the outdoors). Within rural communities notions of the rural idyll have compounded this image of girls as 'out of place' in the outdoors, and popular understandings of rural childhoods suggest that girls are only accepted in outdoor environments when they become nominal boys in the form of 'tomboys'. It seems that despite the tight-knit communities and nature of village life, many adults find it difficult to let go of those myths and stereotypes that define public space as places of danger for young girls (Matthews *et al.*, 2000c). Further research is needed in order to deconstruct and problematize these images of girls as 'out of place' in public spaces, of females as 'out of place' in the rural landscape, and of girls being acceptable in the rural outdoors only when they take on masculine roles.

This chapter has set out a rationale for the geographical study of the experiences of girls growing up within a rural area. In Chapter 5 the research strategies and techniques employed in this research project are outlined.



## **Chapter 5 Understanding the Worlds of Young People: Methodological Strategies and Techniques**

### **5.1 Setting a Research Agenda**

Lather (1991) has proposed a tripartite distinction between empirical, interpretive and critical knowledges. Empirical knowledge, according to Lather, involves the factual representation of observed information. This type of knowledge tries to be objective, with the researcher working as a detached observer. Interpretive knowledge seeks to understand and interpret the meanings of social behaviour. There is a double hermeneutic here - the researcher's interpretation of the participants' interpretation of their lives (Lather, 1991). This approach attempts to make as explicit as possible the notion that this knowledge is an interpretation, not 'objective' facts. The third type of knowledge, critical knowledge, is informed by an awareness and recognition that overlying structures are prevalent in society (Lather, 1991). Critical knowledges are embedded in critiques of social structures and involve an ideology of change.

During the 1990s critical geography has become one of the central themes of human geographic study (Kitchin and Hubbard, 1999). The approach seeks to examine the diverse socio-spatial processes that regulate and reproduce social exclusion. Critical geographies move beyond a focus on capital-labour relations to encompass the broader processes of social disadvantage and marginalization as they affect a range of groups (Kitchin and Hubbard, 1999). Alongside the development of this critical agenda has been a heightened concern that geographical research on social exclusion should be sensitive to the life experiences of marginalized groups. This approach conveys the social consequences of the situations studied, and attempts to uncover the tensions and contradictions faced by people in those situations (Kobayashi, 2001).

Critical research involves reflexivity on the part of the researcher (Kobayashi, 2001), and this aspect of the critical approach is drawn upon in this study. In recent years there have been several papers and collections which have examined issues such as positionality, reflexivity, empowerment and power relations (Davis, 1998; Kneafsey, 2000; McDowell, 1997; Parr, 1998; Professional Geographer, 1994; 1995; Raghuram *et al.*, 1998; Rose, 1997). Ideas from feminist scholarship in particular have been invoked to dismiss the assumption that (critical) research is objective and 'value-free' (Kitchin and Hubbard, 1999). In this approach geographical knowledge is considered to be always partial, socially situated and produced within a political climate - it is subjective and value-laden (McDowell, 1997; Rose, 1997).

The thesis draws attention to a marginalized group - young people - and the inequalities that they may face. This research attempts to glimpse into the worlds of young girls, recognizing difference and diversity. Raghuram *et al.* (1998) have argued that research that focuses upon the gendered nature of everyday life forms a critical knowledge through recognition of unequal power relations.

This chapter shows how the research process has been adopted. First, attention is paid to the ways in which the worlds of children may be explored. Acknowledging that the identity of the researcher is invested in the research process, throughout the chapter the central questions of positionality and ‘in-betweenness’ of the researcher and the impact of this upon the research process are raised. Second, issues regarding the choice of study area are discussed and the study area is described. Third, the recruitment strategies adopted are detailed and ethical considerations are discussed. Fourth, the methods used to explore the everyday experiences of children living in rural areas are outlined. The chapter concludes by discussing the strategies and techniques used in analysis of the data. In this chapter italicized text is used to draw attention to reflections on how the various issues discussed relate to the research project.

## **5.2 Exploring the Worlds of Young People**

### **5.2.1 The ‘Least Adult Role’**

Mandell (1988) has suggested that adult researchers may assume three roles when undertaking childhood research. By assuming that age roles prevent adults from performing a complete participant role, adult researchers may take on the role of a *detached observer*. This approach recognizes that the worlds of adults and children are separate. The second role identified by Mandell is a *marginal semi-participant* role. By adopting this role the researcher focuses upon similarities between adults and children. Fine and Glassner (1979) proposed four types of semi-participant role which recognize some dimension of age and authority separating children and adults: supervisor, leader, observer and friend. The third role identified by Mandell is that of the *participant observer*. This ‘complete involvement’ role is based upon the assumption that an adult researcher’s active involvement in the daily lives of children is a tenable possibility, and advocates researchers’ participation in children’s social worlds.

Some researchers (for example, Ball, 1985; Eder and Corsaro, 1999; Epstein, 1998; Holmes, 1998; Mandell, 1988) have argued that by adopting a 'least adult' role, the power imbalance integral to the adult-child relationship may be reduced, providing researchers with a greater insight into the worlds of children. Holmes (1998) has defined a 'least adult' role as one whereby the researcher exerts no authority over the child participants and establishes a trust relationship based on the 'friend' role. By expressing a desire to be with children, failing to deliver discipline and treating children with respect, Holmes argued that an 'in-between' role can be performed whereby the researcher is seen to be outside traditional adult roles. By avoiding the adult role of authority more authentic data may be gained (Eder and Corsaro, 1999; Epstein, 1998) and, although the power differential between adults and children in research settings cannot be eliminated, it may be lessened (Fine and Glassner, 1979).

The dilemma of the extent to which adult researchers can gain access to children's worlds has become an important issue in geographical research on childhood (Thomas, 2000; Valentine, 1999a). Aitken and Herman (1997) have suggested that:

“as adults, we may be able to identify and construct a notion of childhood, but it is unlikely that we will be able to capture or fully appreciate children's experiences. Years of encounters and accumulated knowledge may filter and structure our thinking about what it means to be a child... The fact that we have all been children does not automatically provide lifelong access to this area of experience... children's perspectives may be remote and isolated from those which we as adults can claim as our own” (p. 76).

They contend that, although researchers, as adults, may be able to reconstruct the circumstances of childhood, this reconstruction is often embedded in a set of cultural values. The emotions of children, they argue, probably remain somewhat distant and elusive. Aitken and Herman refer to this dilemma as the 'crisis of representation'. Taken to an extreme, this argument provides a case for adult researchers to dismiss the study of children and childhood as beyond their grasp, forming an excuse for maintaining the hegemony of adulthood (Matthews, 2001b). However, as Matthews and Limb (1999) have argued, a “partial understanding is better than not attempting to understand” (p. 64), and with the use of appropriate methodologies geographers should be able to get closer to understanding the worlds of children.

*In this thesis an attempt has been made to adopt a 'least adult' role, performing an 'in-between' role outside those traditionally performed by adults. In attempting to get as close as possible to young girls' worlds, the research relied upon research methods that 'free' them to articulate their views, feelings and ideas (see section 5.5). Throughout the research young people were treated with respect and attempts were made to avoid situations in which an adult 'conscience' would lead to an exertion of authority or delivery of discipline.*

### 5.2.2 Gender Issues - A Woman Exploring the Worlds of Girls

In his review of gender issues in the use of interviewing as a research method, Herod (1993) identified two key issues: how the gender of the researcher may shape the research process, and how gender relations are implicated in the structure of particular research methodologies. These ideas can be developed to examine gender issues present in the research carried out in this thesis - specifically those of a woman exploring the worlds of girls.

Herod (1993) has suggested that the social characteristics of interviewer and respondent - such as age, gender and race - are significant as different pairings may have different meanings and evoke different cultural norms and stereotypes, influencing the opinions and feelings expressed by respondents. Gender differences in fieldwork may be a source of difficulties or exclusion (for example, researchers being unable to gain access to certain spaces or certain sources of information), yet they can also be a source of knowledge about a particular field (Ball, 1985). Recognizing that fieldwork does not occur in a 'gender vacuum', Winchester (1996) has suggested that women are more likely to be given sensitive information and that they may be seen as less 'official' and threatening. With regard to childhood research specifically, Holmes (1998) suggested that women may have an inherent size advantage over male researchers when working with children, because women appear to be smaller and are perhaps perceived to be less threatening and intimidating.

In this thesis the gender of the researcher may have shaped the research process in a number of ways. In common with Epstein (1998) and Holmes (1998), it may have been that the researcher's presence within primary schools was accepted by both teachers and children as being 'just another woman' within a space in which female adults dominate. In their research at out-of-school clubs, Barker and Smith (2001) noted differences in the ways male and female researchers were treated. The female researcher was quickly accepted as an 'insider' and had significant access to children. The lack of men in playwork, combined with suspicion of men's ability to work with and care for children, denied the male researcher this insider position. However, as Horton (2001) has argued, male researchers may experience similar freedoms in classroom situations, and so the gender of the researcher may not be an influence in gaining such access.

*On a few occasions when working with children within their homes, some girls chose to talk within the privacy of their own rooms. It may be that with a female researcher the girls felt able to share such spaces, and that whilst the parents were happy for a woman to spend time with their daughters in this way, they may not have felt the same way with a male researcher. Although none of the parents ever alluded to this, on one occasion it felt as though a female researcher may have influenced a parent's opinion. The first meeting with one group was held at the home of one of the girls. On arrival the girl's mother introduced herself and stated that she was going to take advantage of having an adult in the house to go to visit a neighbour, leaving the girls in the researcher's care. It is debatable whether the woman would have felt able to leave her daughter and her daughter's friends in the house with a male researcher whom she had met only moments before.*

*Valentine (1999a, p. 149) has argued that there is an "obvious power imbalance between adults and children in terms of... bodily size". This statement did not always ring true in this research, with the vast majority of participants being taller than the researcher, whose (lack of) height may have helped to conceal some of the power imbalances inherent in adult research with children. Further, a slight stature may have appeared less intimidating and threatening. In fact, a number of the younger girls took great delight in measuring to see whether they were taller than the researcher!*

The second issue raised by Herod concerns how gender relations are implicated in the structures of research methodologies. Herod (1993) suggested that female researchers may have problems gaining access to spaces considered as exclusively 'male spaces' and that they may not be taken seriously by the men occupying such spaces.

*The focus of this research is on the experiences of girls. Kotash (1987) justified the exclusion of young men from her research by voicing her concern that she might not understand young men's worlds in the same way that she was confident she could understand the worlds of young women. It is acknowledged that, like Kotash, there was a concern whether boys' worlds could be accessed successfully. With Widdowfield's (2000) acknowledgement of the importance of emotions of research in mind, it is perhaps relevant to note that the researcher felt more comfortable working with girls, feeling closer to the issues discussed and through this finding easier access to the worlds of girls.*

### 5.2.3 'Performing' Research

The greater use of qualitative methods within geographical inquiry has led to an increasing appreciation and acceptance of the subjective nature of research. This has resulted in a greater emphasis being placed on bringing one's own self into the research process (Widdowfield, 2000). The concept of reflexivity - the continual monitoring of action and revision of social activity in the light of new knowledge - has been central to this (Barker, 1997; Davis, 1998; Rose, 1997; Tooke, 2000). Some recent studies (for example, Bennett, 2000; Parr, 1998) have suggested that consideration of the ways in which the researcher 'performs' roles are crucial.

Bennett (2000) has suggested that a frequently used qualitative research tool - the interview - consists of a number of 'performances' played out by both the researcher and the participant. Bennett recalled how in preparing for an interview she tried to take account of the research skills required (being a good listener, organized, relaxed, unselfconscious, flexible, intelligent, emotionally secure, able to 'monitor' her own behaviour, actions and comments), and noted that she had to take on some of these characteristics in her performance as a competent researcher.

Bennett observed that participants also performed different roles, their actions altering as the interview progressed and as they became more comfortable with this social situation. Through attempting to identify the various performances of herself and others, Bennett was able to unravel the ways in which she responded emotionally to the research and the roles she successively adopted (see also, Parr, 1998; Widdowfield, 2000). Further, she was able to reflect upon how these performances influenced the data collected and her interpretations.

*As the research progressed the researcher became aware of performing several roles. Being in her mid-20s meant that the researcher did not 'fit' a parent role, and in fact several of the girls had brothers, sisters or cousins of similar age to the researcher. The 'performance' differed between groups of girls, according to their personalities. Some girls wanted the researcher to perform a very active role in deciding issues to discuss and places to visit. Others wanted a more passive role, with the girls themselves actively deciding topics of conversation (within the general themes presented at the onset of the research) and organizing the dates and times of the meetings.*

*The girls appeared to view the researcher as a friendly person (rather than a friend) who had experienced growing up in the same locality not so long back. Being a non-driver and living locally with her parents, the researcher shared some commonalities with the girls. Further, having studied at the local secondary school was a great ice-breaker as the merits of various teachers could be discussed! This commonality led to some of the youngest girls considering the researcher to be a source of information about the secondary school they were shortly to attend, and some of the older girls wanting to discuss 'A' Level choices and university. It may be that some of the girls felt these commonalities helped to break down some of the inherent barriers between adult researcher and child participant, and in so doing enabled the researcher to gain greater access to the worlds of some of the girls.*

*The researcher performed a different role when interviewing the mothers. The researcher shared few commonalities with this group, the strongest link being that the researcher was a local resident. In these interview situations a more typical researcher role was adopted: being organized, relaxed, flexible, friendly and so on. Unlike the work carried out with the girls, these interviews were very much one-to-one situations and rather than being 'hidden' by group dynamics the researcher was called upon much more to perform in such a way that demonstrated agreement (whether real or not) with the opinions expressed by the mothers.*

*Although it was stressed that the research was not about whether the mothers were 'good parents', it emerged that by giving positive encouragement to remarks made about the boundaries set on children's use of public space, the mothers were more inclined to 'open up' and provide detailed information. By showing approval of their parenting strategies and agreement with their comments, the researcher was able to perform a role which supported the women's views and encouraged them to be more forthcoming.*

The roles performed by researchers are not limited to those words spoken and activities carried out. Parr (1998) has suggested that the body may be referred to as a 'tool' of negotiation which researchers manipulate, as far as is possible, to 'fit in' with the other bodies present in a given research situation. She argued that:

*"Negotiations of the researcher's body in association with the bodies of the researched promotes an holistic understanding of the research relationship, and adds to an appreciation of the different states-of-being experienced by others... It is well known in ethnographic or interview situations that to dress appropriately may help the interaction process... but other forms of presentation can also be important" (p. 31).*

Viewing the body as being as important and concrete to the research process as the tape recorder, Parr suggested that similar politics of negotiation are involved in its use as a research tool. By considering how difference is embodied in terms of clothing and mannerisms, Parr was able to present a 'bodily performance' in her research (carried out in drop-in centres for people with mental health problems) which made the difference she embodied intrude less on her research.

In childhood research it has been noted that by sitting at the same level as children, consultation may be more effective (Matthews and Tucker, 2000). Creating an informal atmosphere by removing some of the cultural symbols of adult power (such as a more formal dress style, and size differential being highlighted by adults standing at the front of the room whilst the children sit), children may feel less intimidated and be encouraged to speak out.

*When working with the girls the researcher dressed casually, often mirroring their 'jeans and a sweater' style. The equipment was carried to the meetings in a rucksack similar to those the girls used for carrying books to school, trying to create an informal, familiar image. When interviewing the mothers the researcher dressed a little more formally, swapping the jeans for tailored trousers. The researcher also used a more 'official' looking bag, trying to create an image of being organized, efficient and professional. When carrying out the questionnaire surveys within schools a compromise was reached - the smarter clothing used for the parent interviews together with the 'school bag'.*

*Much of the work carried out with the girls was done sitting on the floor, where the researcher attempted to mirror their posture to show that she was relaxed sitting there. In all of the interviews with the mothers the researcher sat on a chair, either face-to-face or alongside. Sitting on the floor the researcher tended to work with the girls in greater proximity than their mothers, who chose to sit where there would be greater physical distance between the parties.*

## **5.3 Choosing the Study Area**

### **5.3.1 Doing Research 'at Home'**

Richardson (2000) has noted that as researchers we cannot separate who we are and what we can be, from what we can study and how we can write about that which we study. Further, Back (1993) has suggested that the boundaries between 'Self' and 'Other' become obscured and redefined during fieldwork. These points are particularly relevant with regard to carrying out research 'at home'.



*The study area included both the researcher's home village and the market town in which the secondary school she attended is located. The researcher has lived in South Northants since 1989 (although three years were spent away from the village during completion of an undergraduate degree). Contrary to a traditional ethnography in which the researcher is distant, disengaged, removed and neutral (Richardson, 2000), in this case the researcher was able to undertake what Jones (1997b) terms 'genuine participation': being able to refine views of the village and nearby settlements over a number of years. Rather than employing participant observation as the basis for the research, the researcher sought the views of local young people. Local knowledge was useful in locating particular places on the researcher's 'mental map' of the area, and in linking local names and abbreviations to particular locations.*

As Jones (1997b) has noted, carrying out research in one's own village presents a number of issues. The researcher must distinguish between acts and information which are in the public sphere and those which the researcher has viewed or acquired through his/her 'local' status. This is essential with regard to confidentiality and privacy. Living locally and being able to rely upon local contacts may aid access, but also means that the researcher may be influenced throughout the course of the research by concerns about how this work reflects upon his/her 'position'. Similarly, Kneafsey (2000) voiced fears about carrying out research near the village in which her parents lived. She believed that her local links would mean that she would be known as 'one of the Kneafsey girls' and would have to remain in this daughter role. Kneafsey also felt that her family associations with the area raised the ethical issue of confidentiality of information.

*In this project, researching at home had one particular benefit. At a time when many headteachers felt that 'schools are being over-researched' (Headteacher, personal communication), the researcher's local links enabled her to gain access to the schools which may have been denied otherwise. Indeed, the headteacher of one school stated that the only reason the researcher was allowed access was because of her local links.*

*The researcher did not feel that she would experience the same problems as Kneafsey, even though she was researching 'at home'. Unlike Kneafsey, the researcher was not carrying out ethnographic research and did not employ participant observation as a research method. It is true that many of the girls and mothers the researcher worked with who were resident in her home village were aware of in which part of the village the researcher lived and several knew other members of her family. However, this did not appear to create any difficulties, and if anything it proved that instead of being an 'outsider' coming to the village to ask questions, the researcher had a genuine interest in the area.*

### 5.3.2 The Study Area - Rural South Northamptonshire

South Northants is one of seven administrative districts in Northamptonshire, lying in the south-west of the county and bordered by the towns of Northampton (on the east), Milton Keynes (on the south) and Banbury (on the west) (Figure 5.1). The district is largely rural, characterized by commercial farms and a small number of landed estates such as Easton Neston and Courteenhall, and is comprised of two market towns, Towcester (population<sup>1</sup> 7,006), the administrative centre for the district, and Brackley (population 9,113), and over 70 villages, many dominated by attractive cottages built in the local sandstone. The area has recently become extremely accessible both to the London and Birmingham/West Midlands conurbations, largely as a result of motorways constructed in the 1950s (the M1 and M45) and the 1990s (the M40) and improvements to the mainline rail network (to Euston via the West Coast mainline, and Marylebone via the Chiltern Railway) between London and Birmingham. Both these transport networks skirt the western and eastern margins of the district and bring the villages within one hour's travelling distance of both conurbations.

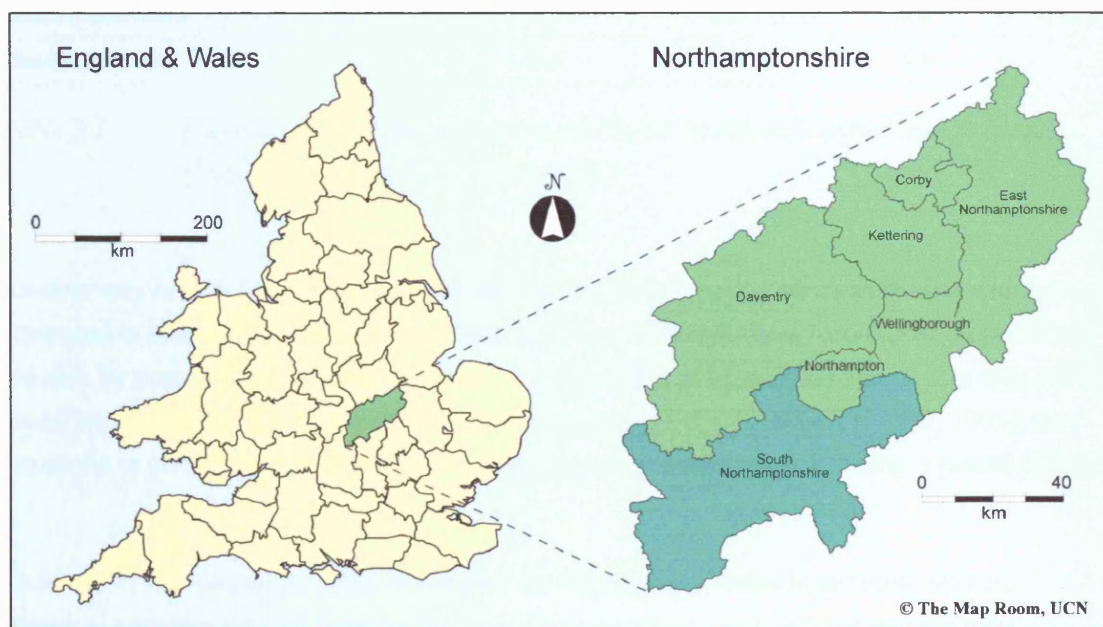


Figure 5.1 Location of the study area.

<sup>1</sup> Population data cited in this chapter are taken from the 1991 census.

It is not surprising therefore that the district has experienced considerable population pressures over the last three decades, whether from the expansion of ‘New Towns’ such as Northampton and Milton Keynes from the mid-1960s or in response to wider regional changes which have seen a wave-like pattern of population growth extending from London (in the south) and the West Midlands (in the north-west). Indeed, although not within South Northants, other settlements in Northamptonshire have been part of overspill schemes for both conurbations, Daventry (about 15 miles from Towcester) for Birmingham and Wellingborough for London. The impact of these growth pressures can be seen in the population changes recorded from the census (Table 5.1).

	1961	1971	1981	1991
<b>Northamptonshire</b>	<b>398,057</b>	<b>468,623</b>	<b>528,448</b>	<b>578,807</b>
<b>South Northants</b>	<b>40,937</b>	<b>55,811</b>	<b>64,295</b>	<b>70,685</b>
	Percentage Change			
	1961-71	1971-81	1981-91	
<b>Northamptonshire</b>	<b>17.7</b>	<b>12.8</b>	<b>9.5</b>	
<b>South Northants</b>	<b>36.3</b>	<b>15.2</b>	<b>9.9</b>	

*Table 5.1 Population of Northamptonshire and South Northants - actual and % change.  
(Data taken from OPCS, 1982; 1993.)*

Another way in which this change can be demonstrated is through a series of studies which have attempted to measure ‘rurality’ using census variables. Although these ‘ecological’ approaches are seen by post-modern and post-structuralist geographers as of limited value in that they fail to reveal lay discourses, based upon personal experience and belief (Halfacree, 1993; 1995), they are useful in giving an overall picture of the dynamics of change in an area over a period of time.

Cloke (1977) developed an Index of Rurality for England and Wales based upon sixteen statistical variables derived from census data. These variables encompassed employment, population, migration, housing conditions, land use and remoteness. Cloke created a simple quartile classification from these data, enabling places to be described as *extreme rural*, *intermediate rural*, *non-rural* or *extreme non-rural*. As Table 5.2 shows, between 1961 and 1971 locations in the country experienced some change, with all locations falling into non-rural categories by 1971. A similar trend can be seen in Harrington and O’Donoghue’s (1998) review of rurality in England and Wales in 1991.

	1961	1971	Category Change
Brackley	0.1670	2.0726	INR » INR
Brixworth	0.2677	1.1209	IR » INR
Daventry	-0.0861	0.8290	IR » INR
Northampton	5.8481	6.0847	ENR » ENR
Towcester	-0.0016	4.6609	IR » ENR
Key to categories: ENR: Extreme Non-Rural; INR: Intermediate Non-Rural; IR: Intermediate Rural			

Table 5.2      *Index scores for selected locations in Northamptonshire, 1961-1971.*  
*(After Cloke, 1977.)*

More recently Bailey *et al.* (2000) have developed a classification using thirty-seven variables from the 1991 census. This classification is based on seven ‘families’, each of which is subdivided in a ‘group’ and further subdivided into ‘clusters’. Using this measure South Northants fits into the family entitled ‘Prosperous England’, the group ‘Growth Area’ and the cluster ‘Prosperous Growth Area’. According to Bailey *et al.* (2000), the profile of ‘Prosperous England’ can be summarized as such:

“Geographical location: all authorities in this Family are English, with a notable circle around central and south east England.

Key characteristics: higher than average values for all indicators of affluence including the proportion of the population where the household head is in Social Class I or II, households with 2+ cars, 2 earners and no children households, owner occupied housing and more than 7 rooms” (p. 51).

The nearest ‘relatives’ to South Northants using this classification are the Daventry, Harborough, East Hampshire and mid-Bedfordshire districts.

The Lifestyles in Rural England project undertaken Cloke *et al.* (1994) aimed to paint a picture of what rural life was like in 1990. This research involved completion of over 3000 household based questionnaires in twelve case study areas. One of these case studies areas, Litchborough, falls within the boundaries of South Northants. Cloke *et al.* (1994) described the area:

“The area is very accessible to the Birmingham and London metropolitan areas and had experienced considerable pressures for increased residential development in recent years, although planning policies were in place that presumed against further growth.



The area contained a high proportion of children aged under 16 years (20%) relative to our other study areas, whilst a near identical rate to the national mean (20.1%). Only 14.1% of residents in the Northamptonshire area were aged 65 years and over, compared with 18.7% for England as a whole...

The study area had the second highest level of owner occupation of our 12 study areas at 78.1% of households... There was a high level of car ownership with 51.5% of households having two or more cars, and only 12.3% of households without use of such a vehicle.

Almost two-thirds (65.4%) of all adult residents were economically active... Unemployment stood at 4.6% in April 1991. The local labour market was dominated by the service sector... Only 6.4% of workers were engaged in agriculture, forestry and fishing. Around 27% of persons in employment were engaged in professional and managerial occupations, whilst the non-manual and manual socio-economic groups accounted for 35.6% and 18.9% of total workers respectively” (pp. 32-33).

In summary, therefore, the study area may be viewed as a commuter area dependent on the Midlands and South East labour markets. Population growth has meant that the district is experiencing pressure for residential development, although there is a fairly restrictive planning policy (Cloke *et al.*, 1994). The area has a relatively ‘youthful’ population age structure, a low rate of unemployment, and high levels of owner occupation and car ownership.

It follows from these ecological studies that South Northants has undergone considerable social changes over the past three decades or so. Indeed Sherwood (1986) revealed in his study of the area that, during the 1970s, the majority of newcomers to South Northants were in professional and managerial households and moving to the area from outside the district. The effect of this process, coupled with an increasingly stringent set of policies controlling new housing development in the villages and the push towards owner occupation has been to produce a housing market dominated by large, expensive and detached properties. A survey of information held by the Land Registry for post code areas NN12 6\*\* (Towcester) and NN12 8\*\* (the villages of South Northants) revealed that the average price of houses sold in 2000 was higher in South Northants than in the county as a whole, and that prices within the rural villages (postcode area NN12 8\*\*) were considerably greater than within the market town (postcode area NN12 6\*\*) (Figure 5.2).

			
	<b>Detached</b>	<b>Semi - Detached</b>	<b>Terraced</b>
<b>Northamptonshire</b>	<b>£137,900</b>	<b>£72,000</b>	<b>£58,000</b>
<b>South Northamptonshire</b>	<b>£176,000</b>	<b>£100,000</b>	<b>£92,200</b>
<b>NN12 6**</b>	<b>£147,300</b>	<b>£84,300</b>	<b>£72,900</b>
<b>NN12 8**</b>	<b>£224,000</b>	<b>£107,400</b>	<b>£94,300</b>

*Figure 5.2 Average price of houses sold in 2000 according to housing type. (Data taken from Land Registry (2001). Total number of properties sold during this period: Northamptonshire = 16,717; South Northants = 1,775; NN12 6\*\* = 184; NN12 8\*\* = 155.)*

Indeed, even for the local authority sector, a recent study of the re-sale of former council houses in rural South Northants revealed that, although most homes were being occupied by households in the skilled manual sector, most were families moving in from outside the district, so further denying access to local, lower-income households (Chaney and Sherwood, 2000).

It follows, therefore, that South Northants is increasingly characterized by an affluent, middle-class population, and this image is confirmed by recent surveys which have compared all districts of England. Gordon and Forrest (1995), for example, included South Northants in a 'crescent of wealth' surrounding the London region. Using data from the 1991 census, Gordon and Forrest ranked the 366 English local authority districts according to a number of criteria. South Northants is ranked within the top 10% of a number of variables which indicate affluence, and within the bottom 10% of many indicators of poverty (Table 5.3).

Criteria	Rank (out of 366)	Details
<b>Indicators of Affluence</b>		
<b>Multiple Earner Households</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>Nearly 60% of all households have multiple earners.</b>
<b>Big Houses</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>27% of all households have seven or more rooms.</b>
<b>The Wealthy</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>South Northamptonshire has a wealth index of 4.6. This index is derived from the following variables: two or more cars; houses with 7 or more rooms; 'dual income, no kids' households; those in occupations where average full time salary was above the higher tax rate threshold (£23,705 in 1991).</b>
<b>Indicators of Poverty</b>		
<b>Poor Children</b>	<b>364</b>	<b>5% of all children live in non-earner households.</b>
<b>Townsend Deprivation Index</b>	<b>351</b>	<b>South Northamptonshire has an index score of -4.27. This index is composed by summing the standardized score of four variables: percentage of households without access to a car; percentage of households not in owner-occupied accommodation; percentage of households in overcrowded accommodation; unemployment as a percentage of economically active population.</b>

*Table 5.3 Indicators of affluence and poverty. (After Gordon and Forrest, 1995.)*

Notwithstanding this impression of South Northants now forming part of a 'crescent of wealth' throughout southern England (Gordon and Forrest, 1995), there is growing evidence to suggest that alongside this has been a rationalization and centralization of much service provision (Sherwood and Lewis, 2000). This has had a greater impact upon the more vulnerable groups in rural areas, with certain hidden populations within the area not feeling the apparent benefits of this affluence (Cloke, 1997b; Cloke and Little, 1997; Cloke *et al.*, 1995; Moseley, 1979).

Within the overall affluent nature of this rural environment, different settlements represent a variety of rural experiences. Locations vary with regard to levels of facility provision. Towcester, the market town, has a much wider range of facilities than the smaller settlements, with housing and economic growth being channelled into this area (Chaney, 1997). Eight key facilities which have particular relevance to young people's lifestyles have been identified - general store, shopping bus service, evening bus service, public telephone, primary school, secondary school, play area, sports field. The rationalization of services has a particular impact on young people. Young people tend to have poor spending power and are (in the case of the age group on which this research focuses) too young to drive. As a result, for many young people the vast majority of their leisure experiences are played out within the confines of their home village (Davis and Ridge, 1997).

	Population	General Store	Shopping Bus Service	Evening Bus Service	Public Telephone	Primary School	Secondary School	Play Area	Sports Ground
Abthorpe	255		√		√				
Adstone	75				√				
Blakesley	435	√	√		√	√		√	√
Bradden	135	√	√		√				
Duncote	105				√				
Foxley *									
Greens Norton	1515	√	√		√	√		√	√
Heathencote *									
Litchborough	235		√		√				
Maidford	155		√		√			√	
Potcote *									
Silverstone	1425	√	√		√	√		√	√
Slapton	60		√		√				
Tiffield	410		√		√	√		√	√
Wappenham	245	√	√		√			√	
Whittlebury	455	√	√		√	√		√	
Wood Burcote *									
Woodend	160		√		√				
Towcester	7006	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√

Table 5.4 Service provision in settlements in the study area. (\* indicates those locations for which population data were unavailable. Evidence from site visits indicates that all these settlements have populations of less than 50.)



The research was carried out within an area of South Northants (Figure 5.3). The study area comprises the secondary school catchment of one of the two main towns in the district - Towcester (population 7,006). The school catchment area comprises the market town, a number of villages of varying population and several individual farmsteads. Nineteen settlements were represented in the questionnaire survey. Seven of these settlements were the home settlements of those girls who participated in the in-depth work: Greens Norton, Litchborough, Potcote, Silverstone, Tifffield, Whittlebury and Towcester. The mothers interviewed were resident in five of these locations: Litchborough, Potcote, Silverstone, Whittlebury and Towcester.

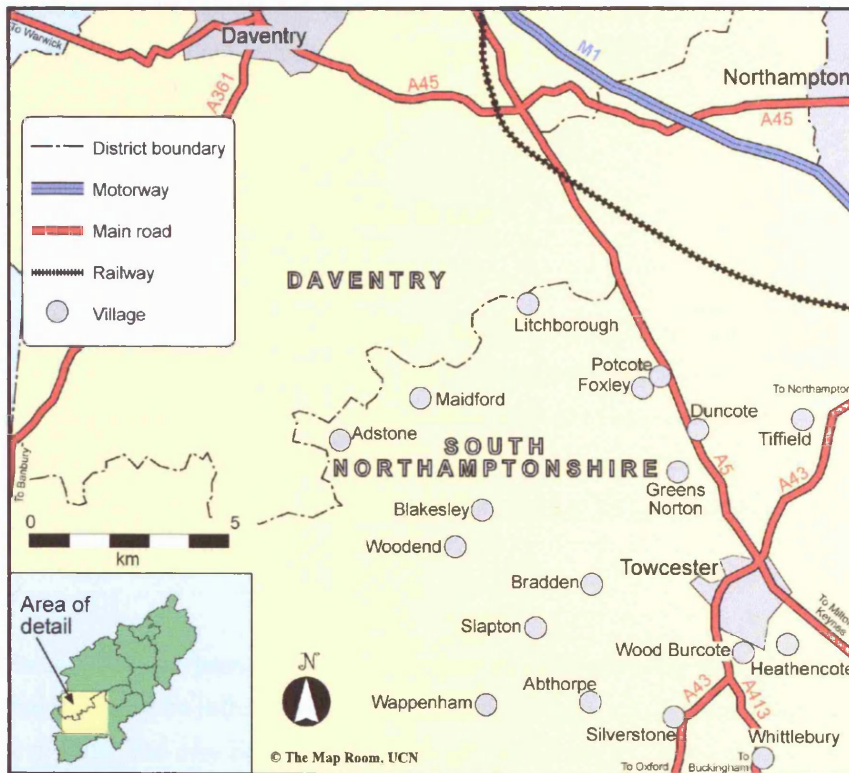


Figure 5.3 Infrastructure of the study area.

There are many different types of rural area. This study area represents one particular type - namely an affluent, commuter-dependent rural. The geographies uncovered in this study are not universal. Rather, they relate to a diversity of rural experiences within such a setting.

## 5.4 Choosing the Participants

Although there is an increasing body of research with children and young people, the early teen years have been somewhat neglected (Skelton, 2000; Valentine and McKendrick, 1997). This research has focused on the experiences of 10-15 year olds. This age group includes those children about to make the change from attending a small village primary school to attending a much larger secondary school in a nearby market town, enabling comparisons to be made between those who spend the majority of their time in the village and those who spend a considerable part of the day outside it. The age of 15 years was chosen as the upper limit of the sample as some data collection coincided with the GCSE examination period in which young people aged 16 years were involved.

### 5.4.1 Working with Children in School

The 'normal' difficulties in accessing a sample of children are heightened when working in a rural area. The smaller populations and wider distribution of young people make them a difficult group to access. There also may be problems in accessing a large number of children and structuring the sample. The first stage of the research, an extensive questionnaire survey, was carried out within schools in an attempt to access as large a number and as wide a range of young people as possible.

Scott (2000) has argued that the main drawbacks of working with children within schools are that they may be influenced by the proximity of their class mates, may quiz each other on their responses, and may be tempted to give answers that win favour with the peer-group. Callaghan and Dennis (1997) have suggested that the culture of school may affect children's confidence in their ability to opt-in or opt-out of the research.

*Attempts were made to minimize the impact of these factors in the research. The researcher tried to make it clear that it was very much an opt-in activity, and stressed that it was an individual's own thoughts that were valued. The participants were told that they did not have to answer any question that they did not wish to. The fact that a number of children chose not to complete the questionnaire suggests that the school environment may not have had a strong influence upon children's participation.*

#### **5.4.2 Recruiting 'Hidden' Children**

In research with rural children there is a strong bias towards those groups easiest to access, for example those who attend youth clubs and organizations, or who commonly 'hang out' on the street. Such an approach may skew the findings and also contributes to the neglect of those young people who may be 'less visible'. To minimize such bias, girls interested in participating further in the research project were asked to give contact details to the researcher following completion of the questionnaire. The sample gained was not random - it comprised only those girls interested in talking about their local area - yet it contained a mixture of girls who attend youth clubs, who commonly 'hang out' on the street, and who fit into the 'less visible' category.

#### **5.4.3 Recruiting Mothers**

Responses in the questionnaire survey suggested that mothers played the most important role in setting the spatial and temporal boundaries on children's use of outdoor spaces. It was thus decided that interviews with mothers would be carried out. Problems of gaining access to mothers of girls whose ages fell into the 10-15 years category - mainly due to the limited number of women who fitted into this category in many of the smallest settlements - made it necessary for the researcher to contact mothers of girls who had participated in the in-depth research. A number of ethical issues arose from this.

*Having stressed to the girls the importance of hearing young people's opinions and experiences, the researcher considered that it would be altering the research relationship if the mothers were contacted directly. Instead a letter was sent to the girls, explaining that the researcher was interested in finding out mothers' views about some of the issues that had been discussed. It was stressed that all information given by the girls would remain confidential, that no information given by the child would be divulged to the mother and vice versa, and that the information collected would not be used in such a way that the opinions of girls and their mothers could be compared directly. The girls were asked to return a form if they were happy for their mother to be invited to participate in the research project. Positive responses were received from 21 of the 27 girls. The mothers were then contacted, and the confidentiality issues involved in their participation were outlined.*

#### 5.4.4 The Participants

##### *The Questionnaire Survey*

The questionnaire survey was completed by 193 young people, with a fairly equal number of boys and girls. A slightly greater number of 13-15 year olds than 10-12 year olds completed the survey. Participants were drawn from 19 settlements. The sample was dominated by young people resident in the market town (Towcester) and largest villages (Greens Norton and Silverstone). The vast majority of participants were white and lived in two-parent families. The characteristics of this group are summarized in Table 5.5.

<b>Number of Participants</b>	<b>193</b>
<b>Sex</b>	<b>95 boys 98 girls</b>
<b>Age</b>	<b>10 - 12 years = 84 13 - 15 years = 108 (no data available for 1 participant)</b>
<b>Location</b>	<b>89 participants lived in Towcester 46 lived in Silverstone 19 lived in Greens Norton 6 lived in Tiffield 4 lived in Blakesley 3 lived in Adstone 3 lived in Litchborough 3 lived in Woodend 2 lived in Bradden 2 lived in Wappenham 2 lived in Whittlebury 2 lived in Woodend 1 lived in each of Abthorpe/Duncote/Foxley/Heathencote Maidford/Slapton (no data available for 6 participants)</b>
<b>Ethnic Origin</b>	<b>182 White 1 Asian 1 Chinese (no data available for 5 participants)</b>
<b>Family Background</b>	<b>170 lived in two-parent families 16 lived in single-parent families (no data available for 7 participants)</b>

*Table 5.5 Summary of participants - the questionnaire survey.*

##### *In-Depth Discussion Work*

In-depth discussion work was carried out with 27 girls. A similar number of girls were in each of the age categories. Around half of the sample comprised residents of Towcester, the market town, with the remainder resident in one of six villages. The sample was dominated by children from two-parent families and of white ethnic origin. The characteristics of this group are summarized in Table 5.6.

<b>Number of Participants</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Age</b>	<b>10 - 12 years = 12 girls</b> <b>13 - 15 years = 15 girls</b>
<b>Location</b>	<b>14 girls lived in Towcester</b> <b>5 girls lived in Silverstone</b> <b>2 girls lived in Greens Norton</b> <b>2 girls lived in Tiffield</b> <b>2 girls lived in Whittlebury</b> <b>1 girl lived in Litchborough</b> <b>1 girl lived in Potcote</b>
<b>Ethnic Origin</b>	<b>26 White</b> <b>1 Asian</b>
<b>Family Background</b>	<b>26 lived in two-parent families</b> <b>1 lived in a single-parent family</b>

*Table 5.6 Summary of participants - in-depth discussion work.*

### ***Interviews with Mothers***

Interviews were conducted with 12 of the girls' mothers. Five locations were represented in this group. None of the group was a single parent, and all were White. The characteristics of this group are summarized in Table 5.7.

<b>Number of Participants</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Location</b>	<b>4 lived in Towcester</b> <b>4 lived in Silverstone</b> <b>2 lived in Whittlebury</b> <b>1 lived in Litchborough</b> <b>1 lived in Potcote</b>
<b>Ethnic Origin</b>	<b>12 White</b>
<b>Family Background</b>	<b>12 lived in two-parent families</b>

*Table 5.7 Summary of participants - interviews with mothers.*

### **5.4.5 Ethics, Consent and Confidentiality**

Children form a very vulnerable group within society (Cunningham and Jones, 1999). Ethical issues arising from childhood research are complex. Matthews *et al.* (1998b) have argued that ethical research involves research *with* not *on* children (see also Alderson, 1995). Children have the right to know why they have been selected, the right to consent to and withdraw from the research project, and for confidentiality and anonymity to be guaranteed (Matthews and Tucker, 2000).

Thomas and O’Kane (1998) have argued that a central concern of ethical research with children should be to redress the power imbalance between the child participant and the adult researcher, enabling children to participate on their own terms. Thomas and O’Kane identified three core principles of consent: the active agreement to participate; the ability to withdraw at any point; and a choice over how they participate in the research.

*An attempt was made to fulfil all three criteria in this research. Separate introductory information sheets were provided for children and parents/teachers. By providing information solely for them, it was hoped that the children would consider that their decision to participate was crucial. Parental consent was gained for all participants, but it was stressed that even though parents had consented for the child to participate the final decision rested with the child him/herself. It was made clear that participants could withdraw from the project at any stage, and the fact that some children did withdraw from the project and did so at different stages within the data collection process, suggests that opting out was seen to be a genuine option. The research tools used were not chosen by the children, but by allowing them to direct the course of the discussion work and determine the focus of the photo posters and video tours within overall themes of the research, they were able to exert some control over the research process.*

Although children “have remarkable insight into impression management and self-presentation in everyday life” (Scott, 2000, p. 112) and may control what information they pass on to the researcher, they do not have control over the use made of their words and actions (Ball, 1985). Children may not have a clear idea about the process in which they are participating, and if the word ‘researcher’ has no meaning for the child, then consent is not informed (Epstein, 1998). In such cases informed consent requires a responsible adult to be told about all features of the project that may affect a willingness to participate (Matthews *et al.*, 1998b). In any event the nature of the project should be explained in terms that the children involved can understand.

*It became apparent early in the research that many of the children did not fully understand what ‘research’ involves and so were less able to give informed consent. To help enable the participants to give informed consent the research project was introduced by comparing it to a school project. The researcher explained that, as with a school project, information was to be collected, thought was to be given about what this information might mean, and then a report would be written and this would be examined. It was explained how the data collected would be used and it was stated that some of the findings might be published in ‘magazines’ (academic journals) that would be read by other people who were carrying out similar projects. The researcher outlined the level of involvement required of participants, describing the length of the project, the amount of time their participation would involve, and what methods would be used. The purpose and likely outcomes of the study were made clear and it was hoped that this would avoid raising false expectations (McDowell, 1997). Feedback was given in order that participants could see how their contributions had been valued and used.*

Ethical research, according to Alderson (1995), considers how possible risks to the participants can be reduced. Maintaining confidentiality and anonymity is central to this, and these issues were of paramount importance to this research. Pseudonyms have been used for all participants. The girls chose their own pseudonyms. Epstein (1998) has noted that this may be misleading as not all children choose names common to their own ethnic and language group, yet in research which aims to be *with* children it enables the children themselves to determine the way in which they are presented to an audience. Indeed, as Valentine (1999a) has noted, while contemporary research with children within the social sciences is strongly focused on giving children a voice, many researchers working with this aim are actually “writing individual children out of their research” (p. 148).

*Carrying out research within rural areas raises a further confidentiality issue. In many of the villages in the study area there are few young people who fall within the age group, making anonymity sometimes difficult if local people read the research reports. However, in this study the participants were keen to point out that they were not worried about anyone identifying them, as no one they knew would be likely to read the thesis or any associated publications. Further, many of the participants were excited about the idea that their views may appear in a written report and did not want their identities to be masked in any way.*

## **5.5 Choosing the Research ‘Tools’**

Effective consultation depends on children being responsive and engaged in the research process (Matthews and Tucker, 2000). In their research on out-of-school clubs, Smith and Barker (2000) asked children to define a research agenda. They found that children were keen to stress that the use of several diverse methods would enable as many children as possible to offer their opinions. Smith and Barker stressed that, although some children may find one method or task enjoyable, others may find it inhibitive. Their research demonstrated the importance of moving beyond traditional research methods towards more child-focused ones. Recognizing that some views expressed may be situation-specific, the use of several techniques enables triangulation of data and identification of consensus and difference. The use of multiple techniques has the further advantage of giving breadth of coverage.

James *et al.* (1998) suggested that the power relation evoked between the adult researcher and the child participant in a standard one-to-one interview becomes diffused when group interviews are held, and that engaging children in ‘task-centred’ activities rather than ‘talk-centred’ methods might provide a better way of allowing children to express their ideas and opinions. It must be recognized, however, that the adoption of child-centred methods does not in itself necessarily allow children’s voices to be heard.

A range of research methods were employed at the outset of this project. Three strands formed the basis of the data collection: an extensive questionnaire survey with both boys and girls; in-depth discussion work with groups of girls, and semi-structured interviews with the mothers of some of those girls who had participated in the in-depth research.

### 5.5.1 The Questionnaire Survey

The main aims of the research were to investigate whether locality constitutes a contingency effect upon rural childhood(s) - particularly whether 'the rural' matters as a defining experience for young people growing up in UK society today - and to examine whether gender and age are important factors in the outdoor behaviour and experiences of young people who are growing up in a rural area. In order to gain an overall picture of the lifestyles and experiences of children growing up in rural South Northants a questionnaire survey was undertaken. The survey is summarized below (Table 5.8).

Questionnaire Survey	
<b>Aim:</b>	To gain an overall picture of the lifestyles and experiences of children growing up in rural South Northants, and the influence of location, gender and age upon this.
<b>Carried Out:</b>	Summer 1999.
<b>Sample:</b>	Sample comprised 98 girls and 95 boys aged 10-15 years. Total of 193 questionnaires completed. 19 settlements represented.
<b>Task:</b>	Self-completion questionnaire. Assistance given where necessary.
<b>Format:</b>	Questions were divided into 8 sections: personal details; attitudes towards places; travel; free time - outdoors; free time - indoors; gangs; clubs and leisure; social details.
<b>Duration:</b>	30-60 minutes.
<b>Feedback:</b>	Summary sheets distributed to participants via the schools within one month. Researcher returned to the Primary Schools to explain the results to the children. The children were asked to suggest what answers other children may have given and to place pictures of things children liked and disliked etc. on a large poster at the front of the room. The researcher showed the participants some of the drawings produced - all were anonymized - and the children were asked to interpret these.

Table 5.8 Summary of questionnaire survey.

The questionnaire was divided into eight sections (see Appendix A). The first section aimed to uncover some personal details about the participants, enabling the responses to be analyzed with regard to age, gender and location. Attitudes towards local places were explored in the second section, enabling general opinions about the locality to be identified. Details about levels of household car ownership were collected in the third section in order that differences in access to transport could be compared to children's use of facilities both within and outside the home village.



The fourth and largest section focused on children's free time out of doors. The participants' use of both formal and informal outdoor spaces was examined together with the spatial and temporal boundaries set by parents on children's time outdoors. The data collected could produce a general picture of differences in children's outdoor place use, and variations in this - whether due to age, gender, location, some other variable or a combination of these - could be highlighted. In section five questions concerning children's free time within the home allowed differences in children's social use of home spaces to be explored in relation to age, gender and location. Gang membership was examined in section six in order to establish whether different groups of young people share social spaces.

Club membership and use of leisure facilities were uncovered in section seven. Through collecting data on the frequency of attendance at clubs and facilities in different locations the proportion of children's leisure activities both within and outside of the village could be identified, and differences according to age, gender and location explored.

Following consultation with colleagues and the children's teachers, it was decided that prior to the questionnaire survey, those children attending the primary schools would be asked to produce two drawings. By drawing pictures of 'a local place I like' and 'a local place I do not like' it was hoped that the children would start to think about their feelings about and experiences in the local area (see also Hart, 1997; P. Owens, 1999). The researcher worked with small groups of these young children to assist them in completing the questionnaire, being able to give more individual attention than a whole class environment would allow. It was deemed impractical to work with the secondary school children in small groups due to timetabling issues, end of term exams and the number of children involved. Instead the questionnaire was completed with whole class groups.

The questionnaire survey enabled the role of location, gender and age upon young people's experiences of growing up in a rural area to be explored. Rural childhoods were compared between and within settlements in South Northants to establish the extent to which place matters. It was considered whether the size of settlement and the facilities provided influence experiences of growing up in a rural area. In considering the extent to which gender and age cut across location to give rise to multiple childhoods, the importance both of locality and other macro-social forces were examined. The rural lifestyles of boys and girls were investigated to establish the role of gender in experiences of rural upbringings. Although this extensive survey could not provide detailed information on the lifestyles of individuals, it enabled a broader picture to be seen and indicated some issues and themes worthy of in-depth study.

### 5.5.2 In-Depth Discussion Work

The second strand of data collection consisted of in-depth discussion work with groups of girls. Using data from the questionnaire survey to pinpoint those issues and themes most evident or interesting as areas for further inquiry, a bottom-up process was used in drawing up the discussion schedule. The dominant themes emerging from the questionnaire survey led to exploration of: girls' use of outdoor spaces; their perceptions of places of safety and danger; conflict with adults; conflict with gangs of older children; their attendance at clubs and use of leisure facilities; and boys' places/girls' places. Through examining these themes a more detailed picture of girls' everyday experiences growing up in a rural area could be seen, and difference and diversity in the experiences of individual children could be drawn out. Attention was also paid to the role of gender, age and location in shaping young girls' lifestyles. The methods used in this in-depth discussion work are summarized in Table 5.9.

In-Depth Discussion Work	
<b>Aim:</b>	To explore the influence of gender, age and location on girls' experiences of growing up in a rural area. To explore difference and diversity in the lifestyles of a group of 10-15 year old girls.
<b>Carried Out:</b>	October 1999 - June 2000.
<b>Sample:</b>	27 girls. 7 settlements represented.
<b>Task:</b>	Session 1 - Group discussion. Session 2 - Photo posters. Session 3 - Video tour.
<b>Format:</b>	Session 1: General discussion. Questions were grouped into 7 sections: personal details; use of outdoor spaces; places of danger and safety; gangs; conflict with adults; clubs and leisure; boys' places/girls' places. Session 2: Participants took photographs of local places and displayed these in posters. Discussions took place using the photographs as a catalyst. Session 3: Participants led the researcher on a tour of the local area, talking about why places were important to them.
<b>Duration:</b>	Each session lasted 45-120 minutes.
<b>Feedback:</b>	Thank you note sent within one week stressing importance of participant's contribution to the research project. Participants also given a gift voucher for a shop of their choice as a token of appreciation. Summary sheets distributed when analysis completed. Copies of papers sent as soon available in published form.

Table 5.9 Summary of in-depth discussion work.

The in-depth discussions were conducted with girls aged 10-15 years. The groups met on three occasions - the first meeting comprised a group discussion; the second was centred around child-taken photographs; the third consisted of a child-led video tour of the home village. Group discussions tend to be most effective when there is a secure, unthreatening and supportive structure of group members (Burgess *et al.*, 1988c). Children often find that working with friends is more supportive and enabling. They are more at ease in each others company and so more confident with adult researchers (Mayall, 2000). With this in mind, the in-depth discussions were carried out with friendship groups. The strengths and weaknesses of group discussions are listed below (Table 5.10).

*When seeking participants for the project it was stated that the researcher would like to meet with small groups of friends. No limit was set on the size of these groups; most girls worked in groups of two or four. One girl was very much interested in participating in the research project but could not persuade any of her friends to join her; the researcher worked with this girl on an individual basis.*

Strengths	Weaknesses
Can elicit the collective experiences of a group of children.	The nuances of an individual's experiences may be hidden.
Informal atmosphere enables and encourages children to speak out.	Group dynamics (some children may dominate the discussion).
Group members can build upon each others ideas.	Children may be influenced by peer pressure to give answers they think other members of the group might like to hear rather than what they truly think.

*Table 5.10 Strengths and weaknesses of group discussions.  
(Based on Boyden and Ennew, 1997; McKendrick et al., 1996;  
Matthews and Tucker, 2000; Morgan, 1997.)*

The girls chose the setting in which the research was carried out. The different environments chosen were dependent on the needs and preferences of the group. The majority of girls chose to work within the home of one member of the group. Scott (2000) has argued that home interviewing raises a number of issues, most notably that complete privacy is often impractical or elusive in the home and that the role of parents as gatekeepers takes on more connotations. A minority of groups chose to work outside of the home, preferring to meet in coffee shops or the local library. Sibley (1995a) has noted how boundary disputes are common within the home, encouraging the exodus of some young people onto the streets.

Following the initial group discussion, conversations were based on child-led activities such as child-taken photographs and child-led video tours. These visual methods were used as catalyst for discussion and to help elicit socio-spatial data. Young and Barrett (2001a) have argued that some visual methods, such as sketch maps and the use of aerial photos, are very much directed and controlled by the researcher. The use of child-taken photographs, however, moves the control and implementation of visual methods from adults to children, allowing them to construct accounts of their lives in their own terms (Young and Barrett, 2001a; 2001b). Further advantages of this technique are that it is fun and 'active', helping to engage children with the research, and images may be produced in spaces and at times that the researcher may not otherwise have access to. Child-led video tours have similar advantages, being fun, 'active' and helping to engage young people's interest. The video camera also provides an intermediary between the researcher and the participants, with the camera being the central recipient of their stories (Pearce and Stanko, 2000). The strengths and weaknesses of visual methods are summarized in Table 5.11.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Visual methods do not marginalize people in same way as some literacy-based methods.	Without verbal comments you may incorrectly infer what young people are thinking.
Encourages involvement, engagement and sustained interest.	Techniques are more costly both in time and outlay.
Photographs and videos may capture events and situations that may be overlooked by other forms of recording.	Utmost care is needed to ensure that children are not put at any risk when taking photographic records.
Images are easily shared, creating a common base for discussion.	Training may be required in all photographic techniques.
Puts children in control.	

*Table 5.11 Strengths and weakness of visual methods.  
(Based on Aitken and Wingate, 1993; Bain et al. (no date);  
Boyden and Ennew, 1997; Cohen and Emanuel, 1998; Glaister, 1968;  
Matthews and Tucker, 2000; Mignot, 2000; Pearce and Stanko, 2000;  
Shaw and Robertson, 1997.)*

The girls were each given a 27-exposure disposable camera at the first meeting and were asked to take photographs of the local area which fitted into eight categories: places I like, places I dislike, places to be alone, places to be with friends, safe places, unsafe places, boys' places and girls' places, and the countryside. In order to allow and encourage the girls to set their own agendas and talk about their own views (Hurley, 1998), it was stressed that the girls did not have to take photos for each category and that they could focus on those issues most important to themselves. The girls were told that they did not have to take all 27 photos if they did not wish to. The technicalities about taking pictures in dark or indoor places were explained, but this did not prevent children from taking pictures in such places (see also, Cunningham and Jones, 1999). The cameras were collected and the film developed before the second meeting. The girls were given a set of prints to keep.

At the second meeting the girls were asked to make posters using the photographs they had taken, grouping the photographs into the categories (see Appendix B). Large sheets of card, a wide selection of felt tip pens and means of attaching the photos to the card were provided. Some girls chose to display their photos on just one sheet of card, others made several posters. A number of the girls added new categories, reflecting their particular interests and concerns. The girls were asked to add written comments to their posters indicating why photographs had been taken of these places. These comments were expanded on in discussions as the girls completed the posters. The majority of the girls chose to include all the photographs they had taken in their poster(s). A minority selected a sample of their photos to display.

In total 351 photographs were taken by the girls. Table 5.12 shows a basic analysis of these images. The content of around one fifth of the photos were classified by the girls as 'unsafe places', and a further one fifth as 'places I like'. 'Places to be with friends' were also commonly pictured on the posters. 'Places to be alone', 'boys' places/girls' places' and 'places I dislike' were included less frequently. The content of the photos is also summarized in Table 5.12. Using a fairly crude level of analysis it can be seen that buildings and aspects of the natural environment featured regularly, and that more than one fifth of images showed young people involved in some sort of activity. Recreation grounds and parks, a leisure centre, and roads appeared in one in ten photos.

Category	%	Content	%
Unsafe places	21	Buildings	31
Places I like	19	Natural environment	29
Places to be with friends	15	Activity	22
Safe places	10	Family	12
The countryside	9	Recreation ground/park	10
Boys' places/girls' places	6	Roads	10
Places I dislike	6	Leisure Centre	9
Places to be alone	5	Shops	9
Own category	4	Gangs/other children	5
Not categorized	12	Other	12

*Table 5.12 Content of the photographs taken. (The columns do not total 100 since many of the images were placed in more than one category and reflected more than one of the content descriptors.)*

At the third and final meeting the girls took the researcher on a tour of their home village. Where the friendship group consisted of girls from more than one village, a tour was made of each village. The girls decided which places were important to talk about and chose a route around the village which would encompass these places. They also decided whether each member of the group would talk about a particular place, or whether they would take it in turns to act as spokesperson. In order that all of the participants could be filmed talking about places that were important to them it was agreed that the researcher would operate the camera. During the course of the tours, however, some of the girls requested to use the camera and these requests were granted. A copy was made of the video recording and sent to each member of the group within one week of the event.

The video tours generally consisted of the same places as the photos, however additional sites were included as the girls toured their home village. By simply walking around their home village the girls passed places they had not considered important or relevant to the photo survey, yet when actually there they were eager to discuss these. All of the tours in the market town and larger villages included a visit to a recreation ground and park. Every tour in Towcester included the leisure centre. All but one of the tours in villages included 'rural' spaces such as fields or woodland.

Through this combination of methods a detailed picture of the everyday lifestyles of a group of young girls could be gained. The effect of gender upon young people's use of outdoor spaces was explored, with particular attention paid to whether place use is 'gendered' within the rural landscape. The place use and behaviour of 10-15 year olds was investigated in order to establish whether there are any age-related variations in experiences of growing up in a rural area. It was also considered whether different places are valued by different age groups and whether young people of different ages use outdoor space in different ways.

### **5.5.3 Interviews with Mothers**

The third strand of the data collection process consisted of interviews with the mothers of some of the girls. Again, this was based on a bottom-up process, with the themes and issues highlighted in the in-depth discussions with the girls forming the basis of the interview schedule (see Appendix C). Semi-structured interviews were conducted, with prompt questions used to enable comparative analysis of data. Participants were encouraged to talk freely and openly about their own experiences and concerns. The interviews were carried out within the women's own homes. This research method is summarized in Table 5.13.

Interviews with Mothers	
<b>Aim:</b>	To explore the perceptions of mothers of 10-15 year old girls; to examine how parenting strategies impact upon girls' outdoor behaviour.
<b>Carried Out:</b>	Summer 2000.
<b>Sample:</b>	12 mothers of the girls who participated in the in-depth discussion work. 5 settlements represented.
<b>Task:</b>	Semi-structured interview.
<b>Format:</b>	Questions were grouped into 6 sections: personal details; family migration history; perceptions of country childhoods; places of danger and safety; gangs; boys' places/girls' places.
<b>Duration:</b>	30-90 minutes
<b>Feedback:</b>	Thank you note sent within one week stressing importance of participant's contribution to the research project. Summary sheets distributed when analysis completed.

*Table 5.13 Summary of interviews with mothers.*

The interviews were employed in order to explore notions of country childhoods from the viewpoint of mothers, and how parenting strategies impact upon girls' use of outdoor spaces. Discussing family migration histories enabled the mothers to reflect back upon their own childhoods and compare these with those of their daughters. In addition, where families had moved to the area it provided information regarding the impetus for choosing a rural environment and the perceived benefits and disadvantages for children. Through exploring perceptions of country childhoods these issues could be studied in greater detail.

The questionnaire survey had suggested that mothers were primarily responsible for setting the spatial and temporal boundaries on children's use of outdoor spaces. Asking the mothers about places of danger and safety meant that the fears and concerns which may influence the boundaries set on children's place use could be compared with the views of the girls. In a similar way mothers' views on gangs and boys' places/girls' places were examined so that comparisons could be made between the level of importance given to particular circumstances by the girls and their mothers.

All but one of the interviews was carried out in the participants' own home. One interview was conducted in the coffee shop of a local supermarket due to transport difficulties. Each interview lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. A semi-structured interview format was used to ensure that the issues the researcher wished to cover were raised but that there was also opportunity for other themes to develop. In one instance the husband of one of the participants was present in the room whilst much of the interview was conducted. In this case the woman occasionally sought her husband's opinion to confirm the substance of her responses. No children were present whilst the interviews were conducted, although many of the girls were present to welcome the researcher into the home and introduce her to other members of the family. The strengths and weaknesses of an interview approach are listed in Table 5.14.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Data can be collected to enable comparative analysis.	Participants may find it difficult to relax during an interview.
Provides detailed information.	The process of recording is often difficult.
Participants may reveal thoughts and feelings they would not be able to express in a group.	Participants may give answers they think the interviewer wants to hear.
The nuances of an individual's experiences may be elicited.	It is difficult to treat every participant in the same manner.

*Table 5.14 Strengths and weaknesses of semi-structured interviews.  
(Based on Boyden and Ennew, 1997; Cohen and Emanuel, 1998;  
Matthews and Tucker, 2000.)*

## 5.6 Interpreting the Data

Quantitative data was collected through the questionnaire survey and qualitative data was obtained using the other research methods. Thus a variety of analysis techniques were required in order for the various data to be interpreted.

### 5.6.1 Analysis Strategy: The Questionnaire Survey

The data were coded and input into the *SPSS* data management package. A bottom-up approach was adopted with codes imposed by the nature of the data. A coding list was built up as the data was input to the program, and all codes were reviewed once all the questionnaires had been reviewed. Each questionnaire was coded by two individuals to ensure that the categories used were unambiguous and the process replicable.

Once the coding process was complete descriptive statistics were calculated using the program. As well as noting the frequency of responses, comparisons were made to discover any differences related to location, gender and age.



### 5.6.2 Analysis Strategy: Group Discussions and Interviews with Mothers

All the group discussions and interviews were fully transcribed. The transcripts were then analyzed for patterns, surprises and contradictions. Both bottom-up and top-down approaches were used. Thematic coding was carried out using a bottom-up approach. This procedure for analyzing data is used to uncover themes and issues whilst at the same time remaining open to the views related by the participants (Flick, 1998).

The same analysis process was undertaken for the group discussions and the interviews, although these analyses were carried out independently. Each transcript was read several times to ensure that the researcher was familiar with its content. The transcripts were coded according to recurrent themes and issues. Patterns were highlighted and contradictions to these noted. Once all the transcripts had been coded, they were reviewed to ensure that the codes were used consistently.

The coded transcripts were input to a qualitative data program, *Ethnograph v4.0*, which was then used to help manage the data. The program was not used to impose codes on the data or to quantify the responses gained. Rather, its data retrieval functions (sorting data according to its coding) were used to highlight themes and issues worthy of further analysis and to look for patterns within the data (such as which codes were frequently found to be attached to the same segment of text). Catterall and Maclaran (1997) have argued that on-screen coding and retrieval of coded segments through computer-assisted qualitative data analysis can result in researchers missing important elements in the data. To ensure that important facets of the data were not overlooked in this research, all data were coded before they were input to *Ethnograph*. Each transcript was read several times both before and after use of the program.

Theoretical coding was carried out using a top-down approach. This form of coding enables a grounded theory to develop (Flick, 1998). A number of theoretical perspectives were chosen and the data from the group discussions and interviews was coded in relation to these<sup>2</sup>. Again, each transcript was read a number of times prior to coding, and following coding of the data set these codes were reviewed to ensure consistency.

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2 To help make sense of the data, theoretical perspectives such as liminality, in-betweenness and hybridity (see Chapter 2, section 2.2.2) were used to inform a coding procedure. Codes were applied to selected sections of the transcript to help explain the incidents described.

### 5.6.3 Analysis Strategy: Visual Methods

#### *Drawings*

Before completing the questionnaire the youngest participants were asked to draw pictures of a place they liked and a place they disliked. The main aim of this was to start the children thinking about the issues explored in the questionnaire survey (see also Hart, 1997; P. Owens, 1999). Due to the time constraints of the research project these drawings were not analyzed in great detail. A small number of the drawings are reproduced in Chapters 7 and 8, where they are analyzed with regard to their content in a similar way to the photographs taken by the girls.

#### *Photo Posters*

Rose (2001) has argued that interpretation of visual images must address questions of cultural meaning and power. She suggested that a critical visual methodology should consider the visual in terms of cultural significance, the social practices and power relations in which it is embedded, and the power relations that produce and challenge ways of seeing. According to this approach visual representations are understood to depend on and (re)produce social inclusions and exclusions.

The written comments made by the girls on the posters were analyzed alongside the discussions based around the photos. The discussions were fully transcribed and were coded and analyzed in the same way as the group discussions. Walker (1993) has argued that most people, when faced with a photograph, have little difficulty in talking about the relationship between the photograph and the event or subject it portrays, and that this ability to talk about photographs stems from a need to close the gaps between the photograph as an image and our views about people, places and events. The photo posters provided much information for discussion. The comments made by individuals about specific places were compared with those they made in the initial discussion session to gain a clearer picture of the meanings that these places held.

Mignot (2000) has suggested that photographs are 'polysemic' - they hold a number of meanings - and that the interpretations are structured by the viewer's social affiliations. Thus to understand the meaning of a child-taken photo the researcher may consider its provenance, note its principles of inclusion and exclusion, and examine the hierarchies and differences it naturalizes (Fyfe and Law, 1988). Rather than considering simply the content of each photo, the analysis focused on the girls' own interpretations of the images and the places they represented. The girls' reading of the photos enabled the researcher to glimpse some of the ways in which individuals create meaning in their lives (Walker, 1993).

## *Video Tours*

The discussions recorded on the videos were fully transcribed (see also Pearce and Stanko, 2000). These transcripts were coded and analyzed using the same process as for the group discussions. The data from the video transcripts were compared to that collected in the group discussions and photo posters to examine the views that girls had of particular spaces. The time limits of the research project, together with the volume of data collected, meant that in-depth analysis of the videos in terms of the 'performance' of the girls and their behaviours in and responses to these places could not be carried out. Video 'stills' were captured and used in the same way as the photos to illustrate the views of the participants.

### **5.6.4 Presentation of the Data**

There is an emphasis within contemporary cultural geography on the importance of individual perceptions of shared social worlds, with a growing body of research paying attention to how individuals make sense of their experiences and construct and maintain their social worlds (Kilduff and Mehra, 1997). Using the voices of participants can challenge convention (both in terms of academic writing and norms) and articulate the voices of those previously silenced (Kilduff and Mehra, 1997). In order to provide a richly descriptive picture of contemporary rural childhoods and a rare insight into the particular experiences of girls, in this thesis quotations are taken verbatim from the children's responses. The voices of many young people are included in an attempt to illustrate difference and diversity.

Where text has been replicated from the photo posters the spelling and grammar are those used by the girls themselves. All of the photographs which illustrate the thesis were taken by the girls. Some 'stills' from the video footage are also included. The text which accompanies these images has been transcribed from the video. These are distinguished by:



## Chapter 6 Rural Realities

### 6.1 Introduction

In this chapter data collected using the questionnaire survey<sup>1</sup> are explored to provide an insight into the lifestyles of young people, aged 10-15 years, growing up in rural South Northants. Many factors have an influence upon young people's lifestyles. Here particular attention is paid to three factors - location, age, and gender<sup>2</sup> - in order to highlight difference and diversity within the geographies of rural young people.

Recognition is given to the importance of place in young people's experiences of rural living. South Northants does not present an homogeneous rural space. Different locations offer different leisure facilities and levels of service provision. The villages also differ with regard to access to public space and the number of young people who have to share recreational spaces and opportunities. In this chapter there is a focus upon differences in young people's lifestyles according to location, with variations between those resident in the market town and the villages explored. Where there is sufficient data to justify comparisons, differences between individual settlements are also examined.

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1 The sample comprised 193 young people, 95 boys and 98 girls. For more details of the questionnaire survey, see Chapter 5, section 5.4.4.

2 In this research the influence of ethnicity on young people's lifestyles is not examined. Watt (1998), has argued that in the UK the rural is an "all white zone" (p. 688). This description fits well with the population structure of rural South Northants, with only 1.3% of the population from ethnic minority groups (Northamptonshire County Council, 1995). Such a small proportion of the sample was from ethnic minority backgrounds that the influence of this factor cannot be reliably examined.

Although there is an increasing body of research with children and young people, the early teen years have been somewhat neglected (Skelton, 2000; Valentine and McKendrick, 1997), yet this age group (10-15 years) includes a period of important spatial change for many of the young people in the sample, namely from attending a small primary school in the home village to attending a large secondary school which is situated in a nearby market town. Comparisons can therefore be made between those young people who spend the majority of their time in the village and those who spend a considerable part of the day outside it. In this chapter differences between pre-teens (10-12 years) and young teenagers (13-15 years) are examined, this categorization taking into account the expansion of spatial boundaries in the early teenage years noted by many researchers (see, for example, Cunningham and Jones, 1998; Hillman, 1997; Jones and Cunningham, 1999; Matthews, 1987; 1992; Matthews *et al.*, 2000a).

In much of the research that has examined gender differences in young people's use of leisure spaces and opportunities, girls have been found to have less spatial freedom than boys (Cunningham and Jones, 1991; 1994; Griffiths, 1995; Hillman, 1997; Kytä, 1997; Matthews, 1987; Nava, 1984; 1992; Peters, 1995; Prosser, 1995). In this chapter gender differences are explored in order to establish whether girls and boys have different experiences of and attitudes towards rural living.

The survey is dominated by middle class children and teenagers, reflecting the population of South Northants (see Chapter 5, section 5.3.2). Measures of social class are notoriously difficult to collect, especially when surveying children and young people. Car ownership can be used to tease out some subtleties within the data. As Table 6.1 demonstrates, there is a link between car ownership and social economic groups. In South Northants just 3% of households in socio-economic groups 1-9 do not have a car, compared to 14% of households in groups 10 and 11.

<b>Socio-economic Group</b>	<b>Number of Households</b>	<b>Number of Households with No Car</b>	<b>% of Households with No Car</b>
<b>1, 2, 3, 4 (professional, managerial)</b>	<b>674</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0.9</b>
<b>5, 6, 7 (skilled non-manual)</b>	<b>357</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>6.4</b>
<b>8, 9 (skilled manual)</b>	<b>324</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>3.7</b>
<b>10 (semi-skilled manual)</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9.4</b>
<b>11 (unskilled manual)</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>25.5</b>
<b>Economically Inactive</b>	<b>719</b>	<b>339</b>	<b>47.1</b>

*Table 6.1      Socio-economic groups and car ownership in South Northants.  
(Source: OPCS, 1993, table 86. Figures are a 10% sample).*

As Davis and Ridge (1997) have demonstrated, poor public transport services in rural areas and problems of accessibility mean that many low income families have access to a private car where their urban counterparts would not. However, although car ownership levels may be high, differences exist between low income and professional households with regard to the number and type of journeys made. In exploring the realities of rural living for young people in South Northants, this measure is used to unravel different geographies of place use, particularly with regard to access to leisure and recreational opportunities outside the home village. It is recognized, however, that car ownership does not indicate whether parents are willing or can afford to escort their children to leisure opportunities.

The chapter falls into four sections. First, the influence of location upon young people's attitudes towards and experiences of growing up in rural South Northants is examined. Particular attention is paid to evaluations of village life, leisure choices, and the composition of friendship groups. Second, differences in young peoples' views and lifestyles associated with age are explored. This section focuses upon perceptions of town and country, favourite leisure spaces and activities, perceptions of risk, and friendship groups and gang membership. Third, variations in experiences of growing up in a rural area according to gender are highlighted. Preferences for rural living, use of outdoor spaces and of leisure facilities, perceptions of risk, and friendship patterns are the key issues explored in this section. Fourth, in order to further explore these multiple rural realities, a typology of rural experiences is presented.

Data from the questionnaire survey were used to pinpoint some themes worthy of further inquiry. The chapter concludes by identifying the themes which were subsequently explored in greater depth with the groups of girls and their mothers. Much of the information detailed in this chapter has relevance elsewhere and will be drawn upon in later analyses.

## **6.2 Location**

The term 'rural' comprises a number of settings and experiences. In this study one particular type of rural is represented, namely a largely commuter area dominated by an affluent, middle-class population. The geographies uncovered in this study are not universal. Rather, they relate to rural experiences within this setting. However, within the affluent character of this area diversity exists, with different settlements providing a variety of rural experiences. In this section young people's experiences of growing up within South Northants are analyzed with regard to location. Residents from nineteen settlements participated in the questionnaire survey. These locations can be divided into three types: the market town, large villages (with greater populations and levels of service provision) and small villages (with fewer residents and services) (see Table 6.2 and Chapter 5, section 5.3.2).

Market Town	Large Villages	Small Villages	
Towcester	Blakesley	Abthorpe	Maidford
	Greens Norton	Adstone	Potcote
	Silverstone	Bradden	Slapton
		Duncote	Tiffield
		Foxley	Wappenham
		Heathencote	Whittlebury
		Litchborough	Wood Burcote
			Woodend

Table 6.2 Classification of settlements in rural South Northants.

When examining differences associated with location it is important to recognize that there are some variations within the sample in each settlement type which may influence the findings. As Table 6.3 illustrates, the market town category included more 13-15 year olds than 10-12 year olds, and more girls than boys. The large village category comprised more 10-12 year olds than 13-15 year olds, and more boys than girls. The sample from small villages is skewed in favour of 13-15 year olds and girls.

Location	Age				Gender			
	10 - 12 years		13 - 15 years		Girls		Boys	
Small Village	12	14%	20	19%	19	19%	13	14%
Large Village	41	49%	30	28%	29	30%	42	45%
Market Town	31	37%	57	53%	50	51%	39	41%
	n = 84		n = 107		n = 98		n = 94	

Table 6.3 Age and gender composition of sample in each settlement type - frequency and %.

### 6.2.1 'Country Children' or 'Urban Incomers'?

Idyllic views of rural childhoods present young people as having strong links to the land, being 'rooted' within the local community and having a good knowledge of the local environment (Jones, 1997a; Ward, 1990b). Yet few of the participants in South Northants have strong family ties to the locality. Rather than being 'country children' in the manner described in texts such as *Cider with Rosie* and *Lark Rise to Candleford* - born and raised in the village, with the support of a close-knit extended family - many of these young people have lived in other locations, both rural and urban. Just one third of participants have been resident in their home village all their lives and nearly half have been resident for less than five years (Figure 6.1). Unlike the children described in the nostalgic writings of Laurie Lee and Flora Thompson, these young people do not have a wealth of memories and experiences of the home village to draw upon, binding them to the location.

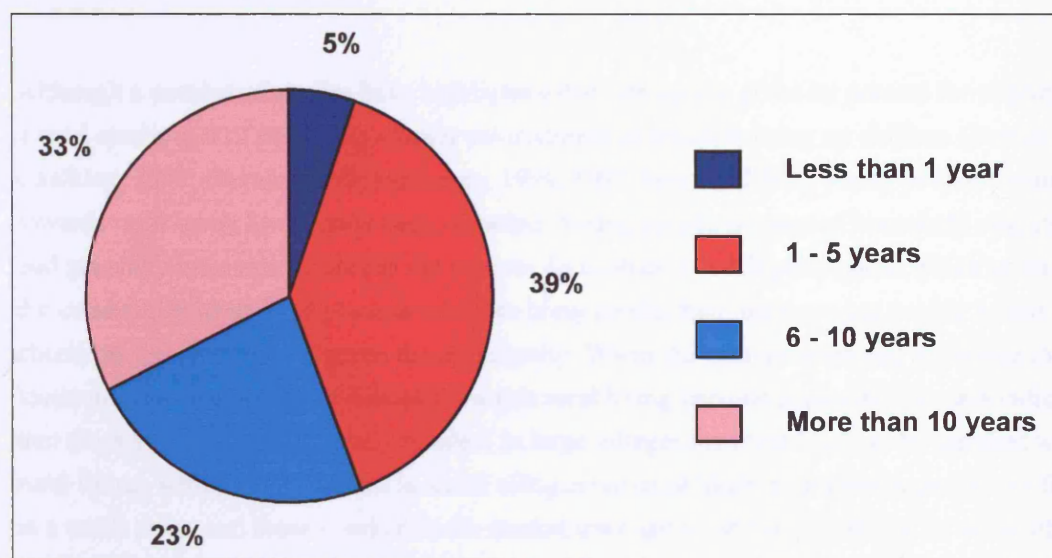


Figure 6.1 Length of residence in home village (%). (n=193)

Of those young people who had not always lived in their current place of residence, 63% had lived in a rural area immediately prior to this move. With more than half moving less than 20 kilometres, many moves were within or between local settlements (Figure 6.2). Looking further back into the young peoples' migration histories a more complex picture arises, with a number moving from an urban area into a rural area, and then subsequently moving from one rural settlement to another, a finding supported by the research of Chaney and Sherwood (2000).



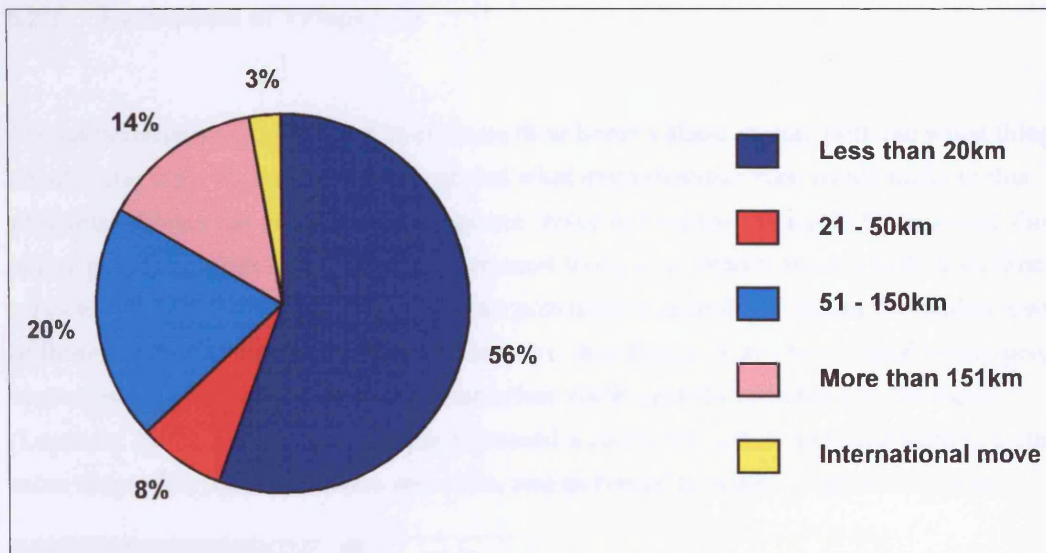


Figure 6.2 Distance of move from previous to current place of residence (%). (n=144)

Although a number of studies have highlighted that one reason given by parents for migration to a rural area is that of providing a better environment in which to bring up children (Bolton and Chalkley, 1990; Bonner, 1997; Halfacree, 1994; 1995; Newby, 1985), young people's attitudes towards rural living have rarely been recorded. Young people are part of household migrations and generally have little choice in the process. In contrast to adult perceptions which promote the countryside as an ideal place in which to bring up children, many young people would choose to live elsewhere if given the opportunity. When the data are analyzed according to location some differences in attitudes towards rural living become apparent. The data indicate that those young people currently resident in large villages are most likely to be satisfied with rural living, whilst those resident in small villages are most likely to express a preference for life in a small town, and those resident in the market town are most likely to desire an urban lifestyle in a large town (Table 6.4). Put another way, a minority of all young people in this study wished to live in a village, especially amongst those resident in the market town, although a large town was also unattractive to most of the respondents.

Preferred place of residence	Small Village	Large Village	Market Town
Village	35	46	23
Small town	45	36	32
Large town	19	19	45

Table 6.4 Residential preferences, according to location (%).  
(small village n=63; large village n=67; market town n=59)

## 6.2.2 Evaluations of Village Life

The participants were also asked to evaluate their home village, stating both the worst things about living there for someone their age and what improvements they would make to this settlement. Criticisms of the home village are linked to location. As might be expected, those young people resident in small villages are most likely to complain about a lack of facilities and services (Table 6.5). Although much leisure provision is centralized within the market town, half of those resident in the town stated that there are ‘few things to do’. Many rural young people seem to share a desire to participate in the urban youth cultures presented by the media (Leyshon, 2000). These young people expressed a desire for ‘urban’ facilities such as a cinema, more shops, fast food restaurants and cafés, and increased provision of sports facilities.

	Small Village	Large Village	Market Town
<b>Few things to do</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Facilities/services</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Isolation</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Social/community</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Natural environment</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Traffic/roads</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>6</b>

*Table 6.5 Bad things about living in home village, according to location (%).  
(small village n=32; large village n=71; market town n=89)*

Although many young people resident in villages complained that there were few things to do in their home settlement, there are some indications that they wish to preserve the existing leisure opportunities of the rural setting. As Table 6.6 shows, a greater proportion of those young people resident in the market town stated that their home town would be improved by increased provision of leisure facilities such as cinemas and fast food restaurants. Rather than seeking such environments in their home village, many young people from villages stated that they would like better bus services and more cycle paths, improving access to those locations in which these facilities already exist. However, this would seem to be a function of age as much as location, with more 13-15 year olds resident in the market town. It may be that this older group generally express a stronger desire for commercial leisure facilities, skewing the results for this settlement category.

	Small Village	Large Village	Market Town
More shops	72	51	70
Café for young people	66	70	70
Better bus service	56	55	36
Swimming pool	56	69	24
More sports clubs	53	73	64
More cycle paths	50	61	39
Cinema	50	61	88
More fast food shops	44	58	65
Less traffic	31	59	61

*Table 6.6 Desired improvements to home village, according to location (%).  
(small village n=32; large village n=71; market town n=89)*

### 6.2.3 Leisure Choices

The different facilities and environments provided by rural settlements have an influence upon the spaces described as favourite places. In the market town, where facilities are more plentiful, many more young people stated that their favourite place was a sports facility (Table 6.7). Yet a higher proportion of young people from the villages stated that local facilities, and in particular shops, were favourite places. Although there are few shops and services in many of the villages (see Chapter 5, section 5.3.2), the paucity of these facilities means that they provide focal points within the village. These sites become meeting places where groups of young people may congregate (Davis and Ridge, 1997; Leyshon, 2000; Streich, 1999), suggesting that in these smaller rural settlements facilities such as shops become invested with different meanings to those in market towns.

The natural environment appears to be particularly valued by young people who live in the smaller rural settlements. Those young people resident in villages are approximately ten times more likely than those living in the market town to value natural environments, perhaps because the size of their home settlement enables them to gain greater access to such settings.

	Small Village	Large Village	Market Town
Recreation grounds	26	36	30
Sports facilities	23	4	48
Facilities/shops	16	16	5
Friend's house	10	7	7
Local fields	10	10	4
Natural environment	10	20	1
Other	6	7	5

Table 6.7 *Favourite place in home village, according to location (%)*.  
(small village n=31; large village n=70; market town n=81)

The places in which young people regularly meet reflect the leisure opportunities offered by their home village. Although few differences were apparent between the proportion of young people choosing to meet friends in local streets or at friends' houses, more young people from the market town than from the villages stated that they regularly hang out at sports facilities and playing fields (Table 6.8). There was some variation between villages of different sizes, with more young people from larger villages choosing to meet friends at playing fields, reflecting the fact that the larger villages are more likely to offer such a facility. On the other hand, young people resident in the smallest villages were more likely to hang out with friends in the natural environment, since formal recreational spaces in these locations were rarely available.

	Small Village	Large Village	Market Town
Natural environment	5	8	4
Recreation grounds	33	47	42
Friend's house	14	14	17
Local streets	19	8	6
Sports facility	14	5	23
Den	0	11	0
Other	14	9	10

Table 6.8 *Places where young people regularly hang out with friends, according to location (%)*.  
(small village n=21; large village n=66; market town n=84)

The length of time young people choose to spend indoors does not appear to reflect to any great extent the leisure opportunities offered in their home village. As Table 6.9 shows, no variations are evident with regard to the time young people spend alone in their room. Sibley (1995a) has argued that the choice young people make with regard to their use of the family home as a site of leisure is influenced by the extent to which young people feel welcome within the home, whether their parents allow them to socialize with friends indoors, and whether they have access to private space. Perhaps these domestic criteria have a greater influence upon young people's use of indoor spaces than location.

	Small Village	Large Village	Market Town
Less than 1 hour	23	11	16
Up to 3 hours	63	72	75
Up to 5 hours	10	9	7
Up to 7 hours	3	3	2
More than 7 hours	0	5	0

*Table 6.9 Time spent alone in own room each day, according to location (%).  
(small village n=31; large village n=68; market town n=86)*

The absence or presence of a club or youth organization within the home village does not appear to impact greatly upon club membership. Similar numbers of young people from all settlement types stated that they regularly attended a club. About two thirds of young people who attended a club relied upon parents to provide transport to the meeting place. This shows not only the importance of car ownership for all groups in the rural population, but also the willingness of many parents to provide a taxi service where such facilities were not immediately available. It may also reflect the sense of 'obligation' some parents may feel where their residential choice denies children access to these recreational opportunities.

A variety of leisure facilities are located in nearby towns. A cinema, bowling alley, laser game centre, ice rink and shopping malls can be found in Northampton or Milton Keynes, towns between 10 and 15 miles from the study area. There are some fast food shops in Towcester, the market town, although many young people travel to Northampton or Milton Keynes in order to visit such outlets. There is a leisure centre in Towcester, and riding stables in a number of villages. As Figure 6.3 illustrates, although access to many sites involved a fairly lengthy period of travel, the young people surveyed used a variety of leisure facilities. More than three quarters of participants noted that they, with greater or lesser frequency, visit a cinema, leisure centre or shopping centre; two thirds visit fast food outlets; approximately one third play laser games, go ten-pin bowling, or visit a pub with their family.

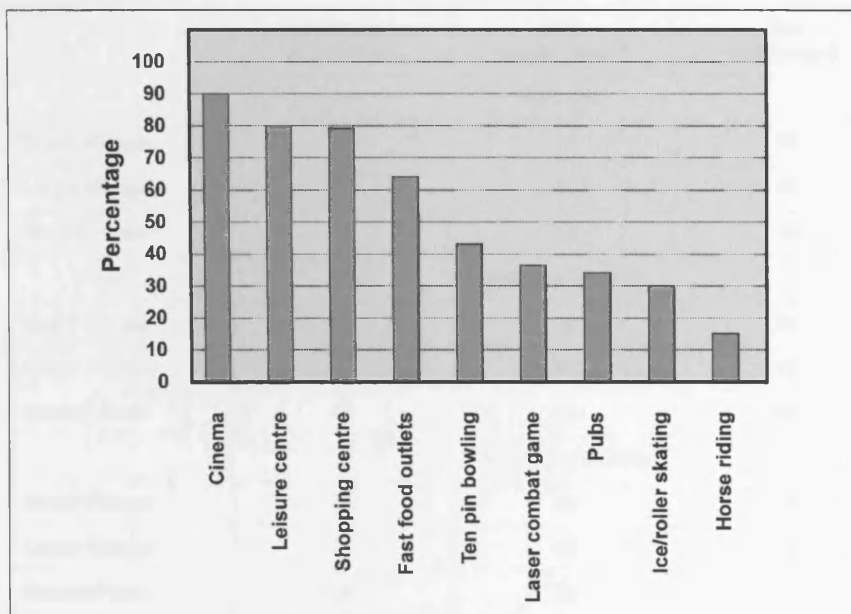


Figure 6.3 Leisure facilities visited by young people (%). (n=185)

No differences were apparent in the young people's use of facilities according to location, with those from small villages equally likely as those from the market town to visit these leisure spaces. However, some variations are apparent with regard to the frequency with which young people from the settlement types use these facilities. Table 6.10 shows the frequency of visits to the most popular leisure facilities according to location. The cinema is visited with similar frequency by young people from each settlement category. With the nearest cinema located in a local large town, all young people must travel some distance to gain access to this facility. This being the case, settlement type does not appear to play an important role.

In contrast, some notable variations are apparent with regard to the frequency with which young people visit the leisure centre. There is a leisure centre in the market town so it is unsurprising that a larger proportion of residents of this town use this facility most frequently, with 65% visiting at least once a week compared to around 40% of those young people living in villages. In the case of this leisure facility, therefore, proximity plays an important role in young people's leisure choices. Shopping centres were most frequently visited by those resident in the smallest villages. With few of these settlements having a shop of any kind, this reflects the necessity of travelling to other locations in order to make purchases, again showing that location plays a role in the leisure choices of young people.

Location	One or more visits/week	One visit/fortnight	One visit/month	Occasionally
<b>Cinema</b>				
<b>Small Village</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Large Village</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Market Town</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Leisure Centre</b>				
<b>Small Village</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Large Village</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Market Town</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Shopping Centre</b>				
<b>Small Village</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Large Village</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Market Town</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>26</b>

*Table 6.10 Frequency of visits to popular leisure facilities, according to location (%).  
(small village n=31; large village n=68; market town n=85)*

With poor public transport services in rural South Northants, many parents play an important role in determining which leisure facilities their children use. Travelling by car was the most frequently cited form of transport used in order to get to these facilities. Nearly nine out of ten young people were reliant upon the private car to visit the cinema<sup>3</sup>, bowling alley, laser game centre, ice rink and riding stables, and more than two thirds travelled to shopping malls and fast food restaurants by car. Approximately one third of young people travel independently to the leisure centre.

Lucey and Reay (1999) have argued that middle class children's horizons extend beyond the local area to a much greater extent those of working-class children because of access to funds and the ability to travel more widely. Social class, as indicated by car ownership, influences the types of leisure facilities visited. One fifth of the young people surveyed belonged to one car households, with just 2% living in households which did not have access to a private car (Figure 6.4). Reflecting the middle-class nature of South Northants and car ownership levels in this district generally (Table 6.11), more than half of the sample were members of two car households, with nearly one in five in households having three or more cars.

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<sup>3</sup> The young people surveyed tended to visit cinemas, bowling alleys, laser game centres and ice rinks in the nearby large towns of Northampton and Milton Keynes.



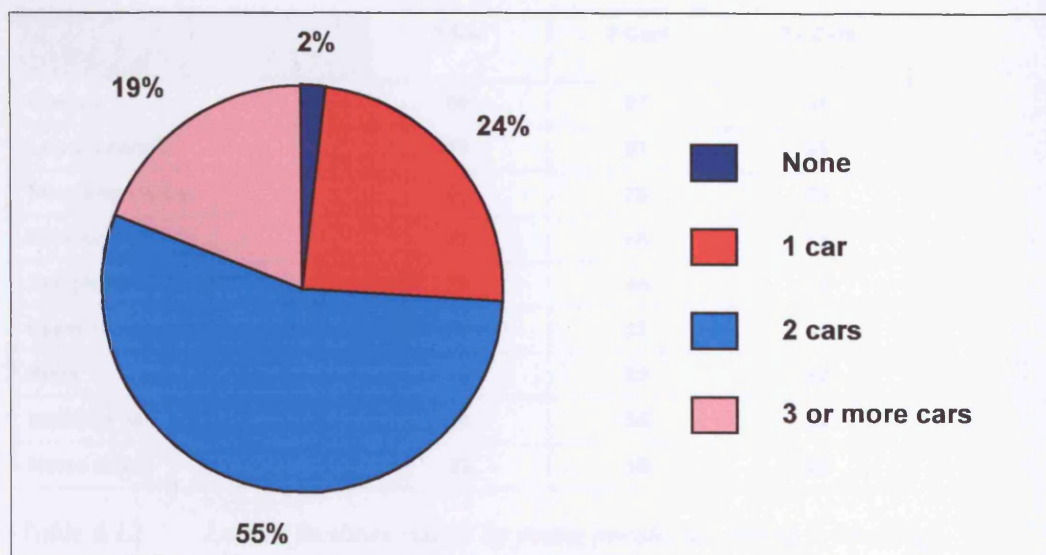


Figure 6.4 Levels of car ownership, according to household (%). (n=192)

Household Group	Number of Households	Number of Households with No Car	% of Households with No Car	Number of Households with 2 or more Cars	% of Households with 2 or more Cars
Married couple with dependent children	797	13	1.6	477	59.8
Cohabiting couple with dependent children	42	6	14.3	23	54.8
Lone parent family unit with dependent children	87	16	18.4	8	9.2

Table 6.11 Household groups and car ownership in South Northants - frequency and %. (Source: OPCS, 1993, table 87. Figures are a 10% sample.)

The effect of car ownership (or rather the number of cars per household) on visits to leisure facilities is shown in Table 6.12. This shows that young people from households with two or more cars are most likely to visit these leisure facilities. Those young people in households without a car (only four in the sample) were least likely to visit these facilities and all were reliant upon friends to provide transport.



	1 Car	2 Cars	3+ Cars
Cinema	86	91	94
Leisure centre	74	81	83
Shopping centre	68	78	94
Fast food outlets	57	65	69
Ten pin bowling	33	45	53
Laser combat game	27	37	42
Pubs	30	33	42
Ice/roller skating	18	35	31
Horse riding	13	15	20

Table 6.12 *Leisure facilities visited by young people, according to levels of car ownership (%). (n=192)*

#### 6.2.4 Hanging Out in the Countryside

One difference between the experiences of young people growing up in rural areas and those in urban and suburban environments is the size of the peer group from which young people can choose friends (Leyshon, 2000). With few young people resident in many small settlements, mixed age friendship groups may be common (Davis and Ridge, 1997), and with many travelling outside their home village to school, friendship groups may extend over a large area. In rural South Northants the majority of young people stated that they regularly meet with four or more friends (Figure 6.5). Virtually identical numbers of young people belonged to single sex and mixed friendship groups, although, contrary to notions of mixed age friendship groups dominating in rural areas, nearly half of the participants stated that they regularly meet with young people of the same age (Figure 6.6).

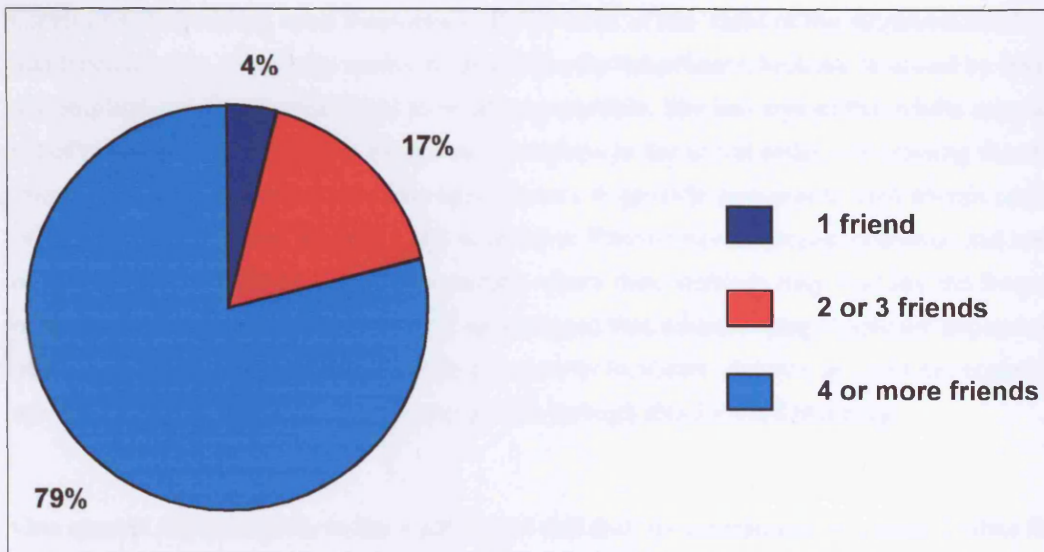


Figure 6.5 Size of friendship groups (%). (n=188)

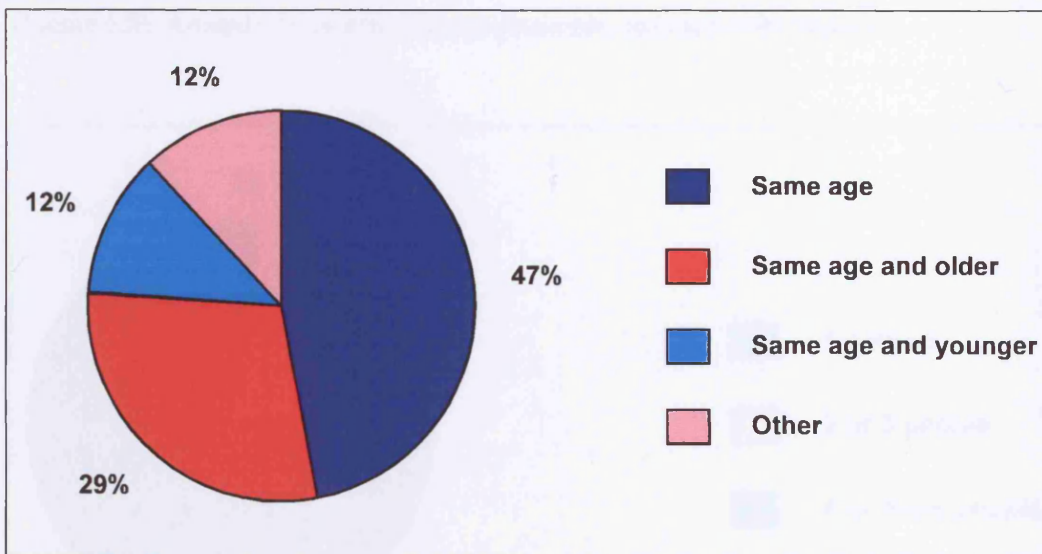


Figure 6.6 Composition of friendship groups (%). (n=188)

Contrary to Davis and Ridge's (1997) findings that mixed age friendship groups are common in small rural settlements, few differences were found in the composition of friendship groups in the villages and market town. The size and gendered nature of the groups vary little. The age structure of the groups are similar in all settlement types, with mixed age groups equally common in villages and the market town. With high levels of car ownership in this middle-class dominated area, it would seem that parents play an important role, helping children to maintain friendship links with others of the same age by providing transport to locations outside the home village. Where young people are confident that they can regularly meet friends from other settlements they may be disinclined to seek the company of young people of various ages who live close by.

Cahill (2000), building upon Bourdieu's (1977) ideas of the 'rules of the neighbourhood', has identified a series of socially mediated directives for behaviour which are bounded by invisible and implicit social understandings of what is acceptable. She has argued that adults impose this set of rules upon young people to prevent disruption in the social order, maintaining the status quo. Where young people are reliant upon parents to provide transport to visit friends resident in other settlements, adults are able to set such rules. Parents have a greater influence and control over their children's friendships, determining whom their children may visit and the frequency of these visits. Davis and Ridge (1997) have argued that where young people are dependent on adults to provide transport there is little spontaneity in leisure choices, as visits are organized in advance. Order is imposed upon young people through this forward planning.

One quarter of participants in the study stated that they were members of a gang. Unlike the stereotypical (urban) image of large gangs of young people, nearly one quarter of gangs in rural South Northants had less than four members, and none of the gangs described consisted of more than seven young people (Figure 6.7). Around two thirds of gangs were of mixed sex. More than half the gangs of which participants were members consisted of young people of the same age (Figure 6.8). Around one quarter of gangs, however, included older teenagers.

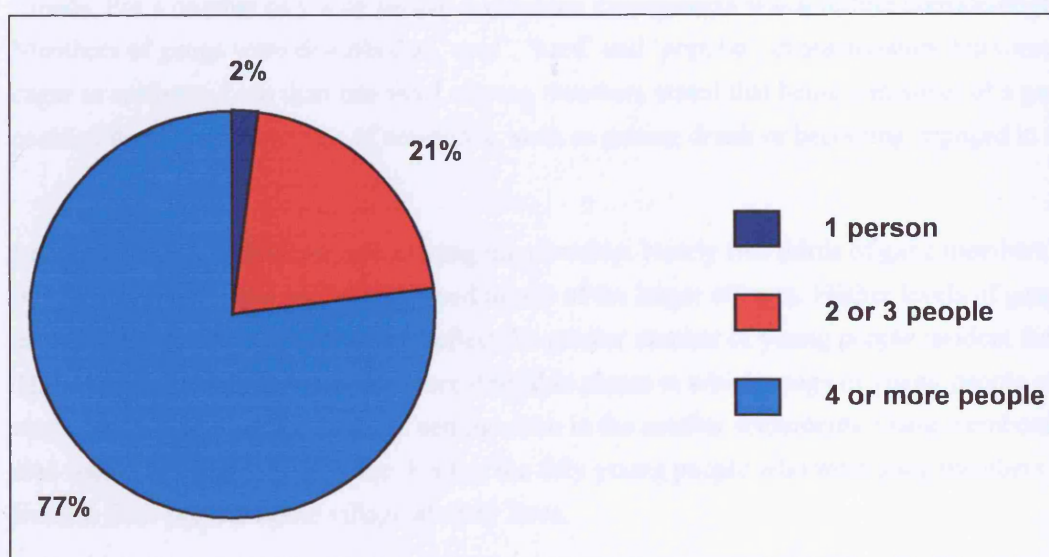


Figure 6.7 Composition of gangs (%). (n=50)



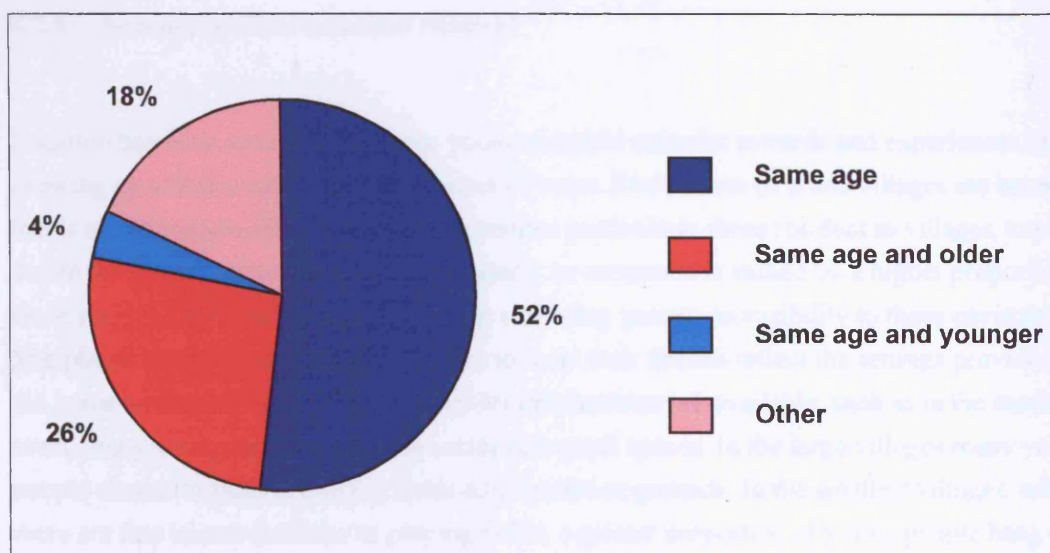


Figure 6.8 Size of gangs (%). (n=50)

Young people become members of gangs for a variety of reasons. Enjoyment was the primary reason for the majority of gang members. Being a part of a gang meant that they could have fun and enjoy themselves, and gang membership was seen to provide opportunities to socialize with friends. For a number of young people impression management was a further consideration. Members of gangs were described as 'cool', 'hard' and 'popular', characteristics that some were eager to cultivate. Less than one third of gang members stated that being a member of a gang enabled them to perform acts of resistance, such as getting drunk or becoming engaged in fights.

Location plays an important role in gang membership. Nearly two thirds of gang members lived in the market town and one quarter lived in one of the larger villages. Higher levels of gang membership in these locations may reflect the greater number of young people resident there. These locations may also provide more desirable places in which gangs of young people can meet, presenting a greater range of settings than in the smaller settlements. Gang membership is also linked to length of residence. Half of the fifty young people who were gang members had lived in their present home village all their lives.

### **6.2.5 Summary: Does Location Matter?**

Location has been shown to influence young people's attitudes towards and experiences of growing up within a rural area in a number of ways. Evaluations of home villages are based on levels of service provision. Many young people, particularly those resident in villages, express a desire for 'urban' leisure facilities. The natural environment is valued by a higher proportion of those resident in village locations, perhaps reflecting greater accessibility to these environments. The places in which young people choose to meet their friends reflect the settings provided in the home settlement. Where commercial leisure facilities are available, such as in the market town, many young people choose to socialize in such spaces. In the large villages many young people choose to meet at playing fields and recreation grounds. In the smallest villages, where there are few leisure facilities or playing fields, a greater proportion of young people hang out in natural environment spaces such as fields and woodland. There does not appear to be a rural childhood in the sense of that described by rural writings and the rural idyll. The rural environment is not highly valued by many young people, and the majority seek to spend their leisure time in formal recreational spaces (often in nearby towns) rather than in the countryside.

Location appears not to play an important role in determining whether young people attend clubs or visit various commercial recreational facilities. With a rationalization and centralization of many services, young people must travel outside their home settlement in order to access many facilities. Where travel is required settlement type does not influence the particular leisure spaces visited. However, location does influence the frequency with which young people access facilities. Location also has an impact on friendship groups. Issues of accessibility often prevent young people from travelling independently to meet friends. Where they are reliant on parents to provide transport, young people must submit to adult-defined rules which govern their spatial freedom and choice of friends.

## **6.3 Age**

In order to determine whether age plays an important role in young people's attitudes towards and experiences of growing up in rural South Northants, the data from the questionnaire survey were analyzed for two age groups. The responses of pre-teens, those aged 10-12 years, were compared to those of young people in their early teens (aged 13-15 years). The sample comprised 84 pre-teens and 108 teenagers. More teenagers than pre-teens were resident in the market town (see Table 6.3), and a greater number of 10-12 year olds lived in the large villages. The gender composition of these age groups is such that boys slightly dominate the pre-teen group and girls the teenage group.

### 6.3.1 Perceptions of Town and Country

The survey contained a number of questions which explored perceptions of the countryside and preferences for rural living. There seems to be a pattern, that with age the level of dissatisfaction with village life develops, such that older children are more likely to see the benefits of urban residency. Aitken's (1994) description of the country childhood idyll (see Chapter 3, section 3.4.2) centres on the notion that the rural is a favourable environment in which to live when compared to the urban. Alongside the idea of a rural utopia is one of urban distopia, with the urban often used to illustrate childhood crises (Jones, 1997b). In order to establish the extent to which these stereotypical images of rural and urban are embraced by rural young people, participants were asked to rate characteristics of towns and the countryside using a five point scale.

In contrast to the rural childhood idyll, the countryside was not deemed by many to be an exciting space in which to live. Towns were seen to be more exciting than the countryside (Table 6.13), with half the respondents classifying towns as 'very exciting' or 'exciting' compared to less than one third choosing these categories for the countryside. With regard to the issues of risk and safety, the majority of young people expressed sentiments which fit the rural idyll, namely that rural areas are safer than urban ones (Jones, 1997b; Williams, 1985). Nearly two thirds of participants considered towns to be 'very dangerous' or 'dangerous', while in contrast only 13% described the countryside in these terms. The countryside was rated as 'very safe' or 'safe' by more than half the respondents, yet only 7% classified towns in this way.

The data also support the notion of friendliness and community spirit in rural spaces, indicating that there is a social element present in these young people's perceptions of rural living. The countryside was seen as being more friendly than towns. Although one quarter of young people rated towns as 'friendly', nearly three quarters described the countryside in this way, and a further one in ten described the countryside as 'very friendly'.

	What is the Countryside like?	What are Towns like?
Very exciting	3	4
Exciting	28	46
Neither exciting nor boring	34	34
Boring	25	14
Very boring	10	3
Very unfriendly	2	2
Unfriendly	4	29
Neither unfriendly nor friendly	15	42
Friendly	70	27
Very friendly	10	0
Very dangerous	2	8
Dangerous	11	55
Neither dangerous nor safe	31	30
Safe	51	7
Very safe	5	0

Table 6.13 Perceptions of towns and countryside (%). (n=182)

Some differences in perceptions of the countryside according to age are apparent. Pre-teens are more likely to draw upon notions of the countryside as being an exciting place in which to live. As Table 6.14 shows, although 48% of young people in the 10-12 years age group described the countryside as 'very exciting' or 'exciting', only 17% of the 13-15 age group used these terms. Those in their early teens are more likely to express the sentiment that the rural is a safe place. Whilst half of the younger age group classed the countryside as 'very safe' or 'safe', nearly two thirds of 13-15 year olds chose these categories. Few variations are apparent with regard to the 'friendly-unfriendly' dichotomy, suggesting that notions of friendliness and community are drawn upon equally by young people of different ages.

	10 - 12 Years	13 - 15 Years
Very exciting	6	1
Exciting	42	16
Neither exciting nor boring	26	40
Boring	17	33
Very boring	10	10
Very unfriendly	4	0
Unfriendly	4	3
Neither unfriendly nor friendly	18	12
Friendly	69	71
Very friendly	6	13
Very dangerous	4	1
Dangerous	14	8
Neither dangerous nor safe	34	29
Safe	44	57
Very safe	5	5

*Table 6.14 Perceptions of the countryside, according to age (%).  
(10 - 12 years n=84; 13 - 15 years n=97)*

Some variations in perceptions of towns are also apparent. The older participants were more likely to hold positive views of the urban. More than half of the 13-15 years age group categorized towns as 'exciting', and nearly one third described towns as 'friendly' (Table 6.15). In contrast, just over one third of 10-12 year olds viewed towns as 'exciting' and only one quarter as 'friendly'. Further, a greater proportion of the younger children drew upon urban stereotypes classing towns as 'very dangerous' or dangerous'.



	10 - 12 Years	13 - 15 Years
Very exciting	7	1
Exciting	38	53
Neither exciting nor boring	29	36
Boring	20	9
Very boring	6	1
Very unfriendly	2	1
Unfriendly	35	24
Neither unfriendly nor friendly	38	45
Friendly	24	30
Very friendly	0	0
Very dangerous	16	2
Dangerous	56	54
Neither dangerous nor safe	22	36
Safe	6	8
Very safe	0	0

*Table 6.15 Perceptions of towns, according to age (%).*  
(10 - 12 years n=82; 13 - 15 years n=99)

The more positive views of the countryside held by younger children as evidenced by perceptions of town and country are also apparent in young people's residential preferences. As Figure 6.9 illustrates, more than half of 10-12 year olds stated that they would prefer to live in a village, compared with less than one quarter of 13-15 year olds. This indicates that pre-teens are more satisfied with their current place of residence than those in the early teenage years. The more favourable views of urban living held by 13-15 year olds are also reflected, with more respondents from this age group stating a preference for both small towns and large towns.

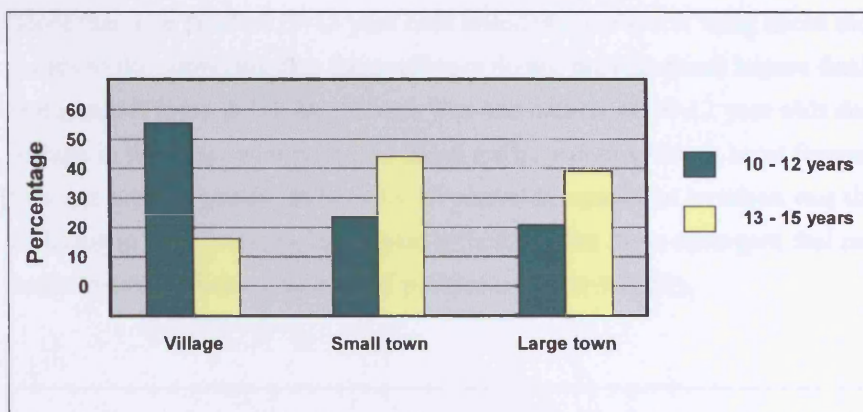


Figure 6.9 Residential preferences, according to age (%).  
(10 - 12 years n=84; 13 - 15 years n=104)

The differing perceptions of the rural expressed by the two age groups are also illustrated by their appraisals of their home settlements. One in four of the 10-12 age group cited aspects of the natural environment as being the best thing about their village, yet only one in ten of the responses given by the 13-15 year olds fit into this category (Figure 6.10). This difference may reflect varying place uses of the age groups, with younger children preferring to play in natural settings (Cunningham and Jones, 1998; Jones and Cunningham, 1999). The greater proportion of 13-15 year olds choosing 'playing sport' as the best thing about their village suggests that more formal play spaces may be more highly valued by older teenagers.

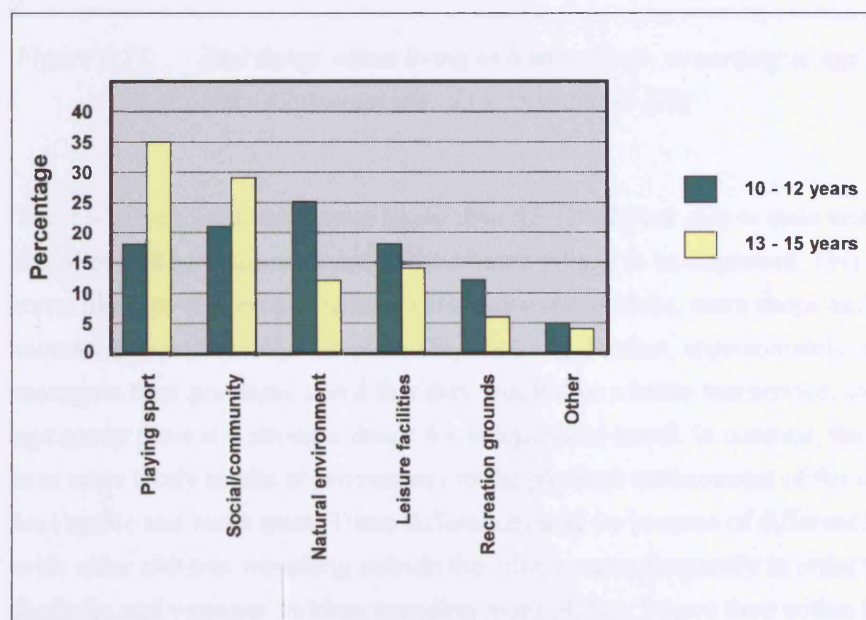


Figure 6.10 Good things about living in home village, according to age (%).  
(10 - 12 years n=84; 13 - 15 years n=108)

More than one third of 13-15 year olds stated that the worst thing about their village was 'few things to do', implying that these villages do not provide those leisure facilities valued by this age group (Figure 6.11). In contrast, just one quarter of 10-12 year olds described their home village in this way, with concerns about traffic and busy roads most frequently mentioned by this age group. Further, 16% of 13-15 year olds stated that isolation was the main disadvantage of living in their home village, again indicating that these teenagers feel unable to participate in some leisure activities because of problems of accessibility.

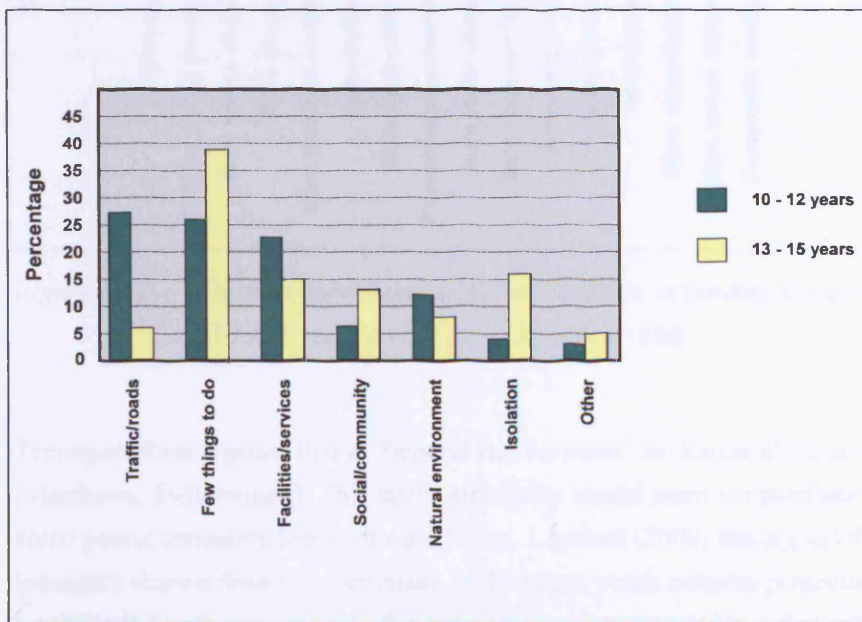


Figure 6.11 Bad things about living in home village, according to age (%).  
(10 - 12 years  $n=84$ ; 13 - 15 years  $n=108$ )

The 13-15 year olds were more likely than the 10-12 year olds to state that they would like the facilities and services provided in their home village to be improved. This older age group was more likely to request a cinema, a café, more sports clubs, more shops and fast food outlets, and increased provision of youth clubs (Figure 6.12). Further, approximately one third more of the teenagers than pre-teens stated that they would like a better bus service, indicating that for this age group there is a stronger desire for independent travel. In contrast, the younger age group was more likely to cite improvements to the physical environment of the village, for example less traffic and more trees. These differences may be because of differences in leisure activities, with older children travelling outside the village more frequently in order to access leisure facilities and younger children spending more of their leisure time within the confines of the village.



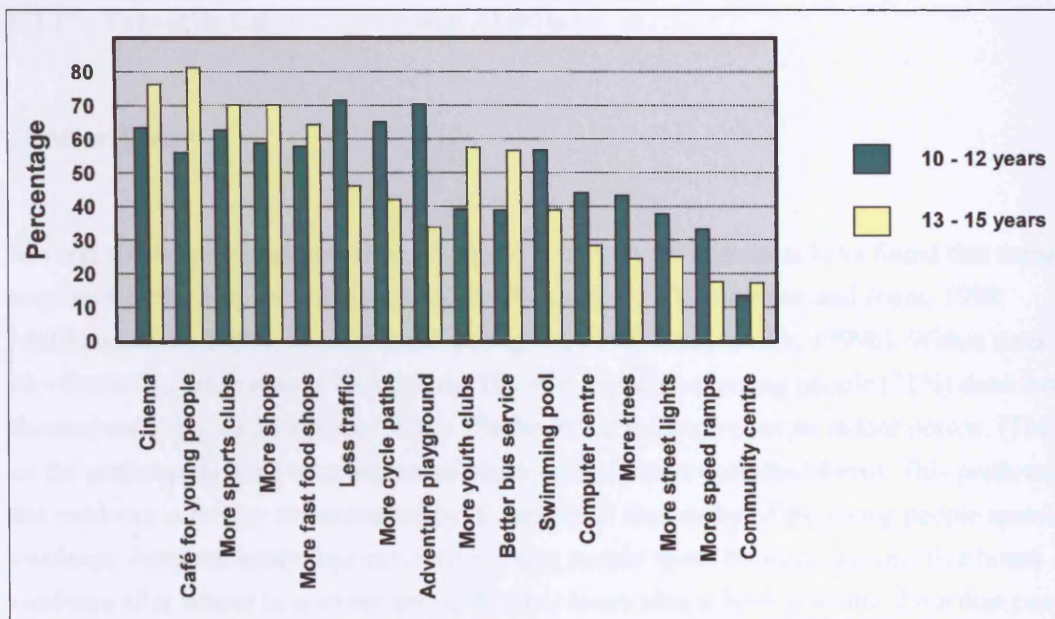


Figure 6.12 Desired improvements to home village, according to age (%).  
(10 - 12 years  $n=84$ ; 13 - 15 years  $n=108$ )

Teenagers form a group that is 'betwixt and between': no longer children but not yet adults (Matthews, forthcoming). This status ambiguity would seem to contribute to the dissatisfaction some young teenagers feel with rural living. Leyshon (2000) has argued that many rural teenagers share a desire to participate in the urban youth cultures presented by the media. In rural South Northants access to the sorts of leisure spaces embraced in urban youth cultures is often limited, so although teenagers may be eager to explore and redefine identities and roles in such settings this is not always possible. Teenagers may therefore feel disconnected from symbols of (urban) youth transitions, leading to less favourable views of the countryside where these experiences are denied and more favourable views of the urban as a centre for youth culture.

### 6.3.2 Favourite Leisure Spaces and Activities

#### *Outdoor Spaces*

Several studies of young people in urban and suburban environments have found that teenagers express a preference for outdoor play (see, for example, Cunningham and Jones, 1998; Matthews *et al.*, 2000a; Owens, 1988; Pellegrini, 1992; Percy-Smith, 1999b). Within rural South Northants this preference is also shown. The vast majority of young people (71%) described themselves as an outdoor person. Only 7% described themselves as an indoor person. (The rest of the participants were uncertain as to which category best described them). This preference for the outdoors is further demonstrated by the length of time many of the young people spend outdoors. Approximately four out of five young people spend between one and five hours outdoors after school in summer and up to three hours after school in winter. Less than one in twenty spend all their free time indoors.

Within the sample as a whole formal recreational spaces were most frequently mentioned as favourite places (Figure 6.13). Features of the countryside such as fields, streams and woodland were rarely mentioned, suggesting that young people value 'any place' environments more than those characteristically rural aspects of their local area. Two types of formal recreational space dominate the responses: recreation grounds and sports facilities. Not surprisingly, the reason most frequently given for this being a favourite place is the ability to play sport there (Figure 6.14).

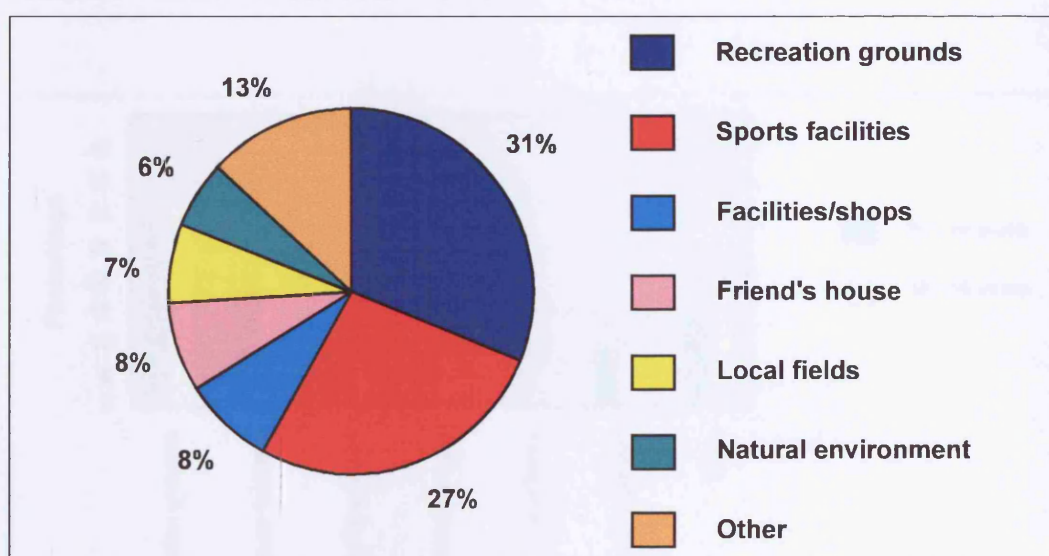


Figure 6.13 Favourite place in home village (%). ( $n=183$ )



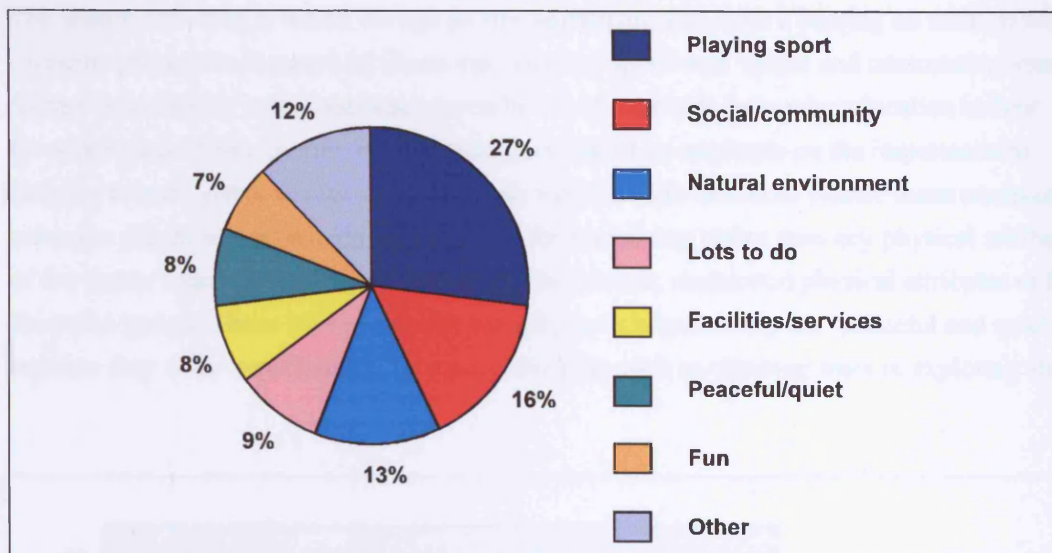


Figure 6.14 Reason why favourite place (%). (n=173)

Pre-teens and young teenagers have different place preferences. A greater proportion of those in the 10-12 years age group stated that local fields and other aspects of the natural environment were their favourite local places (Figure 6.15). For these younger children it seems that some aspects of the rural childhood idyll hold true, with the natural environment providing a setting for play. A greater percentage of 13-15 year olds than 10-12 year olds stated that a sports facility is their favourite place, adding weight to the idea that teenagers are more regular users of leisure facilities. These differences would seem to reflect different values given to certain types of space relating to age, or be a result of varying levels of access to a variety of leisure spaces, with 13-15 year olds more free to travel to playing fields and sports facilities and 10-12 year olds restricted to natural settings closer to home.

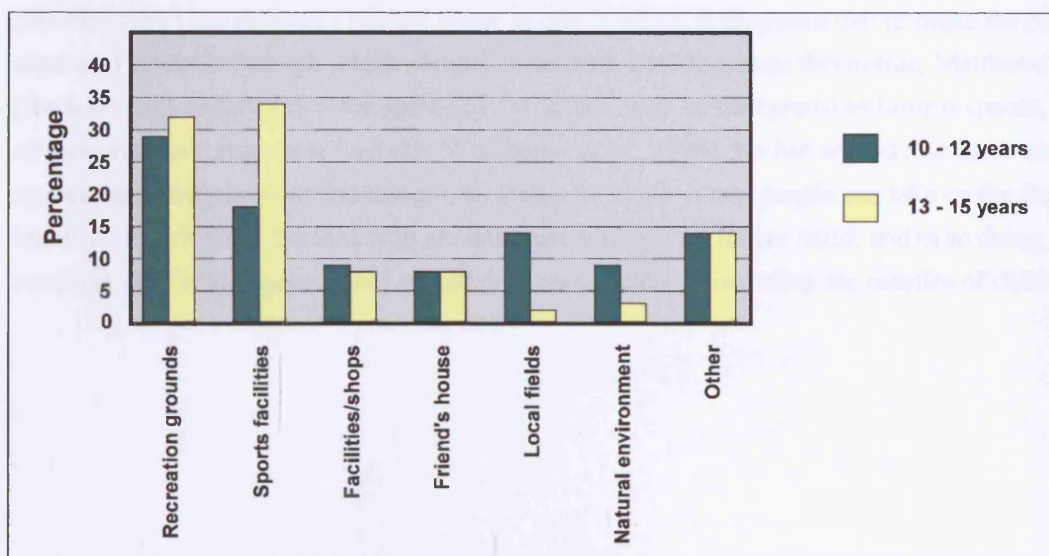


Figure 6.15 Favourite place in home village, according to age (%).  
(10 - 12 years n=79; 13 - 15 years n=103)

The leisure activities in which the age groups participate also have a bearing on their choice of favourite places. As Figure 6.16 illustrates, 'playing sport' and 'social and community' reasons feature prominently in the responses given by 13-15 year olds as to why a location is their favourite place. The majority of these teenagers placed an emphasis on the importance of meeting friends, either to play sport or to talk with, in these favourite places: these teenagers value the places which provide opportunities for socializing rather than any physical attributes of the space. Many of the younger age group, in contrast, mentioned physical attributes of their favourite spaces. These 10-12 year olds valued places because they are 'peaceful and quiet' or because they offer opportunities for explorative play such as climbing trees or exploring streams.

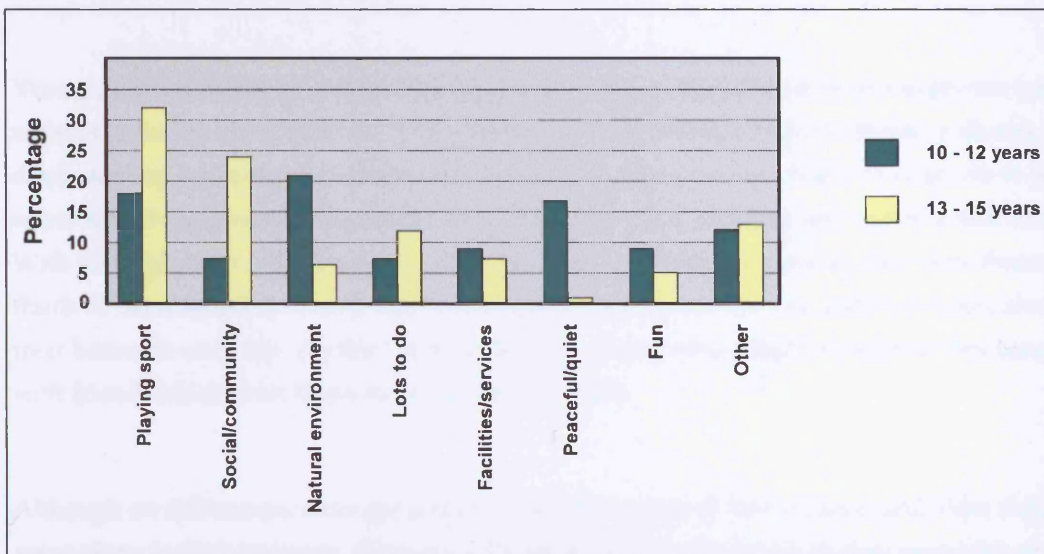


Figure 6.16 Reason why favourite place, according to age (%).  
(10 - 12 years  $n=76$ ; 13 - 15 years  $n=96$ )

Shields (1991) has defined a liminal space as one in which peer groups can re-make the cultural signs and symbols through which identity is defined. Building upon this notion, Matthews (forthcoming) suggests that the spaces of the 'street' may be interpreted as liminal spaces, places of separation and transition (see also Winchester *et al.*, 1999). He has argued that these outdoor spaces represent places on the margin, locations in which young people can take on the fluid identity of the hybrid, persons who are not quite adult yet no longer child, and in so doing establish their independence and set out their own identity, discarding the mantles of childhood.



Teenagers may particularly value leisure facilities and playing fields because these recreational spaces offer a setting in which this hybridity can be embraced. Spaces, such as recreation grounds after dark, present settings in which neither adults nor children 'fit'. Young people can thus occupy these liminal spaces and try out new identities and roles. A number of researchers have shown that these sorts of leisure facilities are often sites of conflict between adults and young people (Matthews, forthcoming; Matthews *et al.*, 2000a; 2000c; Percy-Smith, 1999b; Sibley, 1995c). These conflicts are understood to be the inevitable outcome of differences in adults' and young people's perceptions of acceptable place use.

### *Indoor Spaces 1: Domestic Space*

Young people's ability to use the home as a site of leisure depends on access to private space within the family home (Prosser, 1995; Sibley, 1995a). Within South Northants, a district dominated by professional, middle-class households, many young people have access to private space within the home. In this study, fewer than one in ten young people shared a bedroom. With this high level of access to personal space, it is perhaps unsurprising that more than two thirds of the respondents stated that they regularly spend between one and three hours alone in their bedroom each day. Further, around four out of ten young people stated that they hang out with friends inside their home more than once a week.

Although no differences were apparent between the length of time younger and older children spent alone in their bedroom, there are differences in the ways in which they spend this time. As Table 6.16 illustrates, a greater proportion of 13-15 year olds listen to music, do homework or watch television. Pre-teens, in contrast, are more likely to spend their time reading or playing.

	10 - 12 Years	13 - 15 Years
Listen to music	77	90
Do homework	60	78
Watch television	57	74
Use computer	49	48
Read	47	33

Table 6.16      *Ways in which young people spend leisure time alone in their room, according to age (%). (10 - 12 years n=81; 13 - 15 years n=104)*



No variations are apparent in the frequency with which 10-12 year olds or 13-15 year olds spend time with friends within their own home. However, the different spaces which these age groups chose to inhabit suggest that teenagers may wish for more privacy when socializing with friends within the family home. When younger children invite friends to their home, nearly three quarters spend the majority of their time within family rooms such as the lounge or dining room. In contrast, half of 13-15 year olds spend most of their time within their bedrooms.

### *Indoor Spaces 2: Formal Leisure Space*

Many rural settlements provide little in the form of youth clubs or organizations (Phillips, 1994). In rural South Northants, many clubs and groups are centralized within the market town. The range of clubs is fairly limited. Sports teams and clubs are the most numerous. Many local schools run after-school activities, the majority of which relate to sports or additional tutoring in subjects such as mathematics. Uniformed organizations such as Girl Guides and Scouts are located in several of the larger settlements. There is a paucity of youth clubs, and where this facility is provided it is often tied to Church groups.

Although the provision of clubs may be limited, approximately half of the young people surveyed stated that they are a member of a club or youth organization. The numbers of young people attending different types of clubs appears to be linked to the availability of clubs, with sports teams and after school activities being the most numerous and being attended by greater numbers of young people. Nearly half of those young people who attended a club were involved with sports (Figure 6.17). One fifth of club members spent leisure time at school-based clubs. Few participants were members of uniformed organizations.

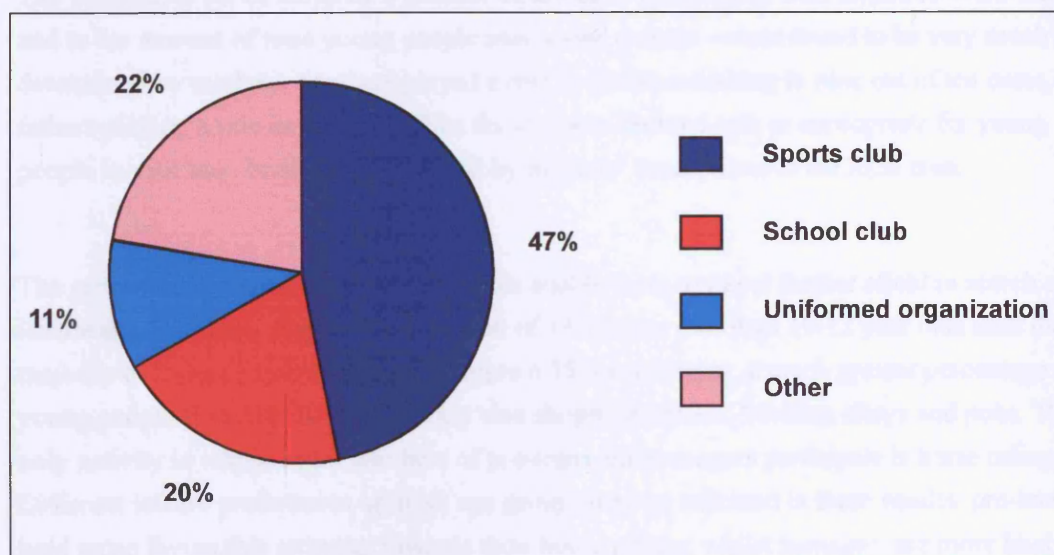


Figure 6.17 Levels of club membership (%). (n=103)

Pre-teens are more likely to attend clubs, supporting Evans's (1987) finding that club membership declines as young people grow up. Children in the 10-12 years age group were more likely to be a member of a club or youth organization, with nearly two-thirds of this younger age group regularly attending a club compared to less than half of 13-15 year olds. Clubs run by schools were more popular with pre-teens than teenagers, reflecting not only the fact that more clubs are available in primary schools, but also the view that it is more acceptable within the peer group for younger boys and girls to spend leisure time within the adult-ordered school environment. Sports clubs were very popular with the older age group.

### **6.3.3 Spatial Restrictions and Perceptions of Risk**

Much early research into children's geographies explored the spatial ranges of young people in urban areas (see, for example, Blaut *et al.*, 1970; Cunningham and Jones, 1991; Gould and White, 1974; Hart, 1979; Matthews, 1984; 1987; 1992). It is well established that as children grow older their home range becomes extended (Matthews, 1992). Hart (1979) has noted that in rural areas older children have greater home ranges than younger children. In South Northants 13-15 year olds were found to have greater home ranges than 10-12 year olds. For instance, around half of the teenagers were allowed to go to a nearby village or large town on their own without seeking special permission, yet only one in ten 10-12 year olds had this level of spatial freedom. Even when special permission has been given, more than two thirds of 10-12 year olds may not leave the confines of the home village, either when alone or with friends. Of the older age group, only one quarter may not leave the confines of the village when they are alone, and just one in ten must stay within the village when they are with friends.

The boundaries set on children's outdoor behaviour – particularly with regard to home ranges and to the amount of time young people may spend outside – were found to be very much determined by mothers. Mothers played a role in decision-making in nine out of ten cases, with fathers playing a role in just half. Thus those places deemed safe or appropriate for young people to visit may be strongly coloured by mothers' perceptions of the local area.

The greater home ranges of 13-15 year olds enable them to travel further afield in search of leisure opportunities. A greater proportion of 13-15 year olds than 10-12 year olds used the majority of leisure facilities listed in Figure 6.18. In particular, a much greater percentage of young people from the older age group visit shopping centres, bowling alleys and pubs. The only activity in which equal numbers of pre-teens and teenagers participate is horse riding. Different leisure preferences of these age groups may be reflected in these results: pre-teens hold more favourable attitudes towards their home village, whilst teenagers are more likely to seek recreational spaces away from their immediate neighbourhood because of greater dissatisfaction with local facilities.

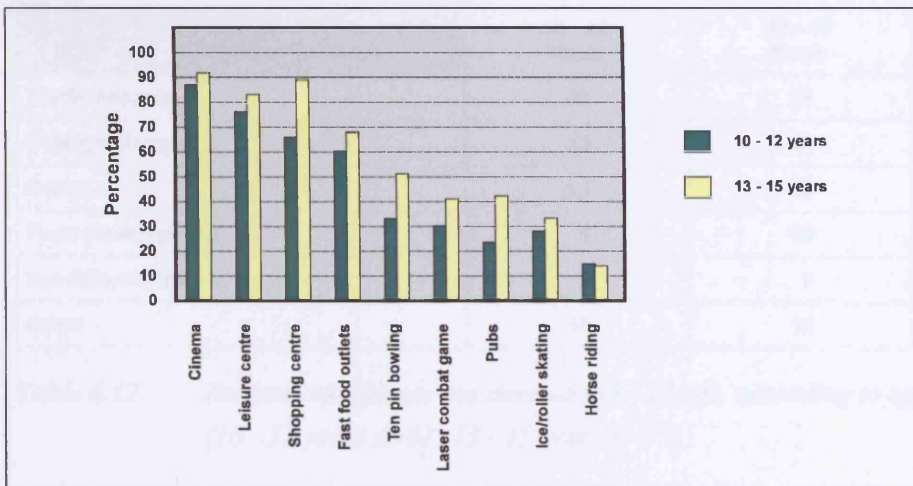


Figure 6.18 Leisure facilities visited by young people, according to age (%).  
(10 - 12 years n=84; 13 - 15 years n=107)

Some differences in the types of places classed as unsafe appear when the data are examined according to age group. As Figure 6.19 illustrates, more than half of the children in the 10-12 years age group classed roads as unsafe places. Less than one quarter of 13-15 year olds indicated that roads were unsafe, with the greatest number stating that recreation grounds are spaces which present a risk. Perceptions of risk differ according to age, with pre-teens concerned about the physical dangers of traffic and teenagers expressing anxiety about social risks (Table 6.17). More than half of the 10-12 year olds mentioned traffic hazards, reflecting their concern with roads as unsafe places. The reasons given by the 13-15 year olds as to why a space is unsafe are spread more evenly over a number of categories, many of which are linked to social fears. Those in their early teens reported concerns about gangs, stranger-danger, crime and a lack of street lighting. For these teenagers, social fears are predominant.

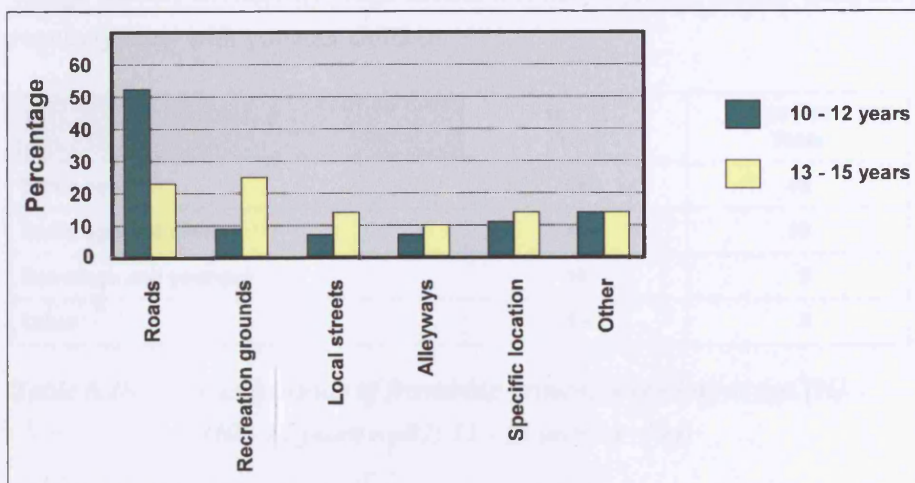


Figure 6.19 Places deemed to be unsafe, according to age (%).  
(10 - 12 years n=67; 13 - 15 years n=79)



	10 - 12 Years	13 - 15 Years
Traffic hazards	53	26
Stranger-danger	13	20
Gangs	12	16
Poor street lighting	3	18
Vandalism/crime	2	7
Other	18	14

*Table 6.17 Reasons why places are deemed to be unsafe, according to age (%).  
(10 - 12 years n=61; 13 - 15 years n=77)*

#### 6.3.4 Friendship Groups and Gang Membership

Variations in the size and composition of friendship groups are apparent according to age. A greater proportion of young teenagers belong to large groups, with just one in ten 13-15 year olds and more than one third of 10-12 year olds regularly meeting with fewer than three friends. With many teenagers travelling outside the home village to a secondary school in a nearby market town, these older children have more opportunities to extend their friendship groups, being in daily contact with young people from other villages.

Pre-teens are more likely to belong to single sex friendship groups, with two thirds of 10-12 year olds and only one third of 13-15 year olds choosing to spend their time with those of their own sex. The 10-12 years age group, many of whom attend a small village school, are more likely to be a member of a friendship group which includes younger children (Table 6.18). With many village schools having mixed age classes it is not surprising that pre-teens are more likely to regularly meet with younger children.

	10 - 12 Years	13 - 15 Years
Same age	44	48
Same age and older	26	33
Same age and younger	16	9
Other	15	9

*Table 6.18 Composition of friendship groups, according to age (%).  
(10 - 12 years n=82; 13 - 15 years n=104)*

Pre-teens and teenagers were equally likely to be a member of a gang. Those in the older age group were more likely to form the large gangs central to stereotypical images of young people. Single sex gangs were most common in the 10-12 years age group: two thirds of 10-12 year old gang members were in single sex gangs compared to just one in five 13-15 year olds. There were few variations with regard to the age structures of gangs of which young people are a part, although slightly more 10-12 year olds stated that their gang contained younger children and slightly more 13-15 year olds remarked that they were the youngest members of their gang.

### **6.3.5 Summary: Does Age Matter?**

Age influences young people's attitudes towards and experiences of growing up in rural South Northants in a number of ways. Pre-teens have been shown to hold the most positive views of the countryside, whilst teenagers are more likely to hold more positive views of urban environments. Those in the 13-15 year age group were least satisfied with their home village, the most frequently cited criticism being that rural settlements offer 'few things to do'. The teenage group were most likely to express a desire for greater service provision in their home village. In contrast, 10-12 year olds were most concerned about issues of traffic hazards, noise, and busy roads. A greater proportion of this younger group stated that they wished to see improvements to the physical attributes of their home settlement.

Pre-teens and teenagers also exhibit differences in their leisure choices. The older age group showed a preference for formal leisure spaces, such as sports facilities and playing fields, whilst the younger group were more regular users of spaces in the natural environment. The 13-15 year olds reported spending their leisure time playing sport or talking with friends; the 10-12 year olds stated that they played with friends when outdoors. No differences were found in the frequency with which young people invited friends to their home, however, 13-15 year olds were more likely to spend time in the privacy of their own room and 10-12 year olds were more likely to spend time in rooms shared with other members of the family.

A greater proportion of pre-teens than young teenagers regularly used the structured leisure spaces of clubs or youth organizations. Teenagers generally have a greater home range than that of pre-teens, and they often exploit this by using leisure facilities outside their home village. The two age groups showed different levels of concern about places of risk. A large percentage of the younger group referred to fears of physical danger; in contrast, a large percentage of the older group mentioned social dangers.

## 6.4 Gender

Boys and girls were not distributed evenly across the age groups or settlement types. Boys slightly dominate the 10-12 year age group (45 boys and 39 girls) and girls the 13-15 years age group (49 boys and 59 girls). A greater number of girls were resident in the market town and small villages, while a greater number of boys were resident in the large villages (Table 6.3).

### 6.4.1 Preferences for Rural Living

Although no great differences were apparent with regard to girls' and boys' views of towns, girls were found to hold more positive views of the countryside, suggesting that girls have a stronger preference for rural living. As Table 6.19 shows, around one third of the girls classified the countryside as 'very exciting' or 'exciting' compared with around one quarter of the boys. The girls were more likely to term the countryside as 'very friendly' or 'friendly', with 87% of girls choosing these descriptors compared with 73% of boys. A slightly greater proportion of girls than boys believed the countryside to be 'very safe' or 'safe'.

	Girls	Boys
<b>Very exciting</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Exciting</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Neither exciting nor boring</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Boring</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Very boring</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Very unfriendly</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Unfriendly</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Neither unfriendly nor friendly</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Friendly</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Very friendly</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Very dangerous</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Dangerous</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Neither dangerous nor safe</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Safe</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Very safe</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>

*Table 6.19 Perceptions of the countryside, according to gender (%).  
(girls n=94; boys n=88)*

Although girls were more likely to view the countryside in a positive manner, this is not strongly reflected by the number of girls who would choose to live in a village. A similar number of boys and girls stated a preference for village life, yet noticeably fewer girls than boys would choose to live in a large town (Figure 6.20). However, more girls than boys stated that they would prefer to live in a small town, showing that even here for many girls the positive images they hold of the countryside do not outweigh the benefits they perceive of life in a small town.



Figure 6.20 Residential preferences, according to gender (%).  
(girls  $n=96$ ; boys  $n=93$ )

Jones (1999b) has argued that the rural childhood idyll is essentially a 'masculine' experience and that girls must become tomboys in order to participate in the activities associated with idyllic rural childhoods. Nearly twice the percentage of boys than girls outlined aspects of the natural environment as the best thing for young people living in their home village, supporting Jones's ideas of the gendered nature of the rural idyll (Figure 6.21). However, one in three girls cited social and community factors - features central to the idyll - as being a good thing about their village, whilst only one in five boys chose this aspect. These differences may reflect differences in the socialization of girls and boys, with girls encouraged to focus their attention on social interaction and boys encouraged to be independent and participate in physical activities such as building dens and climbing trees (Cunningham and Jones, 1991; 1994; 1999; Pearce, 1996; Prendergast, 2000).



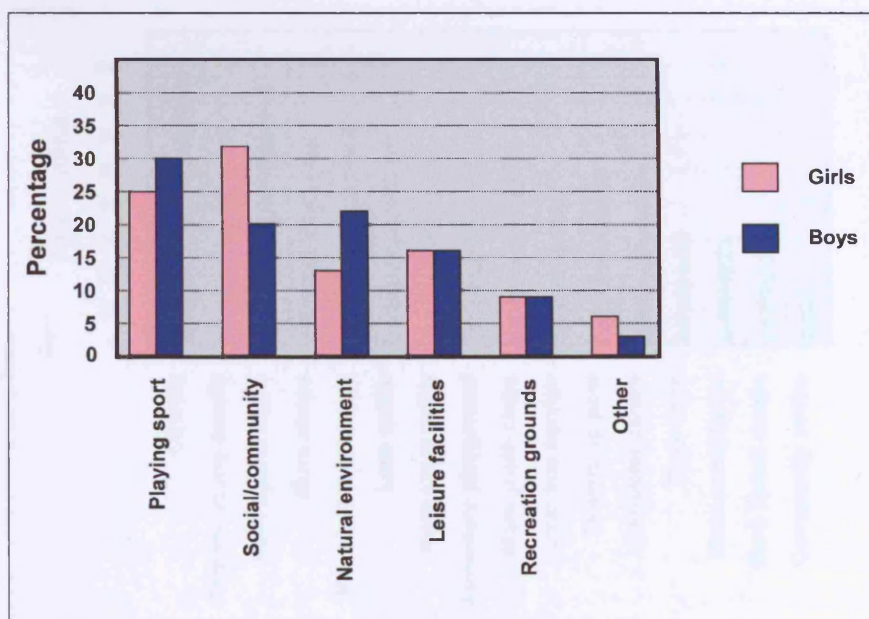


Figure 6.21 Good things about living in home village, according to gender (%).  
(girls  $n=88$ ; boys  $n=92$ )

#### 6.4.2 A Retreat from the Street?

##### *Use of Indoor Spaces 1: Domestic Space*

Some recent research has argued that there has been a 'retreat from the street', with boys in particular spending more of their leisure time in the home (Bingham *et al.*, 1999; Holloway and Valentine, 2001; Livingstone and Bovill, 1999; McNamee, 1998; 1999; Valentine *et al.*, 2000). This change in leisure patterns has been attributed to an increase in the use of computer and video games, with boys being dominant users of these technologies. Although desired improvements to the home village are distributed fairly equally between boys and girls, one noticeable difference is in the number of girls and boys who would consider their village to be improved by a computer centre (Figure 6.22). The proportion of boys who would like a computer centre in their village is more than double that of girls, indicating that boys favour these leisure activities.



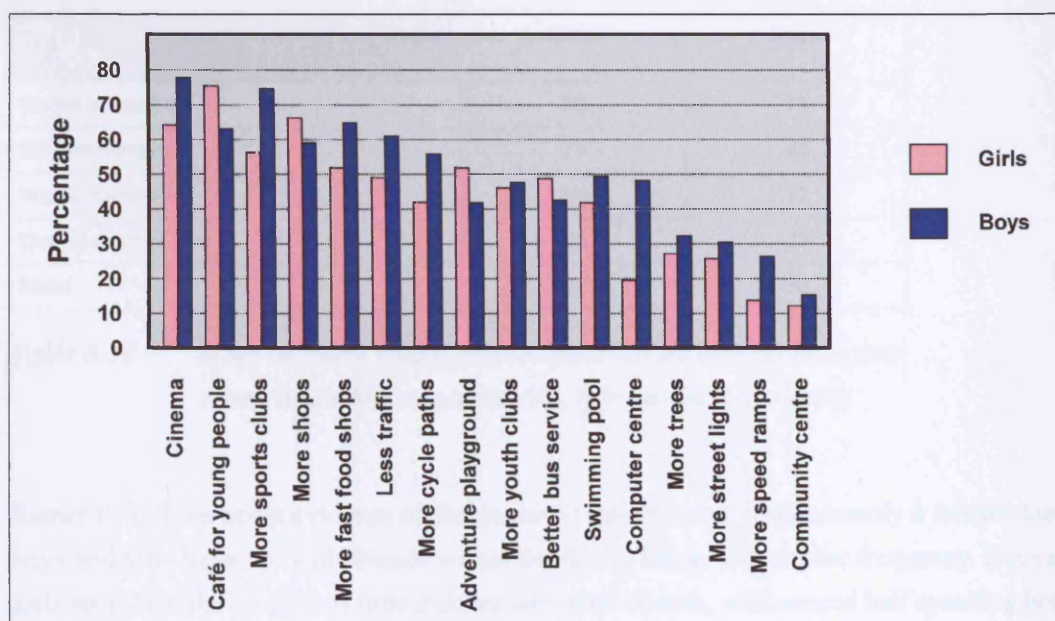


Figure 6.22 Desired improvements to home village, according to gender (%).  
(girls  $n=98$ ; boys  $n=95$ )

Youth studies in the late 1970s and 1980s suggested that the private sphere, and in particular the home, were the domain of girls (see, for example, Campbell, 1981; Corrigan, 1979; McRobbie, 1982; 1991; McRobbie and Garber, 1976; McRobbie and Nava, 1984). Rather than being active users of outdoor spaces, young girls were understood to spend much of their leisure time indoors engaged in what McRobbie (1982) termed 'bedroom culture'. More recent studies have suggested that this pattern no longer holds true, with boys spending an increasing amount of time within the domestic sphere, playing computer and video games and watching television (Bingham *et al.*, 1999; McNamee, 1998; 1999).

This research in South Northants supports these recent arguments, and no differences were found between the length of time girls' and boys' spend alone in their home. There were, however, marked differences with regard to their choice of leisure activities. Boys tend to spend their time using computer and video equipment. Although three-quarters of boys spend their time using a computer, less than one-quarter of girls' spend their time this way (Table 6.20). This may reflect differences in access to computers: McNamee (1998; 1999) has noted that where computers are shared by family members, many are located in boys' bedrooms, meaning that girls may be denied access to such resources by their brothers. A greater number of boys than girls stated that they watch television when they were alone in their rooms, perhaps reflecting differing access to such facilities. Girls were more likely to spend their time listening to music, reading and completing homework.

	Girls	Boys
Listen to music	95	73
Do homework	77	62
Watch television	60	72
Use computer	23	75
Read	47	31

*Table 6.20 Ways in which young people spend leisure time alone in their room, according to gender (%). (girls n=96; boys n=93)*

Rather than there being evidence of the domestic sphere being predominantly a female domain, boys and girls hang out with friends within the family home with similar frequency. Boys and girls spend similar lengths of time indoors with their friends, with around half spending between one and three hours indoors. There is an indication that the girls' 'bedroom culture' described by McRobbie (1982) may exist. Girls are more likely to spend time in their bedrooms when with friends, with half of girls compared with less than one third of boys choosing to spend time in this room. This may also reflect the wish of many girls for a degree of privacy within the home.

### *Indoor Spaces 2: Formal Leisure Spaces*

Girls and boys appear to have different priorities with regard to how they spend their leisure time. More than one third of boys stated that their favourite place is a playing field or park, compared to one quarter of girls (Figure 6.23). In contrast, more girls than boys chose sports facilities, particularly the indoor environment of the leisure centre, or a friend's house as their favourite place. Many of the early studies of youth cultures viewed boys as active agents and girls as passive observers (Griffin, 1993, McRobbie and Garber, 1976; Nava, 1992). In this study a greater proportion of girls than boys stated that it was the social opportunities offered by a space that they most valued (Figure 6.24). Boys, on the other hand, were more likely to refer to activities in which they could participate in these spaces.



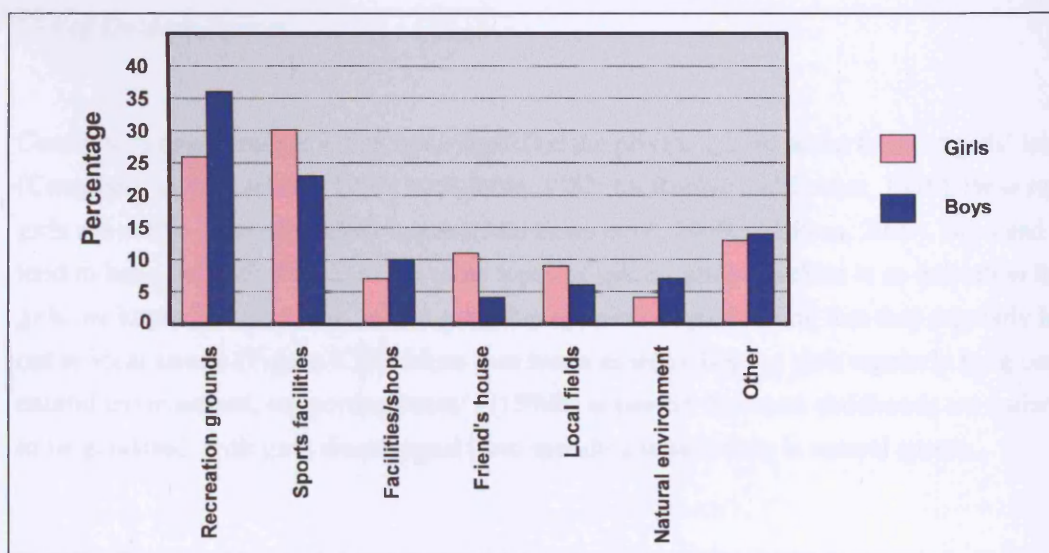


Figure 6.23 Favourite place in home village, according to gender (%).  
(girls n=92; boys n=91)

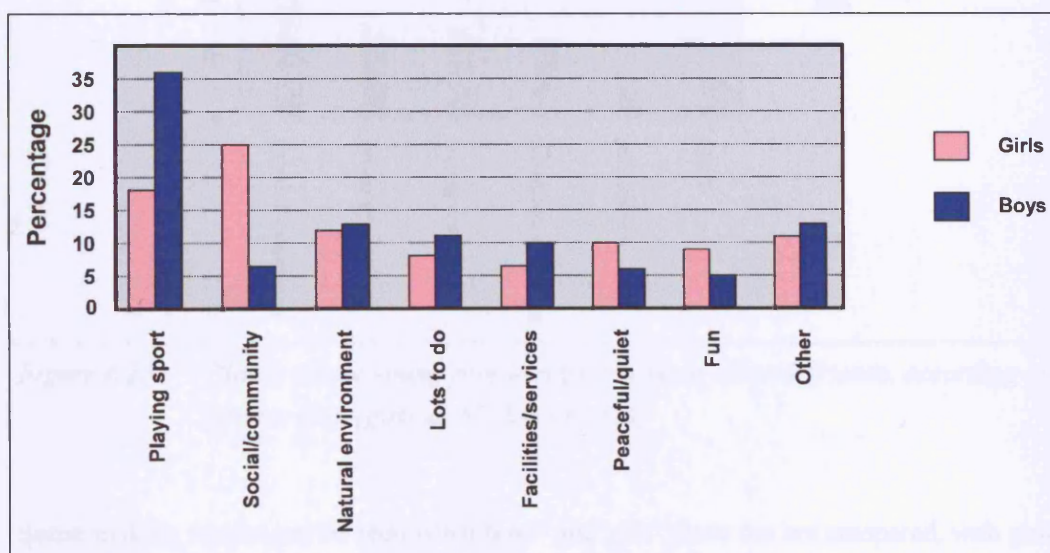


Figure 6.24 Reason why favourite place, according to gender (%).  
(girls n=89; boys n=84)

A greater proportion of boys than girls attend clubs or youth organizations. Nearly two thirds of boys stated that they attended a club, but less than half of the girls indicated that they attend a club or youth organization. This difference may relate to the perceived desirability of the clubs available to young people in rural South Northants. Nava (1984; 1992) has argued that much leisure provision is geared more towards boys than girls. Of those boys who were a member of a club, more than two thirds attended a sports club. In contrast, only one quarter of girls regularly visited a sports club. With many sports clubs dominated by boys, it may be that girls find such leisure opportunities unappealing.

	Girls	Boys
Play/hang out	67	31
Play sport	8	45
Hang out & play sport	20	18
Other	5	6

*Table 6.21 Leisure activities when hanging out with friends, according to gender (%). (girls n=85; boys n=83)*

Contrary to the findings of Cunningham and Jones (1994), boys and girls in South Northants tend to have similar home ranges. Rather than being kept closer to the home, many rural girls have the same levels of spatial freedom as boys (Tables 6.22, 6.23, 6.24 and 6.25). Indeed, slightly more girls than boys are able to visit neighbouring villages and towns when permission has been gained<sup>4</sup>.

	Girls	Boys
Own garden	8	13
Friend's house	2	5
Own street	1	4
Local streets	32	30
Whole village	25	19
Neighbouring village	23	16
Local large town	8	14

*Table 6.22 Home range when alone, without seeking special permission, according to gender (%). (girls n=84; boys n=84)*

<sup>4</sup> Given the range and diversity of settlements from which the sample was taken, and the size of the sample itself, it was not practicable to calculate the actual distances that young people were able to roam. Instead, the home ranges were categorized according to the types of spaces which defined the boundaries of young people's spatial territories.

	Girls	Boys
Own garden	2	0
Friend's house	0	8
Own street	1	1
Local streets	30	23
Whole village	16	22
Neighbouring village	19	17
Local large town	32	29

*Table 6.23 Home range when alone, when permission has been sought, according to gender (%). (girls n=84; boys n=83)*

	Girls	Boys
Own garden	8	10
Friend's house	1	5
Own street	1	0
Local streets	25	27
Whole village	24	23
Neighbouring village	22	18
Local large town	19	17

*Table 6.24 Home range when with friends, without seeking special permission, according to gender (%). (girls n=83; boys n=82)*

	Girls	Boys
Own garden	0	0
Friend's house	1	9
Own street	1	0
Local streets	17	15
Whole village	15	22
Neighbouring village	17	13
Local large town	49	42

*Table 6.25 Home range when with friends, when permission has been sought, according to gender (%). (girls n=85; boys n=82)*



Bourdieu's (1977) concept of the 'rules of the neighbourhood', the habitus, can also be used to disentangle variations in girls' and boys' place use. Differences exist in the socialization of boys and girls (Cunningham and Jones, 2000; Jones and Cunningham, 1999) - the sets of 'rules' governing acceptable behaviour differ. The spaces and activities which are considered appropriate for girls may vary to those for boys. Whilst it may be acceptable for boys to dominate the large open spaces of playing fields and recreation grounds in their active participation in sports, girls may defy the 'rules of the neighbourhood' by so doing. To maintain the status quo girls are encouraged to behave in a more passive manner, accepting boys' dominance of these outdoor spaces. Thus whilst girls may visit the same spaces and have the same home ranges as boys, their use of these spaces is governed by a set of rules imposed by (adult) society.

### 6.4.3 Use of Leisure Facilities

In her study of mid-teens in urban and suburban USA, Wridt (1999) concluded that girls travel to commercial settings more frequently than boys. Lieberg (1997) has suggested that indoor leisure facilities are often considered by both young girls and their parents to be safe environments. It may be that this perception has an impact upon girls' use of such spaces. As Figure 6.26 illustrates, in this study girls were more likely than boys to visit many of the leisure facilities identified. The exceptions are ten-pin bowling and laser games, both activities which have a strong sporting element. The difference between the numbers of boys and girls who go horse riding is particularly marked. Nearly thirty times as many girls as boys go horse riding.

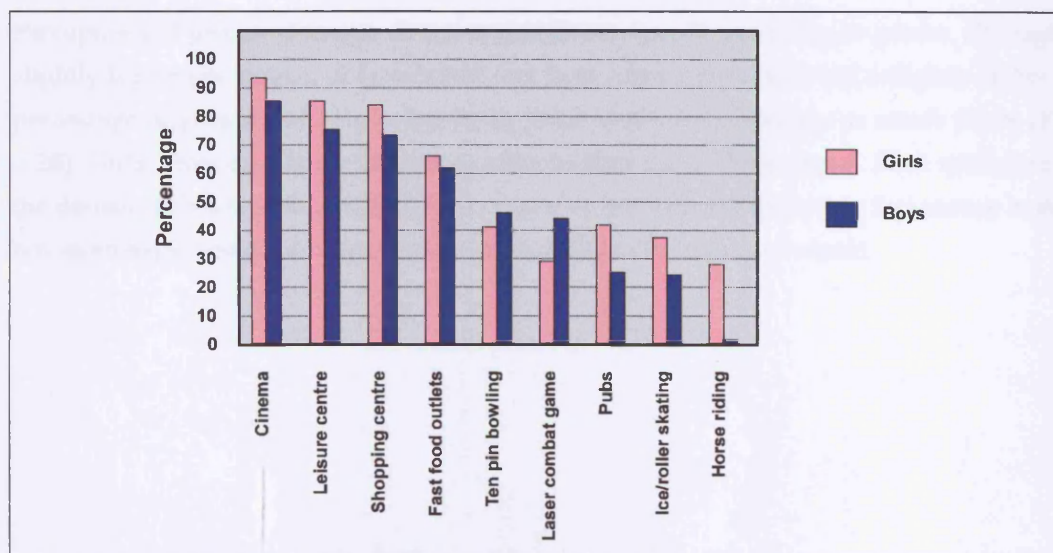


Figure 6.26 Leisure facilities visited by young people, according to gender (%).  
(girls n=97; boys n=88)

#### 6.4.4 Girls at Risk

The idyllic countryside is commonly seen to be a safe place for children, a space in which they are protected from 'urban evils' (Jones, 1997a). Yet three-quarters of the participants stated that there is at least one unsafe place in their home village. Roads were most frequently described as unsafe places, with playing fields and parks being the second most frequently cited places (Figure 6.27).

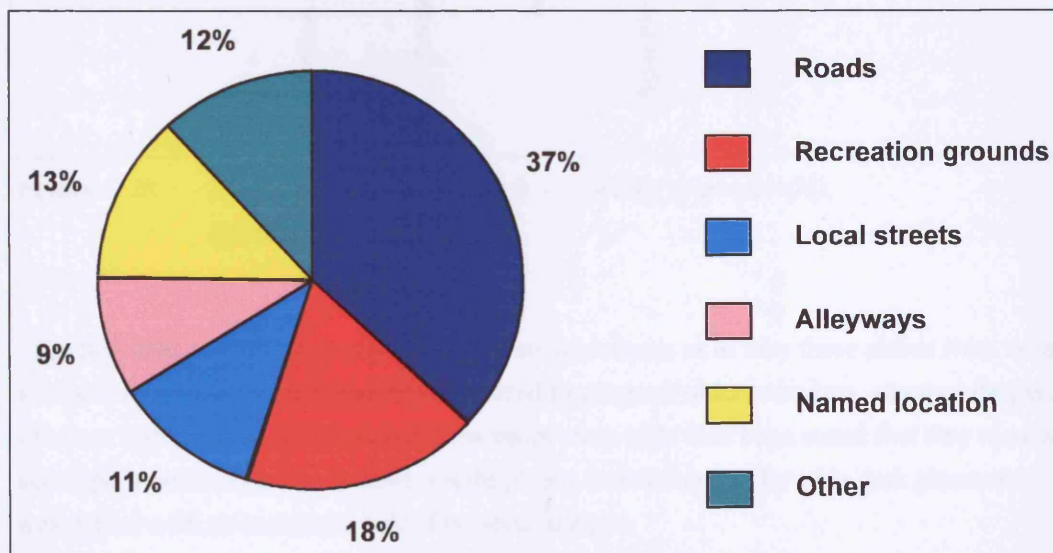


Figure 6.27 Places deemed to be unsafe (%). (n=147)

Perceptions of places of danger do not appear to vary greatly according to gender, although a slightly higher percentage of boys stated that local roads were unsafe and a slightly higher percentage of girls identified playing fields, local streets and alleyways as unsafe places (Figure 6.28). Girls' fears of playing fields may relate to their use of these spaces. Such spaces are often the domain of boys, with girls forced to remain on the margins. Girls may feel uneasy in these boy-dominated spaces, leading them to class such environments as unsafe.



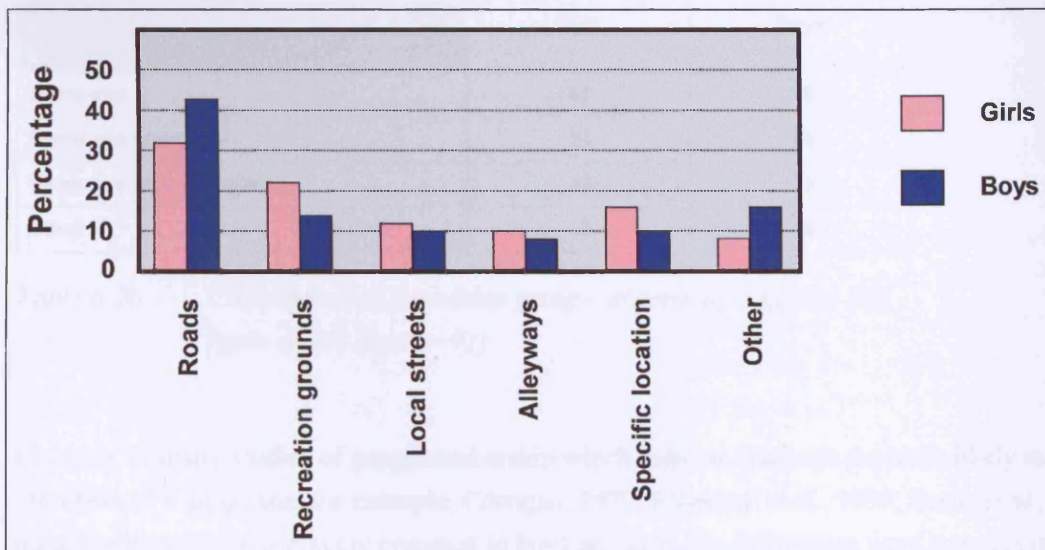


Figure 6.28 Places deemed to be unsafe, according to gender (%).  
(girls  $n=74$ ; boys  $n=73$ )

Like the older age group, many girls gave social reasons as to why these places were unsafe. A greater proportion of girls than boys referred to gangs of older teenagers, stranger-danger, a lack of street lighting and crime. Around ten times more girls than boys stated that they were anxious about poor street lighting in these unsafe places, indicating that for girls dark places are associated with an increased risk of personal danger.

#### 6.4.5 Girls and Boys come out to Play

Although the friendship groups of boys and girls do not appear to vary in size, more girls stated that they were members of mixed sex groups. Some early research into young people's geographies identified differences in home ranges according to gender and concluded that girls' membership of mixed gangs enabled them to have greater spatial freedom (Campbell, 1981; McRobbie, 1982). The home ranges of girls and boys in rural South Northants did not vary greatly, although the data indicate that those girls who were members of mixed friendship groups were slightly more likely to have a greater home range. The composition of friendship groups of girls and boys varied little, indicating that gender did not greatly influence the age structure of friendship groups (Table 6.26).



	Girls	Boys
Same age	47	46
Same age and older	31	28
Same age and younger	15	10
Other	7	16

*Table 6.26 Composition of friendship groups, according to gender (%).  
(girls n=96; boys n=91)*

Contrary to many studies of gang membership which indicate that boys are more likely to be members of a gang (see, for example, Corrigan, 1979; Esbensen *et al.*, 1999; Evans *et al.*, 1999), gang membership was equally common to boys and girls. No differences were apparent in the size or age structure of the gangs of which boys and girls were members. Boys were more likely to be a member of a mixed sex gang, with three quarters of boys in a mixed gang compared to fewer than half of the girls.

Although gang membership varies little between boys and girls, the reasons why young people choose to become a member may differ. Several girls mentioned that membership of a gang helped them to gain autonomy. These girls were able to visit different places if they were with a group of friends, and so through being part of a gang could gain increased spatial freedom. Rather than seeking autonomy in terms of spatial freedom, some boys stated that they felt more able to contest spaces and perform acts of resistance in outdoor environments when they are with a group of friends.

#### **6.4.6 Summary: Does Gender Matter?**

Young people's experiences of and attitudes towards growing up in rural South Northants are influenced by gender. Girls tend to hold more positive views of the countryside, although no differences are apparent in the number of boys and girls wishing to live in a village when they are older. A greater proportion of girls than boys expressed a desire to live in a small town, whilst a greater proportion of boys stated a preference for life in a large town.

Rural childhoods can be understood as a masculine experience (Jones, 1999b). Few of the girls in this study reported that they spend time in the natural environment, participating in 'tomboy' activities such as climbing trees. Boys and girls were found to spend equal amounts of time outdoors and to have similar levels of spatial freedom. Rather than any 'retreat from the street', girls and boys were shown to spend similar amounts of time indoors. However, variations exist in young people's leisure activities, with boys more likely to spend time playing sports. Boys' sporting activities tend to dominate much of the open green space in these rural settlements, with girls pushed to the boundaries of playing fields and recreation grounds. Boys also dominate clubs and youth organizations, many of which have a strong sporting component. In contrast, a greater proportion of girls than boys visit commercial leisure facilities.

## **6.5 Exploring Multiple Rural Realities**

The chapter has begun to unravel some of the complexities of rural living and has demonstrated difference and diversity in children's geographies. Many of the findings resonate with those of studies of urban young people (for instance, Chawla, 2002; Percy-Smith, 1999b; Matthews *et al.*, 1998a), indicating that there are similarities between rural and urban childhoods. The variations in young people's experiences of growing up in rural South Northants show that, rather than there being an universal experience of 'country childhood', a multitude of rural realities exist. In this chapter differences according to location, age and gender have been examined in isolation - yet these factors will cut across each other in a variety of ways to produce complex geographies. With this in mind, the concept of 'lifestyle' may be a useful way of exploring some rural childhood experiences.

### **6.5.1 Classifying Rural Lifestyle Experiences**

Lieberg (1997), in his study of teenagers in urban Sweden, identified three 'lifestyle orientations' - 'peer group', 'association' and 'home' - that encompass not only which leisure activities are carried out, but where these occur and with whom. He argued that young people's experiences of growing up may vary according to their lifestyle choices. Peer group-oriented young people, according to Lieberg, have an orientation towards friendship which concentrates on 'doing nothing' activities in mixed-gender groups in public spaces. This group show an aspiration for freedom and immediacy, as well as a desire for group friendship without an adult presence. Peer group-oriented young people spend the largest part of their time outdoors, usually in their immediate neighbourhood. These young people are most likely to belong to gangs.

Association-oriented young people, in contrast, show an inclination towards a more disciplined use of space and time (Lieberg, 1997). These young people have a desire for group membership, but are more often seen in the presence of adults. Association-oriented young people spend much of their leisure time participating in organised activities away from their neighbourhood. This group are dependent on adults for transportation to different activities.

Home-oriented young people exhibit a lifestyle orientation towards the home and family, in a quest for close, personal relations with parents and siblings in the private sphere (Lieberg, 1997). This group spend much time in the home and little outdoors, either in the immediate neighbourhood or in other city spaces. This group take the most cautious attitude to the use of public spaces.

Useful as Lieberg's (1997) study is as a means of classifying the lifestyle experiences of young people, it forms but one level in a more complex pattern of interactions. This study has shown that young people can be contextualized according to their individual circumstances, including not only gender, but also age and place of residence. This can be seen as a second tier of factors influencing lifestyle experiences (Figure 6.29). This tier does not consist solely of gender, age and location: other factors such as the social status of the household and ethnicity may also be relevant. A further set of issues impact upon these, namely those of scale. In this research the ways in which young people's lifestyles are influenced by (local) peer groups and the (national) media are considered. Scale is shown to be an important factor through which the lifestyle choices of young people can be contextualized, with young people shown to be influenced by a national (urban) youth culture.

These three levels of factors influencing young people's lifestyles are affected by a set of overarching structures. Behaviour is determined by a series of socially-mediated directives that are bounded by invisible and implicit social understandings of what is acceptable (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). These directives form the 'rules of the neighbourhood' and these may vary according to individual circumstances (such as gender, age and location) and personal choice (lifestyle orientation). Adults impose this set of rules upon young people's behaviour to prevent disruption to the social order, influencing their lifestyle experiences (Cahill, 2000).



Building upon Lieberg's (1997) classification, and drawing upon factors of individual circumstance and scale, some patterns in young people's lifestyles in rural South Northants can be seen. In South Northants the peer-oriented group was dominated by young people resident in the market town or largest villages. Pre-teens and teenagers were equally likely to spend much time in their immediate neighbourhood socialising with friends, and to belong to gangs. However, teenagers were more likely to hang around in the larger groups which fit the stereotypical (urban) image of gangs. Boys and girls were equally likely to choose this lifestyle orientation, although more boys than girls contested adult 'rules of the neighbourhood' by performing acts of resistance.

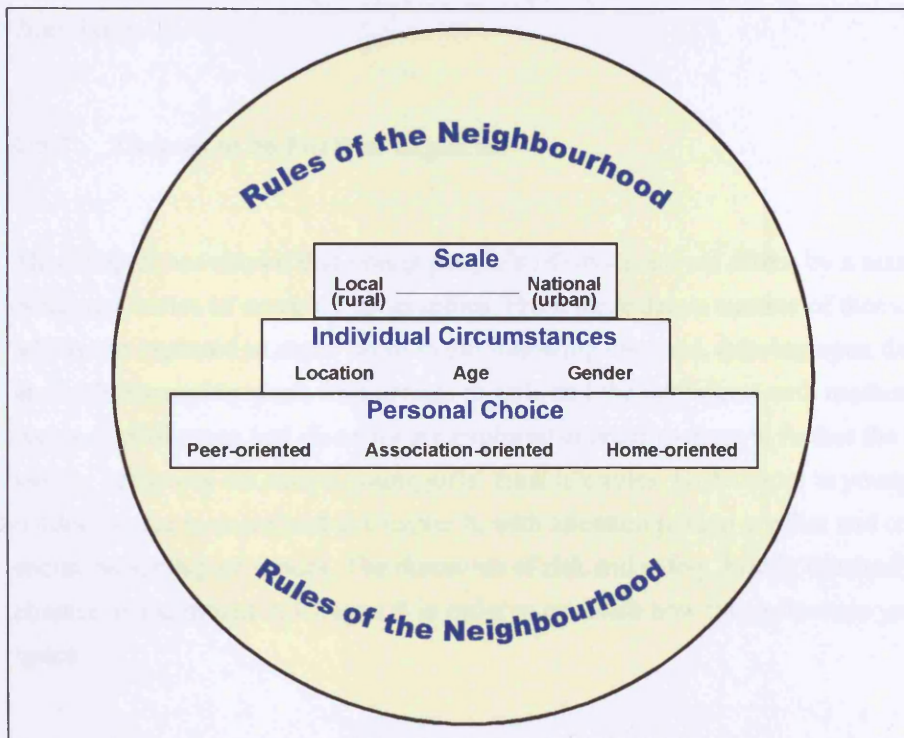


Figure 6.29 Tiers of influence on young people's lifestyle experiences.

The association-oriented group in South Northants was dominated by 10-12 year old boys. The majority of these boys were reliant upon parents to provide transport, and location appeared to have little bearing on this lifestyle choice. No patterns were found within the home-oriented group, with no differences between the numbers of girls and boys, and pre-teens and teenagers, who chose to spend much of their leisure time in the home. Equal numbers of young people from small villages, large villages and the market town fitted into the home-oriented category.

A fourth lifestyle orientation was also apparent in South Northants – one centred on the use of commercial leisure spaces. This group was dominated by teenage girls, particularly those resident in the market town, and much leisure time was spent socialising with friends in formal recreational spaces and commercial leisure facilities. The commercial-oriented group drew upon notions of a national (urban) youth culture and aspired to urban living.

The fact that two of these groups - association-oriented and commercial-oriented - were dominated by one age group suggests that young people may move between these categories over time. As children grow older their home ranges tend to expand and thus the opportunities available to them will vary over time. Young people's lifestyle orientations are dynamic rather than fixed.

### **6.5.2 Themes to be Further Explored**

This chapter has shown that young people's lifestyles are cut across by a number of factors, creating a series of complex geographies. From these data a number of themes have emerged which are explored in more detail in the following chapters, drawing upon data collected in the in-depth discussion work with groups of girls and the interviews with mothers. In Chapter 7 issues of difference and diversity are explored in order to unravel further the ways in which a variety of factors cut across young girls' rural lifestyles. Differences in young people's use of outdoor space is examined in Chapter 8, with attention paid to conflict and collision over the social ownership of spaces. The discourse of risk and safety, briefly touched upon in this chapter, is examined in Chapter 9 in order to establish how this influences young girls' use of space.

## **Chapter 7 Difference and Diversity in Girls' Use of Recreational Spaces**

### **7.1 Introduction**

There is no universal experience of growing up in the countryside (Davis and Ridge, 1997; Fabes and Banks, 1991; Matthews *et al.*, 2000c). Rather, there are “plural childhoods” (James and James, 2001, p. 214), which are shaped and differentiated by age, gender, class, ethnicity and location. Young people grow up in varied circumstances, with different priorities and perspectives, yet nonetheless share some commonalities of experience (Wyn and White, 1997). In this chapter difference and diversity in girls' use of recreational spaces are explored. Building upon the findings of the questionnaire survey, differences between boys' and girls' lifestyles are discussed, and differences between rural and urban childhoods highlighted. Data are unravelled in order to uncover some meanings of the experiences of girls who are growing up in the countryside.

Diversity in girls' experiences of growing up in the countryside can be seen at three levels: the participants lived in different settlements, with each location providing differing levels of service provision and recreational opportunities; the girls came from different family backgrounds, with different attitudes towards parenting and differences in the extent to which they were constrained in their place use and behaviour; and the girls, as individuals, showed great diversity with regard to their favourite recreational spaces, the ways in which they spent their leisure time and their satisfaction with their home settlement and the recreation facilities it provides. These three categories can be used as a framework to provide an insight into the experiences of girls growing up within rural South Northants.

Rudd and Evans (1998) have argued that locational factors and the unique individual structures of family life influence young people's lifestyles. The recreational opportunities available to young people form one set of locational factors. Different locations offer different services and facilities. Some of the settlements in the study area provide a range of formal recreational and leisure facilities, whilst others provide few or none (see Chapter 5, Table 5.4). Davis and Ridge (1997) have argued that, although a general lack of provision often exists in rural areas, the disadvantages of this for young people may be greater than those for adults. Even in opportunity-rich settlements, the opportunities offered may not match the needs and desires of young people (Sampson, 1998).

Further, these factors may not have the same impact upon all young people in rural areas. Where there is sufficient affluence and mobility, localized lack of opportunity can be merely an inconvenience that may be easily overcome. Those families without such access to high levels of disposable income and transportation may be more tied to their immediate locality, and this will have an impact upon young people's experiences of growing up.

The boundaries of young people's home ranges are the outcomes of care-taking conventions, age-related capabilities and gender-related expectations, set within a context of social, cultural and environmental contingencies (Matthews and Limb, 1999). These boundaries reflect a negotiated geography between parent and child (Matthews, 1995; Valentine, 1997a), in which environmental and social dangers exert strong centripetal pulls for the parent, and the desire of autonomy and the pull of rival environmental attractions provide centrifugal impulses for the child (Matthews and Limb, 1999). Parenting strategies differ with regard to the compromises that parents make between protecting their children from public dangers through restricting their independence and simultaneously allowing them the freedom and autonomy to become competent at negotiating public space alone (Valentine, 1997a).

Baumrind (1971) has identified two major dimensions of parenting style which form the basis of parent-child relationships, namely 'parental control' and 'parental acceptance', and these provide a four-fold typology of parenting practice: authoritarian, authoritative, neglectful and permissive (Figure 7.1). The agency of the child is incorporated into this framework (centrifugal impulses) as are the constraints of care-taking conventions (centripetal pulls).

This typology is useful when considering young people's spatial ranges and use of space, with each parenting style indicative of different place behaviour. The authoritarian parenting style is associated with rigidly enforced rules and narrow territorial limits, in this sense dictating young people's place use. Authoritative parenting combines clearly defined rules and spatial limits with reasoned and firm control. Young people's place behaviour is the result of negotiation and compromise. Under these parenting strategies children are drawn towards the home, albeit with greater or lesser stringency (Matthews and Limb, 1999).

The permissive parenting style, in contrast, offers considerable leniency with regard to place limits and a high level of tolerance. Parents are supportive; territories are poorly defined. Young people's place behaviour is often ignored in the 'neglectful' parenting style. Imprecise guidance is provided by parents, with young people left to define their own spatial margins. Both the permissive and neglectful parenting styles are associated with care-taking conventions which respond, to differing extents, to the centrifugal impulses of children (Matthews and Limb, 1999).

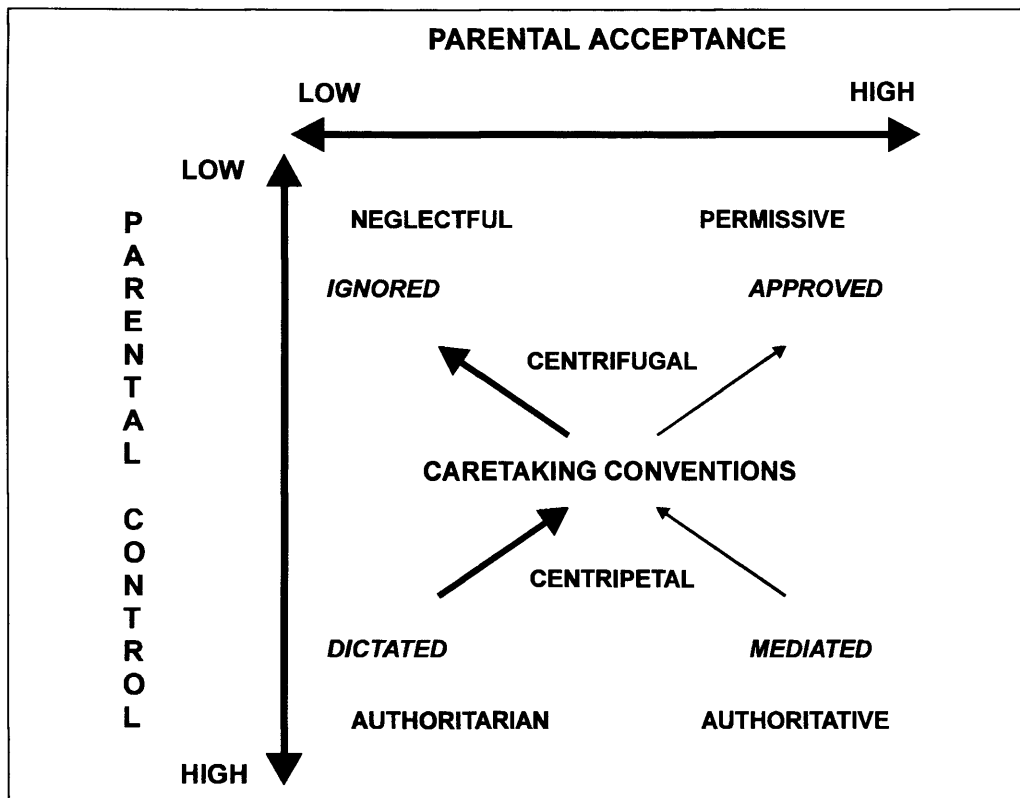


Figure 7.1 Parental care-taking conventions and the place behaviour of children  
(Source: Matthews and Limb, 1999, p. 74).

Although this typology “does not take into account the centripetal effects of fear and attachment which many children will experience nor the centrifugal impulses of parents whose lifestyle are not domicentred” (Matthews and Limb, 1999, p. 71), the model raises issues about differing parenting strategies and the exercise of power within the family that are relevant to an understanding of young people’s spatial experiences. Parenting strategies have an impact upon the extent to which young people are able to move around the countryside.

Individuals may respond in different ways to locational factors and their family background. Young people may make different choices about where to meet friends and where to go to be alone. Individuals’ preferences for particular leisure places differ, and variations in leisure activities may be influenced by lifestyle choices or by life course circumstances. None of these three categories is mutually exclusive. Indeed, contingency effects cut across them all.



In this chapter some differences in girls' use of recreational space are explored at these three levels. The discussion does not reflect a complete inventory of girls' experiences of growing up. Rather, some interesting issues are explored which signal a variety of ways in which young people encounter place and space. Commonalities that are shared by young people are discussed in order to aid understanding of the experiences of girls growing up in a rural area. This chapter draws upon data from the questionnaire survey, the in-depth discussions with groups of girls and the interviews with mothers. In order to convey the lived experiences of the participants this chapter draws extensively on their own words. Photographs taken by the girls and their accompanying written statements are included. Spelling and grammar have been directly transcribed from the originals to represent the ways in which young people provide this information.

## **7.2 Locational Factors and Recreational Opportunities**

Settlements within the study area possess differing levels of leisure facility provision (see Chapter 5, Table 5.4). These facility-rich and facility-poor settlements provide different sets of recreational opportunities for young girls. The questionnaire survey indicated that boys dominate many open green spaces in rural South Northants, and that they also have a dominant presence in clubs and youth organizations. Perhaps as a result of boys' command of local facilities, many young girls spend much time seeking recreational opportunities outside their immediate neighbourhood, often travelling to nearby towns. This set of structures influence girls' use of recreational spaces within their home village.

Three major issues emerge from analysis of this set of factors. First, variations exist in the provision of recreational opportunities according to location. Second, girls' ability to access these services and facilities varies, together with levels of mobility. Third, the combined forces of these upon girls' recreational opportunities have an influence upon opportunities for socializing and the composition of friendship groups. These factors create diversity in young girls' experiences of growing up.

### 7.2.1 Variations in Facility Provision

Davis and Ridge (1997), in their study of children in low income families in rural Somerset, have summarized problems of service provision common to many rural areas:

“What was apparent was the general dearth of provision, with many villages providing no social space or structured activities at all... Whilst many towns and villages do provide a youth club, the reality is that for many children and young people this is often just available for a couple of hours once a week, sometimes under very cramped and restricted circumstances. This environment lends very little to children and young people’s need for social space and the ownership of that space... However, despite the inadequacy of provision available, for those children where there are no opportunities at all, any provision would be a welcome relief... In larger rural settlements and towns, provision tends to be greater but lacking in variety” (pp. 32-33).

A similar situation exists in the study area, with many of the smaller settlements offering few leisure opportunities and little variety existing within the larger villages and the market town. Village-based activities tend to consist of non-organized activities and sports, with the majority of organized activity being based in nearby towns and further afield (Sampson, 1998).

Percy-Smith (1999b), in his research with young people resident in urban and suburban areas in Northampton, has noted that local authorities fail to provide appropriate opportunities for young people, with those facilities that are provided often lacking adequate stimulation and variety. This argument is particularly relevant in rural locations, where issues of access to leisure opportunities compound these problems. Young girls may be denied access to recreational opportunities because of three factors: locational disadvantage; economic circumstances and dissatisfaction with those services provided.

A common complaint amongst girls of all ages who lived in villages was the decline of facilities in these smaller settlements and a centralization of services in Towcester. Rather than being content to spend their leisure time within their own communities, for some girls there existed a strong desire to leave their home village to take advantage of facilities elsewhere. For these girls - more than one third of the sample - their residential location deprived them of easy, independent access to desired leisure spaces.

*We need something to do here. We need something which you don't have to go out of the village for. All the good stuff is in Towcester.*

Shannon, 10, Greens Norton

*You need more to do in our area, because if you want something to do you have to go all the way to Towcester. Especially if you're out in Silverstone.*

Megan, 15, Silverstone

FT: *Would you say that Silverstone is a good place for people your age to live?*

Eleanor: *Yes, as long as you go out to Towcester sometimes, because there isn't much activity around here.*

Eleanor, 11, Silverstone

Lucey and Reay (1999) have argued that middle-class children's horizons extend beyond their local area since their families have the funds and ability to travel more widely. Middle-class children, according to Lucey and Reay, develop 'nomadic' identities through these high levels of mobility. As Peters (1995) has noted, parental restrictions and a lack of funds often restrict girls from doing what they wish with their leisure time. This class-related issue was highlighted by around one fifth of the sample of girls in South Northants. In Towcester, where facility provision is greatest, not all young girls were content with the opportunities available to them. The costs involved with recreation activities, particularly the fees charged at the leisure centre, was a common concern, with girls denied access to facilities because of economic rather than locational disadvantage.

FT: *So what sorts of things are there for people your age to do in Towcester?*

Chelsea: *There's not much that you don't have to pay for.*

Chelsea, 10, Towcester

*It costs quite a bit to go to the leisure centre. I mean, it's not that expensive, but it does add up if you want to go there a lot.*

Sara, 15, Towcester

Dissatisfaction with those services provided varied between settlements. In villages with poor facility provision, girls commonly stated that they would like a play area or general store. A play area would perhaps provide an opportunity for young girls to claim autonomous social space within the village. Further, it would show a recognition that young people as a group are an important group within the local community. Some girls stated that the presence of a general store would enable them to gain a level of independence, being able to buy sweets or magazines without having to travel outside the village. Through being able to buy goods as and when they wished, the girls would be able to participate in consumer behaviours witnessed on television and other media (such as magazines, newspapers, films etc.) whereby young people are presented as having such access to commercial spaces (Leyshon, 2000).

FT: *So what sorts of things are there for people your age to do in Litchborough?*

Chloe: *There's no parks. There's the field behind the trees over the road. I don't like Litchborough because there's no parks and no shops we can go to.*

Chloe, 11, Litchborough

FT: *So what would be the best thing to do to improve Tiffield for people your age?*

Sophie: *Get more things for us to do, and get like a place for you to go. Like a youth group or something, a community centre.*

Jessica: *Yeah, I think there should be a youth group now.*

Sophie: *And a little shop or something.*

Jessica: *Yeah, a shop.*

Sophie: *Where you can buy magazines and stuff like that.*

Sophie, 13 and Jessica, 12, Tiffield

Two of the girls in one of the larger villages, Silverstone, which has both a play area and a shop, talked at length about improvements to local facilities. Eleanor and Helen voiced a desire for more sports facilities and a wider range of youth groups and clubs. Rather than complaining about a lack of facilities, they were concerned about a lack of choice. The girls recognized that different young people have different leisure interests and that service provision in their village did not reflect these.

Eleanor: *They do have a football pitch there, but it isn't really very good. Maybe they could do that up and have a few more sports things. Like quite a few of the boys are into rugby. They might want a rugby pitch.*

Helen: *There's already a cricket pitch up there.*

Eleanor: *Yeah, they have cricket games. Maybe a club or something. A few clubs for us to go to. Not just Guides and Brownies.*

FT: *What sorts of clubs?*

Eleanor: *Just like youth clubs, where they take you on trips and stuff. Where you can just be with your friends and stuff.*

Helen: *Yes. Something to do over the holidays and weekends.*

Eleanor: *Somewhere to hang out just any time you want to.*

Eleanor and Helen, 11, Silverstone

Similar levels of dissatisfaction were voiced in Towcester, where many more recreational opportunities were available. Here girls expressed a desire for more 'indoor' leisure facilities, such as bowling alleys and ice rinks, which they occasionally visited in nearby large towns. Rather than wanting play areas or general stores, these girls sought 'commercial' facilities.

FT: *What sorts of things would you like to improve about Towcester?*

Rebecca: *Definitely a lot more things to do.*

Hazel: *Something like, I don't know, bowling or ice skating or something, instead of just walking around all the time.*

Rebecca, 14, Potcote and Hazel, 13, Towcester

*I'd like a cinema in Towcester. That would be good. I like watching films but it's a long way to go to Northampton.*

Jodie, 13, Towcester

Justine: *There used to be a cinema in Towcester years ago, my mum said.*

Joy: *That would be cool!*

Justine: *Yeah, better than going all the way to Sixfields [leisure complex in Northampton] or Milton Keynes.*

Justine and Joy, 13, Towcester

The influence of television upon the ways in which some girls wished to spend their leisure time is illustrated through a discussion between Natalie, Justine, Joy and Hope, 13 year old girls resident in Towcester. These girls expressed a strong desire to participate in the 'consumer' youth culture they witnessed in a favourite soap opera. Although their home town had a much wider range of services and facilities than the local villages, they argued that these facilities are often geared towards an adult consumer base, neglecting the desires of young people.

- Natalie: *We could do with a teenagers' café or something.*
- Justine: *Like in 'Neighbours'. Like a teenage café type place.*
- Natalie: *We need a proper café. We haven't got anywhere apart from [name of coffee shop].*
- Justine: *That's really an old grannies' place.*
- Joy: *It's really over-priced.*
- Justine: *And it's not somewhere you can just drop in and take away something. You have to go in and sit down and order it and then drink and then go.*
- FT: *The café they have in 'Neighbours', that's the sort of thing you want?*
- Natalie: *Yeah, just a drop-in sort of place.*
- Hope: *Like Harold and Madge's! Where you can just go in and order stuff and then go. And there can perhaps be tables outside or something like that. You can go and sit down and eat and then when you're ready you can just get up and go because you've already paid the bill.*

Natalie, Justine, Joy and Hope, 13, Towcester

## 7.2.2 Variations in Independent Mobility and Access to Public Transport

Hillman (1993; 1997; Hillman *et al.*, 1990) has argued that young people have an increasing need for independence of movement as they grow older. Young people need to be able to travel in order to explore their external environment and assert their identity outside the family. The paucity of public transport, particularly in the evenings, inhibits participation in both purely social and extra-mural school evening and weekend activities (Davis and Ridge, 1997; Moseley, 1979). Mobility is an indicator of lifestyles such that variations in journey patterns reflect the social roles, opportunities and constraints applicable to different groups and individuals (Cloe *et al.*, 1994b).

Differences in levels of mobility between boys and girls have been well documented. Hillman and Adams (1992) have noted that young girls have less spatial freedom than boys in terms of being able to cross roads on their own, travel independently to leisure activities, travel to school, cycle on roads, use buses and go out after dark. Girls are also more likely to be accompanied when travelling to any location (Hillman, 1997; Kyttä, 1997; Wridt, 1999).

In rural South Northants a similar picture emerges. Although corresponding proportions of boys and girls walked alone or were driven to a location where they met friends, boys were more likely to travel by bicycle (29% as opposed to 15%). Further, a higher proportion of girls than boys were accompanied when they walked to meet their friends (Table 7.1). Thus in this rural area girls experience greater constraints on their independent mobility.

Method of Transport	Girls	Boys
Walk alone	11	9
Walk accompanied	45	28
Bicycle	15	29
Bus	1	2
Car	28	30
Other	0	0

*Table 7.1 Method of transport to place where meet friends, by gender (%).  
(girls n=86; boys n=87)*

Diversity in levels of independent mobility according to age can also be seen (Table 7.2). Teenagers have more restricted levels of independent mobility, being more likely to be accompanied when walking and being more likely to travel by car. In contrast, pre-teens are more likely to walk alone or travel by bicycle. These differences reflect the greater home range of teenagers (see Chapter 6, section 6.3.3), with young people being allowed to travel further from home if accompanied. This diversity cuts across differences according to gender, with teenage girls often experiencing low levels of independent mobility.

Method of Transport	10 - 12 Years	13 - 15 Years
Walk alone	13	8
Walk accompanied	31	40
Bicycle	27	17
Bus	3	1
Car	23	34
Other	3	0

*Table 7.2 Method of transport to place where meet friends, by age (%).  
(10 - 12 years n=71; 13 - 15 years n=101)*

In discussions with the groups of girls three issues were highlighted with regard to the provision and use of public transport. First, some young people were at a locational disadvantage, with few or no buses travelling through their home village. Second, where bus services were provided, the routes taken did not always coincide with those locations which the young people wished to visit. Third, bus timetables were often geared towards adults, with very limited services run out of school hours, in the evening or at weekends. With many girls seeking to use leisure facilities outside their home village, this issue is particularly relevant with regard to young girls' experiences of growing up in the countryside.

Bus services vary between the settlements of the study area. Towcester, the market town, has a good day time bus service to and from Northampton - the location most often visited by young people in order to access a range of commercial leisure facilities - with a bus every hour on both weekdays and Saturdays from 9.00am until 6.00pm (Table 7.3). Some of the larger villages, such as Greens Norton and Silverstone, have five or six buses to and from Northampton during weekdays and on Saturdays. Smaller villages, such as Whittlebury, tend to have more limited timetables, with no more than two buses a day during the week and on Saturdays. Many of the smallest villages, for example Litchborough and Maidford, have a shopping bus service once a week, whilst others, such as Potcote, have no service at all. In all of the case study settlements evening bus services are extremely limited or non-existent. Only Towcester has a bus service on Sundays, and this runs just twice a day.

Using the bus service was seen by many girls as providing a number of advantages. This form of public transport enabled them to explore and use leisure facilities outside their home village. Many of the villages in the study area did not possess a shop, and through travelling by bus some girls could gain access to shops and other commercial settings otherwise denied to them. Several also mentioned that through using public transport they gained a level of independence. Although many had to negotiate with parents in order to gain permission to travel outside the village, the girls were to an extent able to determine at what time they took the bus and could choose their own itinerary at their journey's end. Travelling by bus was also seen to provide a degree of privacy, with girls being able to chat en route without parents being able to hear.



	Weekday Service	Evening Service (after 6pm)	Saturday Service
Abthorpe	once a week	no service	no service
Adstone	once a week	no service	no service
Blakesley	twice a week	no service	once a day
Bradden	no service	no service	no service
Duncote	3 times a day	no service	once a day
Foxley	no service	no service	no service
Greens Norton	5 times a day	no service	5 times a day
Heathencote	no service	no service	no service
Litchborough	once a week	no service	no service
Maidford	once a week	no service	no service
Potcote	no service	no service	no service
Silverstone	6 times a day	no service	6 times a day
Slapton	once a week	no service	no service
Tiffield	12 times a day *	no service	10 times a day *
Wappenham	once a week	no service	no service
Whittlebury	4 times a day	no service	4 times a day
Wood Burcote	no service	no service	no service
Woodend	no service	no service	no service
Towcester	12 times a day	twice a day	10 times a day

*Table 7.3 Frequency of bus services to Northampton.  
(Towcester is a market town; Blakesley, Greens Norton and Silverstone are large villages; all other settlements are small villages - see Table 6.2)  
\* The main Towcester to Northampton bus service stops on the main road, more than one mile from the main residential area.*

Whilst many girls felt that they gained some autonomy through independent travel, some complained that their leisure activities were curtailed because of the routes taken by the buses. One frequently mentioned issue was that of access to Sixfields, an area on the south-west side of Northampton, adjacent to South Northants, where a cinema, bowling alley and several restaurants are located. Sixfields is easily accessible by car but, although there is a regular bus service from the centre of Northampton to this area, it does not feature on bus routes from the study settlements. A number of girls stated that when using buses they had parental permission to travel to Northampton town centre only - they were not allowed to travel out to Sixfields by bus. In order to visit this location, therefore, young people were often dependent on parents providing transport, limiting their independence.

FT: *If you want to go to the cinema or anything like that...  
[interrupted]*

Sophie: *You have to get transport from your mum. The bus doesn't take  
you anywhere near it.*

Sophie, 13, Tiffield

FT: *What are the buses like from Towcester?*

Natalie: *There's quite a lot of them.*

Joy: *We could do with one from Towcester to Sixfields, like [to] the  
cinema.*

Natalie: *It would be quite handy having one there.*

Hope: *Yeah, and then we could have a direct route from Towcester...  
straight to Sixfields. So that we can actually not have to rely on  
someone's parents and when they want to drive. We could  
actually go and get the bus.*

Natalie, Joy and Hope, 13, Towcester

Some of the girls also stated that, although travelling by bus gave them a level of independence, this independence could only be accessed during daylight hours. With very few or no buses to and from Towcester and the villages in the evenings two scenarios are commonplace - young people either seek transport from parents or other family members who have access to a car, or they remain within the confines of their home settlement.

Sara: *At night you can't get a bus to the cinema [in Northampton].*

Victoria: *You can't get a bus anywhere.*

Sara and Victoria, 15, Towcester

FT: *What time do the buses stop going to Northampton from  
Towcester?*

Joy: *About five-thirty.*

Hope: *So you can just be stranded in Northampton. You have to find a  
pay phone, phone your mum, "can you pick me up?"*

FT: *So would you find it useful if there were buses later on during the  
day?*

Hope: *Yeah definitely, so you could stay, and you could stop around.*

Joy and Hope, 13, Towcester

It is interesting to note, however, that not all young girls are eager to claim some independence through using public transport. Some young people enjoy the convenience and comfort of being accompanied by a parent, especially if that means being taken by car (Hillman and Adams, 1992). One mother talked at length about her daughter's reluctance to use the bus. Mrs Ross, a middle-class professional, gave a detailed account of a recent discussion she had had with her 15 year old daughter. The mother had highlighted numerous benefits of bus travel, including the gaining of autonomy and more control over where she spent her leisure time. However, Mrs Ross's daughter remained reluctant to use the bus, preferring instead to rely upon her parents for transport.

FT: *Does she [daughter] ever use the buses here?*

Mrs Ross: *She hasn't yet. She has a friend who lives in Towcester who actually came to us last week on the bus, which was a huge step forward. I'm hoping this will be the start of her being able to explore buses... She doesn't feel confident with buses, and that's sort of my next goal with her.*

Mrs Ross, Silverstone

As well as variations in girls' access to and use of public transport, diversity is also apparent in their use of bicycles in travelling between villages. Some girls frequently used their bicycles in order to travel outside their village, visiting nearby settlements in order to make use of facilities, such as shops and playing fields, absent from their home village or to visit friends resident elsewhere.

Anna: *We always go out to different villages to get the other friends and go out into Towcester or somewhere where there's more things to do.*

Shannon: *We've both passed our cycling proficiency so sometimes we cycle.*

Anna: *We cycle to Towcester.*

Shannon: *We cycle to Towcester and places like that.*

FT: *So do most of your friends live in Greens Norton?*

Anna: *No, none at all. None of my best friends... They all live in Towcester, Silverstone and stuff like that. The problem is that my mum won't run me into Towcester and I can't exactly bike there on my own.*

Shannon: *You need someone to bike with you.*

Anna: *Or someone to run you in.*

Anna, 11 and Shannon, 10, Greens Norton

Chloe: *I ride to Farthingstone on my own.*

FT: *What sorts of things do you do there?*

Chloe: *I just play, hang around, at the park.*

Chloe, 11, Litchborough

However, this freedom to travel outside the confines of the village is not available to all. As Table 7.1 illustrates, few girls regularly travelled by bicycle. Around one quarter of the girls who participated in the in-depth discussions complained that they did not have parental permission to ride their bikes within their home village, let alone travel outside it. With traffic hazards seen to be real and justified concerns, some parents forbid their children to travel by bicycle, creating limits to their ability to access facilities and meet with friends resident elsewhere.

Eleanor: *You can't ride your bike around here at all.*

FT: *So you don't ride your bike in the village at all?*

Eleanor: *No.*

Helen: *No, there's nowhere to go.*

Eleanor: *My mum doesn't usually want me to go out riding around here because the traffic really comes too fast.*

Eleanor and Helen, 11, Silverstone

### 7.2.3 Opportunities for Socializing - Friendship Groups

Many young people growing up in rural areas have little contact with their peers outside school hours because of the demographic profiles of settlements (Fabes and Banks, 1991; Phillips, 1994). Young girls in rural South Northants described how their friendship patterns were constrained because of issues of transportation. Within rural South Northants many young people, especially those of secondary school age, travel outside their home settlement to school. It is inevitable therefore that some friendship groups may extend over large spatial areas, with 'best friends' living in different villages.

Since few girls are members of clubs or youth organizations they are further disadvantaged, as they have limited opportunities for pursuing friendships outside of the school environment. With poor bus services between many settlements, particularly during the evenings and weekends, it is unsurprising that concerns about being able to meet with friends were common. The remarks made by Megan, Chloe, Sophie and Jessica are typical of many of the girls who participated in the in-depth discussions.

*Most of my friends live in Towcester or in another village, so you need somebody to drive you there.*

Megan, 15, Silverstone

*When I want to see my friends I have to ask my mum to take me.... There aren't any buses, only one on Saturdays and Wednesdays, and that goes to Northampton not the villages.*

Chloe, 11, Litchborough

FT: *Why is it that you don't see your friends out of school?*

Sophie: *Because it's hard to get transport.*

FT: *So your friends live in other villages?*

Sophie: *Yes.*

FT: *What is the bus service like from Tiffield to other villages?*

Jessica: *We don't have one!*

Sophie, 13, and Jessica, 12, Tiffield

Two solutions to this problem were commonly used. Around one quarter of the girls spent their free time socializing with young people in their home village. Often these friendships crossed school age groups, and in some cases involved young people from different educational establishments (for example, girls who attended the secondary school in the nearby market town socialized with children from the village primary school in the evenings and weekends). For some girls these village friendships did not extend outside the village, with little contact between these young people when they are at school.

*Well I normally can only see Shannon and her sister [after school], and only people that live in the village, because the rest of my friends all live in Towcester.*

Anna, 11, Greens Norton

FT: *Do you hang out together at school?*

Jessica: *Well, she's got her own friends and I've got mine. And we don't...(interrupted)*

Sophie: *We don't see each other there.*

FT: *Do you spend time with the friends you have at school, at weekends or in the evenings?*

Jessica: *No.*

Jessica, 12, and Sophie, 13, Tiffield

Not all young girls faced such constraints on their friendships. For example, Hazel, Katie and Chelsea had 'best friends' within their home settlement and so could socialize with friends more readily. These three girls, however, were all resident in the market town, a location where far greater numbers of young people live. The demographics of the town mean that the girls have a greater number of peers from which to choose their friends. They are therefore less constrained in their friendship choices, although, as one mother pointed out, the issue of accessibility still remains, with many girls unable to socialize with friends resident in nearby villages.

*I usually go out in the evening, like over one of my mate's house. She lives over the road.*

Hazel, 13, Towcester

Katie: *We see each other most days because we live really close.*

FT: *So how long do you spend around your friends' houses?*

Katie: *Lots of the time it's an hour.*

Chelsea: *Yeah. We normally copy each other's homework!*

Katie and Chelsea, 10, Towcester

*They've made more friends from villages [since they started secondary school], but I think her close friends are the friends that live within Towcester because it's easier.*

Mrs Clarke, Towcester

The second solution to overcome the problems of access to friends located outside the home village, one which was used by more than three-quarters of the girls, was to seek transport from parents. Young people's ability to meet with friends was dependent on the availability of private transport and the willingness of parents to provide transport (Little and Austin, 1996). With increasing fears about safety, parents are spending a steadily rising amount of time escorting and 'minding' their children (Hillman, 1997). However, not all parents were able to provide transport (see Chapter 6, Table 6.1).

In order to meet with friends outside school hours a series of negotiations between parents and their daughters were required. Where transport was available, the girls had to reach a compromise between their wishes to socialize with friends and the lack of autonomy they experienced through being reliant upon parents for transport. Not only did the girls have to obtain permission to go where they chose, but they also had to find a time convenient for a parent to take them to and collect them from the 'approved' destination (Hillman, 1997). In many cases parents were only able or prepared to provide transport on certain days or times, further limiting young girls' independence.

*I go into Towcester on Fridays, so I can see my friends then... And apart from that it's just weekends that my mum can give me a lift in.*

Rebecca, 14, Potcote

*When you live in Silverstone and most of your friends live in Towcester, it's hard to go out every night and go and see them. It's mainly weekends I do things.*

Louise, 15, Silverstone

FT: *Are there any buses to Silverstone in the evenings? [Victoria regularly hangs out with a gang in Silverstone]*

Victoria: *No, there's not. Not from Towcester. The last bus is about half past seven. Sometimes I get the bus through to Silverstone, on weekends or on holidays, and then they'll pick me up later. But that's about it. And on some Fridays and Saturdays I get a taxi back a bit later because mum and dad go out at weekends. But I can't afford a taxi now so I don't really do that much.*

Victoria, 15, Towcester

*Now they've moved up from primary school, where all their friends lived in the village, their friends now are dotted about in other villages... They haven't got evening access to them, unless we make a special point of transporting them there.*

Mrs Hughes, Whittlebury

### **7.3 Family Background and Parenting Strategies**

The influence of individual structures of family life upon girls' lifestyles are examined through three themes. First, variations in levels of mobility are explored, with emphasis placed upon differences in access to a private car. Second, diversity in young people's home ranges and spatial freedom is highlighted. Third, building upon Baumrind's (1971) ideas of authoritarian and permissive parenting styles, some of the boundaries set on young people's use of outdoor spaces are unravelled to examine how these impact upon girls' use of specific spaces.

### 7.3.1 Variations in Access to a Private Car

Moseley (1979, p. 37) has argued that the “lack of a car is probably the biggest single factor in any identification of those rural people who are disadvantaged in access terms”. Levels of car ownership are high in South Northants (see Chapter 6, Figure 6.1), yet these statistics mask the experiences of those people who are too young to drive. Age is a significant factor in the extent to which people are deprived in terms of independent mobility, and young people are particularly affected (McLaughlin, 1986). Whilst high levels of independent mobility may be experienced by the majority of adults, young people are a disadvantaged group and one particularly vulnerable to the effects of the rationalization and centralization of many services in this rural area (Nutley and Thomas, 1995; Storey and Brannen, 2000).

For the majority of girls, access to both recreation facilities and friends was achieved through having parents who were readily able and willing to provide transport. Nevertheless, variations in mobility occur within this group. Those girls in two car families were often more likely to receive the benefits. Girls who belonged to one car families or whose parents worked long hours more often had to reach a compromise between their wishes and the mobility needs of their parents (Pavis *et al.*, 2000). In their survey of young people’s transport needs, Storey and Brannen (2000) found that many young people, both girls and boys, saw themselves as having the lowest priority compared to other household members with regard to the use of the family car(s) for their needs. This was echoed in this study, with around one third of the girls stating that the transport needs of other family members had a higher priority.

*We normally get our parents to take us most places.*

Joy, 13, Towcester

*[Talking about a new fast food ‘drive through’ restaurant on the outskirts of Towcester] They [adults involved in planning the location of the restaurant] don’t think of young children. They just think of “oh yeah, they can get their mums and dads to drive them there”, and they can’t. Most people only have one car and most people go to work. And with that one car gone then you’d need to walk there and risk your life, probably, going across the A43 to get a burger.*

Hope, 13, Towcester

*Every time I go out I have to ask my mum to give me a lift... There are only a few buses from Silverstone so you’re quite reliant on your parents all the time which is a bit annoying, because like tonight if I wanted to go out and my parents were going out then I wouldn’t be able to go out.*

Claire, 15, Silverstone



None of the mothers interviewed complained about having to provide transport in order for their children to gain access to recreational facilities and to meet friends. In some cases a network of parents became established, enabling several adults to keep track of who their children were socializing with, whilst the strong links between particular adults made it easier for young people to meet with those friends more regularly.

*I think the disadvantages of living in either a small town like Towcester or a village are very similar in as much as you have to take them to do anything they want to do as they become teenagers. But I don't mind that at all... There's a network of parents who are spending all their time shunting their kids from one place to another. And I think that's part of, you accept that. And I don't dislike doing that anyway. I think that's quite nice.*

Mrs Lucas, Silverstone

*You always get lifts between friends. Like one parent will take and another parent will bring back. It's quite organized and so on. And my parents have taken quite a lot so another parent will come forward and say "well I'll take this week".*

Sara, 15, Towcester

Many parents welcomed the opportunity to provide transport. In this way parents were able to regulate their children's behaviour, being able to influence where they went, who they went with, and at what time they were to return. Victoria, aged 15, described in detail how she had persuaded her parents to drive her to and from a nearby village on four or five days of every week (a total of twelve miles each day) so that she could spend time with a group of friends resident there. Victoria explained that her parents had become concerned about a gang she had been spending time with in her home town. Her parents had negotiated a compromise through which they would provide transport so that Victoria could spend much of her leisure time with friends as long as she ceased contact with the gang in her home town.

*With my parents, they'd rather me be in Silverstone with people that they can trust, than me be in Towcester. Because there's a lot more, there's stranger people in Towcester. So that's why they take me over there, because they'd rather me be there than anywhere else.*

Victoria, 15, Towcester

*[Son] has got a lot of friends in villages actually. So we drive him there... the bus services here are appalling. I mean, if you've got a friend who's three miles away in Northampton you can just get on a bus and get to them, but you can't here. But on the other hand, I feel that's OK... whilst I'm driving them places I know where they are. So I would prefer to live in Towcester and do that than live in Northampton and have them have a free rein really.*

Mrs Blackwell, Towcester

There were indications that some parents were more eager to regulate their daughter's behaviour than that of their sons. Sara and Claire, two of the oldest participants, discussed differences between their spatial freedom and that of their brothers. The girls felt that their parents 'policed' their behaviour much more rigorously than that of their brothers. The discrepancies in the boundaries set were understood by the girls to be based solely on gender.

- Sara: *It's so different with my brother.*
- Claire: *Yeah, for my brothers it's totally different as well.*
- FT: *What is it that's different for your brother?*
- Sara: *Well, he's only a year older than me, but it's just different for him.*
- Victoria: *It's different for boys, because "boys will be boys" sort of thing. It's that more can happen to a girl, and boys can look after themselves a lot more than girls.*
- Sara: *Yes.*
- Victoria: *Well, I'm stereotyping, but it often is the case.*
- Sara: *My brother has more leeway. He goes out to the pub, and sometimes he goes clubbing. Some of his mates can drive, and he comes back about two or three in the morning. And he can go out by himself to meet people.*
- Claire: *Yeah, my brother does that as well.*
- Sara: *I think it's a bit unfair of my parents.*

Sara and Victoria, 15, Towcester and Claire, 15, Silverstone

### 7.3.2 Home Ranges and Spatial Freedom

The term 'home range' refers to the distance children travel away from their home in the course of their outdoor play and leisure pursuits (Matthews, 1992). Donaldson (1970) proposed that home range expands from a relatively small and continuous area known by young children to an increasingly diffuse and discontinuous set of locations covering large areas by adults. Analysis of the questionnaire survey showed that 13-15 year olds generally have a greater home range than 10-12 year olds. However, great diversity exists within and between these age groups, with young girls experiencing a range of restrictions on their use of outdoor spaces because of the limitations placed upon them by parents.

This diversity is illustrated by the differences in the home ranges of two girls, Justine and Hope. These girls are of the same age and live in the same settlement. Although Justine is free to roam around Towcester, Hope has to remain within a smaller area close to her home. Similarly, although Chloe is allowed to go anywhere in her home village, considerable restrictions are imposed on the spatial ranges of Helen and Eleanor.

*I'm allowed to go anywhere [in Towcester].*

Justine, 13, Towcester

*I go to the Leisure Centre on my own... that's just popping over the road... And occasionally I'll go... down to Watling Street [to the town centre] and go to the rec., but I'd have to be with my sister. And I can't go to the racecourse. I can't go past the pub... and I can't go past the Police Station. And I can't go up to [supermarket at edge of town]. I can't go wandering off that far.*

Hope, 13, Towcester

FT: *Are you generally allowed to go anywhere in the village?*

Chloe: *Yeah. Apart from not past the end of the houses on Northampton Road. There's no pavement there.*

Chloe, 11, Litchborough

Helen: *I'm not allowed to go too far from home. I'm not allowed past the flats or further than the recreation ground.*

Eleanor: *I'm not allowed down the road by myself, like walking to the rec. But I'm usually allowed through the fields.*

Helen and Eleanor, 11, Silverstone

Around two-thirds of the mothers described how the limits set on their daughter's spatial range were subject to a continual process of negotiation and review, and were linked to transitions in their children's life course. For many the age of 10 or 11 years was a turning point, with parents eager to prepare their children for their forthcoming move to a large secondary school. Increasing the home range was seen to be particularly important by mothers whose children would have to travel outside their home settlement to reach their new school. Indeed, Mrs Taylor stated she felt a need to prepare her daughter for 'a whole new life' by allowing her greater spatial freedom within the village.

*It was only when she got into Year 6 at Whittlebury School that we decided that she should be allowed to venture out on the road up to, say, [friend's] house.*

Mrs Taylor, Whittlebury

*Now she's eleven she's allowed a little bit more freedom. If you'd have been here this time last year then I would have given you a huge list. I mean, now we allow her to cross the Brackley Road - provided she crosses at the point where you can go half-way and then you can go the other half.*

Mrs Blackwell, Towcester

*As [11 year old daughter] gets older she says "can I go there?" or "can I go there?", so you have to start letting the lead out a bit and say "yes, you can go there if you've got a friend with you and if you come straight back". You know, you've got to give them a bit of freedom.*

Mrs Hughes, Whittlebury

Girls' home ranges may also vary temporally. Hope, for example, explained that she was only allowed to meet friends at a supermarket in the town centre when her mother was at home. If her mother was out of the home town, either at work or shopping, Hope had to remain within the house and its immediate environs. Sophie experienced a fairly free home range during daylight hours, but was kept closer to home in the evenings. Hence young people's home ranges may vary according to the time of day.

*If I'm going down to [supermarket in town centre] occasionally I have to ask. It depends on what my family is doing. Say if my mum's going shopping, she'll give me a lift then she'll pick me up when she's finished and that'll be fine. But if she's going somewhere else [outside the town] she probably won't let me go there.*

Hope, 13, Towcester

*If I play out at night I'm only allowed in my street. I can't go down to the playing field or anything.*

Sophie, 13, Tifffield

The extent to which young girls' use of space is constrained by the limitations imposed upon them by parents varies between individuals. Two-thirds of the girls stated that the boundaries to their home range were reasonable and fair. Their home ranges were often the result of negotiation and compromise with their parents, and they commented that they had no desire to visit those places to which they were denied permission. It may be that their contentment was genuine - that the girls had no wish to spend time in those spaces deemed 'out-of-bounds' - or that their desire to avoid confrontation with their parents was such that they chose to stay within the boundaries set. The girls' statements were echoed by around half of the mothers, who said that their children did not act in ways which would raise concern and possibly result in changes to the boundaries set.

Approximately one third of the girls actively contested the boundaries set on their spatial freedom. Rather than being constrained by the restrictions on their use of local space, these girls regularly transgressed these boundaries, visiting places that were ‘out-of-bounds’. Their ‘official’ home range varied considerably from their ‘actual’ home range. In many cases where disputes had arisen, the girls stated that they were excluded from any decision making, with parents alone choosing the boundaries to their children’s spatial range.

*[13 year old daughter], usually the furthest she'd go is into town or around to her friend's house. I've never limited her because she's never asked for anything further.... I don't mind, you know, [daughter] wandering aimlessly with friends, but she wouldn't want to on her own and I wouldn't want her to either.*

Mrs Bailey, Towcester

FT: *Is there anywhere [in Towcester] that you're not allowed to go?*

Hazel: *I can't go to [fast food restaurant]. But we still go there anyway! There's nothing else that I'm not really allowed to go. My mum would kill me if she knew I went over there. That road is too dangerous.*

Hazel, 13, Towcester

### **7.3.3 Authoritarian vs. Permissive Parenting Strategies**

In Baumrind's (1971) typology of parenting styles, authoritative parenting is understood to combine clearly defined rules and spatial limits with reasoned and firm control, whilst permissive parenting is seen to offer a high level of tolerance and considerable leniency with regard to place limits. Those young people who experience the effects of authoritarian parenting are drawn towards the home. In contrast, those who experience the permissive parenting style are left to define their own spatial margins.

Baumrind's typology can be used as a base from which the outdoor lifestyles of young girls can be explored. The notions of authoritarian and permissive parenting styles can be applied to examine the extent to which parents dictate young people's use of space by different home ranges according to whether their children are accompanied. The degree to which parents insist upon knowing exactly where their children are can also be explored using this typology.

A feature common to the lifestyles of many of the younger girls was that they were nearly always accompanied when outdoors. Boys were less often accompanied (see, for example, Table 7.1). Subject to the authoritarian parenting style, these girls were always accompanied by family members or friends when they left the confines of the home. Their home range was limited and they spent very little time away from their parents' gaze. Being with friends meant an extended home range for many young girls (see Chapter 6, Tables 6.22-6.25), as the remarks by Angelica, Eleanor, Helen and Anna make clear. The presence of an older person, often a sibling, was instrumental in extending the home ranges of these younger girls.

*I'm allowed to go anywhere in Towcester if I'm with someone responsible...  
someone older than me.*

Angelica, 10, Towcester

Eleanor: *When I'm with my big sister or my cousins or something, we are  
allowed the road way to the rec.*

Helen: *If I've got some friends with me I'm allowed to go a bit further.*

Helen and Eleanor, 11, Silverstone

*I'm not allowed to go into Northampton to go shopping on my own yet. I'm  
allowed to go with like a bunch of friends and someone who's a bit older than  
me, like thirteen.*

Anna, 11, Greens Norton

In a number of cases girls' spatial ranges within their home village were further extended when they were accompanied by an adult. As the following statements by middle-class mothers show, this was not confined to the youngest girls, with even the oldest teenagers reliant upon parents in order to move around some places in their home village. These young people had to decide whether the benefits of travelling further afield were worth the disadvantages in terms of autonomy and privacy of being accompanied by adults.

*I don't have the younger ones [son aged 8, daughter aged 10] go to the  
recreation ground on their own, only if I'm with them... Because of the older  
children that are there. And the fact that there's been drugs and things down  
there. And they tend to hang around in gangs down there.*

Mrs Clarke, Towcester

*I guess being situated on the main road has to be my main concern. I mean,  
they're 15 now, they'll be 16 soon, and I know they do know how to cross the  
road because they come home from school on their own. But in the morning  
when they're going to catch the bus they still don't go on their own. We still  
take them to get them across because it's impossible to get across that road.*

Mrs Ross, Silverstone

Restrictions on the use of outdoor spaces extended to some of the oldest teenagers. As the conversation between Claire, Sara and Victoria (aged 15 years) demonstrates, great diversity exists within age groups with regard to the spatial freedom experienced. Claire's use of outdoor spaces was constrained by her parents' insistence that she was always accompanied. The boundaries set on her spatial freedom reflected the authoritarian parenting style. In contrast, Victoria was free to roam around her home town and nearby villages on her own, with the more fluid spatial boundaries a result of the permissive parenting strategy. The restrictions on Sara's use of outdoor space fell between these extremes of restriction and autonomy. Sara was able to spend some time outdoors on her own, although she was only allowed to do so if travelling by bicycle.

Claire: *I'm not allowed anywhere by myself, I have to be with somebody.*

Sara: *I can be by myself on my bike. I'm fine as long as I'm on my bike, that's why I've got it. But I'm not allowed to walk anywhere. And as soon as I've got to that person's house or wherever, then I have to be with somebody.*

FT: *So when you're outside you are usually with somebody?*

Sara: *Yes, definitely.*

Victoria: *I can go anywhere by myself. It's not like they [my parents] don't care or anything, it's just that I think they trust me. I know I'm only fifteen but I can relatively look after myself. But I'm always with someone... so they don't have to say "don't go there" because I'm not really ever by myself.*

Claire, 15, Silverstone, Sara and Victoria, 15, Towcester

A restriction placed upon many of the girls' outdoor behaviour was that their parents should at all times know exactly where in the town or village their children were. The girls offered three explanations for this: that their parents wanted them to be safe; that their parents did not want them 'hanging around' on the street; and that they could 'check up' on their behaviour. These explanations were also drawn upon by some middle-class mothers in order to justify the limits set on their children's use of outdoor spaces. This restriction was imposed on more than three-quarters of the girls, and was reported as commonly by teenagers as pre-teens.

*My mum wants to know if I'm going to a definite place. Like, am I going to the park, am I going to a friend's house?... She doesn't want me just hanging around.*

Shannon, 10, Greens Norton

Victoria: *[If I say that I'm going to be staying at a friend's house] my mum nearly always checks up with the parents to see if I'm actually staying there.*

Sara: *Yeah. You always have to tell them who you're with, who's going to be there, who you're coming home with. All the details.*

Victoria and Sara, 15, Towcester

*I just don't let them hang around really. I don't like them hanging around the streets. So unless I know where they're going, they're just not allowed out.*

Mrs Brown, Towcester

A number of mothers spoke in detail about the restrictions they placed upon their children's behaviour. A variety of strategies was adopted by some mothers in order to prevent their children participating in what they saw as anti-social behaviour or socializing with certain groups of teenagers. Mrs Ross encouraged her children to invite friends to the family home, enabling her to observe her children's behaviour and determine with whom they spent their leisure time. Anna's mother required her to 'check in' every two hours, ensuring that her daughter was never too far from home. Mrs Taylor refused her daughter permission to spend time with a group of teenagers hanging out at the local play area. Mrs Blackwell insisted on driving her children to friends' houses or leisure facilities, and ensured that they did not hang out in spaces where groups of young people were regarded by adults to be a problem. The narratives of these mothers hinted that their children experienced limited levels of autonomy and spatial freedom.

*They [15 year old daughter and son] tend to spend a lot of time up here. This tends to be the place that attracts the friends, which is something that I feel very lucky about... This tend to be their base. So I guess I'm able to keep track of them without actually deliberately doing so.*

Mrs Ross, Silverstone

*I normally have to be back in really early, because my mum knows what I'm like - if I forget the time I'm out until whoever knows. I have to check in with my mum every two hours.*

Anna, 11, Greens Norton

*[11 year old daughter] has started asking to go to the park, purely because there's people that she knows from [secondary school] who go there. And we don't particularly like the park because there are older children there. They sit there and do nothing, or do things that they shouldn't be doing, basically. They smoke and drink and vandalize... They don't go to play really, and it's abused. So I don't like her going, even though she thinks she should because it's the park.*

Mrs Taylor, Whittlebury



*[Son] - he's sixteen but he's not allowed to go out and walk the streets, and if he wants to go anywhere we take him in the car. He can go anywhere he likes, but we take him and then we collect him. When he was about fourteen he really hated that. And we had to be really firm about that, you know, "that's how it is in this household". And we explained to him the reasons behind that. So he's not allowed to just walk the streets. He'll walk up to a friend's, but we'll collect... So we know where he is. Well, you think you know where they are!... She [10 year old daughter] wouldn't be allowed to go around where the Leisure Centre is if she wasn't swimming, just to hang around there. She can go there to swim and come home.*

Mrs Blackwell, Towcester

Around one quarter of the girls sought methods to limit the impact of restrictions upon their leisure time and gain some independence. For example, some took advantage of more lenient restrictions imposed upon friends. By staying overnight at a friend's house they were able to visit different locations or stay out until later in the evening through conforming to the limitations set by another household. Others neglected to tell their parents the full itinerary of their plans or lied about who they would be with.

*Mum doesn't really know what time I stay out to when I'm round other people's houses, or where I go in Towcester.*

Rebecca, 14, Potcote

*I'll say to my Mum that I'm going to Lisa's house and then we're going to Kim's. I don't tell her that we'll walk around town for a bit first.*

Hazel, 13, Towcester

## **7.4 Individual Differences**

The ways in which young people make sense of and respond to their particular social and environmental context vary according to their own interests, capacities and inclinations (Percy-Smith, 1999b). Great diversity exists in terms of the ways in which individuals choose to spend their leisure time, their favourite recreational spaces and levels of satisfaction with their home settlements and the facilities each possesses. Variations in leisure activities may be influenced by life course circumstances. A recurring theme that emerged in the group discussions with girls was that of the ways in which friendships are played out over space. Two issues were frequently mentioned: places where they can find solitude and places where they can socialize with friends. Differences in the places young people chose may reflect lifestyle choices.

### 7.4.1 Leisure Preferences and Multiple Transitions to Adulthood

The concept of the life course is useful in understanding transitions to adulthood and patterns of leisure preferences. Although this concept has been developed in relation to migration, it can be applied to this study to help understand how patterns in young people's leisure choices change with transitions in the age groups studied. The concept of the life course places emphasis on the individual, and explores that individual's 'pilgrimage' in the wider contexts of the social, geographical, historical and political environments within which they live (Boyle *et al.*, 1998). This perspective emphasizes *transitions* rather than stages in the leisure preferences of young people.

Leisure preferences may change as young people grow up. What is an important space or leisure activity for a 10 year old girl may differ considerably to that of a 15 year old. A number of the girls recalled their favourite places or pastimes of their earlier years. Some described these as 'a phase they went through', suggesting that participation in and subsequent rejection of a particular activity formed a rite of passage. For these girls certain facilities or places went 'out of fashion'. This is particularly apparent with regard to the use of 'rural' spaces, with both girls and mothers reflecting that the use of such spaces is not appropriate for older girls.

Jessica: *There's a chalk quarry, and you can chip chalk out. It's really good. But I nearly fell down.*

FT: *Do you go there a lot?*

Jessica: *Nobody goes there no more. Nobody goes anywhere now. We're getting older.*

Sophie: *You have to use your imagination to do everything now. Some people used to play in the back field that's behind the houses here. No one goes there anymore. Tiffield is a good village [for primary school children] because they can play... lots of games, like with all their toys. They can use their imagination more than we can do.*

Jessica, 12 and Sophie, 13, Tiffield

*If you want to do mountain bike riding, if you want to do walking, if you want to study nature, which they did, then Potcote is great... But I don't know if that sort of thing, it doesn't suit teenagers of a certain age. You can't run away with the squirrels to the woods all the time.*

Mrs Jackson, Potcote

Some variations in girls' use of commercial leisure spaces according to age were also apparent. The use of one particular facility appears to be strongly linked to the position of girls in their life course. Many of the younger participants talked about 'Wave Rave', an event held at the local leisure centre on Friday nights. 'Wave Rave' combines use of the wave machine at the swimming pool with disco lights and loud music. The event was very popular with ten and eleven year olds. Girls a year or two older, however, often stated that they considered it to be fun when they attended some months earlier but that it was now 'boring', indicating that the popularity of some leisure facilities reflects life course changes. It also may be that activities go in and out of fashion, or that peer group pressures dictate whether an activity is considered 'fun' or 'cool'.

Anna: *I normally go on a Friday to Wave Rave.*

Shannon: *That's brilliant. There must be about twenty, twenty-five people from just Greens Norton and Bradden that go.*

Anna, 11 and Shannon, 10, Greens Norton

Sophie: *Lots of people, a couple of years below us, they used to go every Friday night to the swimming pool.*

Jessica: *That was good.*

Sophie: *They have Wave Rave. But no one goes anymore.*

Jessica: *No, it's just gone really boring.*

Sophie 13, and Jessica 12, Tiffield

FT: *So you say that you don't go to the Leisure Centre now?*

Rebecca: *No. It's like one of those phases sort of things, it's one of those sort of fads. Now it's just hanging around or we go around each other's houses.*

Rebecca, 14, Potcote

The influence of life course transitions on levels of satisfaction with the facilities provided in the home settlement can also be seen. The opinion most frequently expressed was that as they became older these young girls would become increasingly dissatisfied with the location and would need to look outside the village for leisure opportunities. The questionnaire survey highlighted that a greater number of younger children felt satisfied with their home village and wished to remain living in this location (see Chapter 6, section 6.3.1). In contrast, greater numbers of older teenagers expressed a wish to move to a larger settlement. These preferences may be linked to these transitions in the life course, with the views of the younger children altering as they grow older.

*I think that when you're like an older teenager you'd want to live somewhere else 'cos there's nothing to do, unless you had a car or something to go out. But you'd probably get really bored.*

Eleanor, 11, Silverstone

Jessica: *When they get older, the children then find that it's boring.*

Sophie: *I think when they're like ten. When they've finished Brownies and they're getting to the end of [primary] school and everything. I think that's probably it. I think that's probably when it was for me. I got a bit bored. There's no Guides or anything to go on to. No youth club anymore.*

Jessica, 12, and Sophie, 13, Tiffield

#### **7.4.2 Lifestyle Choices and Places to be Alone**

Data from the questionnaire survey indicated that younger children spend more time in 'rural' spaces (fields, woodland and other 'natural environment' spaces) than older teenagers (see Chapter 6, Figure 6.15), and this argument is to an extent supported by the statements above about changes in place use according to age. However, there is diversity within young people's use of 'rural' spaces, with girls of all ages stating that they choose to visit 'rural' places when they want solitude. Matthews *et al.* (1998a) also noted that young people frequently value natural spaces as places of solitude. It appears that these girls - around one third of the sample - seek privacy and peace in such environments, rather than viewing these spaces as sources of opportunities and materials for play.

*If I'm really angry with my brother or sister, I just go out to the playing field on my own. Just sit on the swings. Or I go up the track and there's this sort of swamp, and I sit on one of the trees there.*

Sophie, 13, Tiffield



*This is Brickle. This is my favourite place because it's isolated from the cars and it's quiet and peaceful. I come here to be alone when I'm feeling down, and it cheers me up.*

*Helen, 11, Silverstone*

Plate 7.1      *The Brickle pocket park, Silverstone.*



*I walk down to Bucknell Wood when I want to be alone.*

*Megan, 15, Silverstone*

Plate 7.2      *Bucknell Wood, Silverstone.*



*I like here because its peaceful, and somewhere you can be alone.*

*Nicola, 11, Whittlebury*

Plate 7.3      *The big pond, Whittlebury*

The home environment was valued by others as a place for solitude. Several of the youngest girls stated that they liked being alone in their own garden. With many being unable to leave the confines of the home unless accompanied, this environment provided a space where a measure of privacy could be gained and where children could spend time by themselves. Having parents and other family members in close proximity may also have added a feeling of security and safety that was valued by some.



*This is my swing where I like to  
be alone.*

*Katie, 10, Towcester*

**Plate 7.4**      *The swing in Katie's back garden, Towcester.*



*I like to be here because [it is]  
the only place I can think.*

*Chloe, 11, Litchborough*

**Plate 7.5**      *The rabbit hutch in Chloe's back garden, Litchborough.*

### **7.4.3    Lifestyle Choices and Places to be with Friends**

Young people meet with their friends in a variety of settings. Although many girls meet their friends in 'outdoor' settings, others prefer to meet in 'indoor' environments (see Chapter 6, section 6.4.2). Different reasons were given by the girls as to why they liked meeting their friends in specific places. Some choices may be positive, with young girls able to choose from a wide variety of settings and facilities. Others may take into account the constraints placed by locational factors and parenting strategies. For some girls the presence of others was a determining factor with regard to their preferences for social spaces.



## *Outdoor Spaces*

For those girls who spent much time socializing with friends out of doors, the reasons for choosing these spaces ranged from gaining a level of privacy that was unavailable within the home, to being able to meet with a large number of friends who would regularly pass that location.

*This is one of my favourite places because I have a friend that lives in [a nearby street] and we always come here and talk here. And it's usually quite quiet. Only people with dogs come and walk their dogs here, so there's not really very many people around.*

Eleanor, 11, Silverstone

*People come here and just stand and sit on the wall and things like that. And it's just another place that everyone knows so you can just come and see your friends... And a lot of people come here after school as well, 'cos it's just a place where you know you're going to find your friends walking past here.*

Rebecca, 14, Potcote [talking about Towcester]

The most common facility provided for young people in the case study settlements was a play area. These ranged in style and size, ranging from a small plot of land in the middle of a housing estate to a series of complex pieces of play equipment located next to a large sports field. Many girls reported meeting friends in these spaces on a regular basis. However, these spaces hold different meanings for different individuals. Some girls made a positive choice to socialize with friends in these settings, others chose not to meet friends in such spaces.

At first glance it is difficult to see why some young people value play areas and recreation grounds yet others decline to visit these sites. Two drawings completed by the younger participants of the questionnaire survey (Figures 7.2 and 7.3) are similar - both show a playground and detail both the play equipment present and the relative spatial locations of this - yet the drawings represent very different attitudes towards these places. The picture shown in Figure 7.2 was drawn under the heading 'A place I dislike'; the picture shown in Figure 7.3 shows 'My favourite place'. The details given in these pictures make it unclear as to why such similar spaces should be viewed in these different ways.

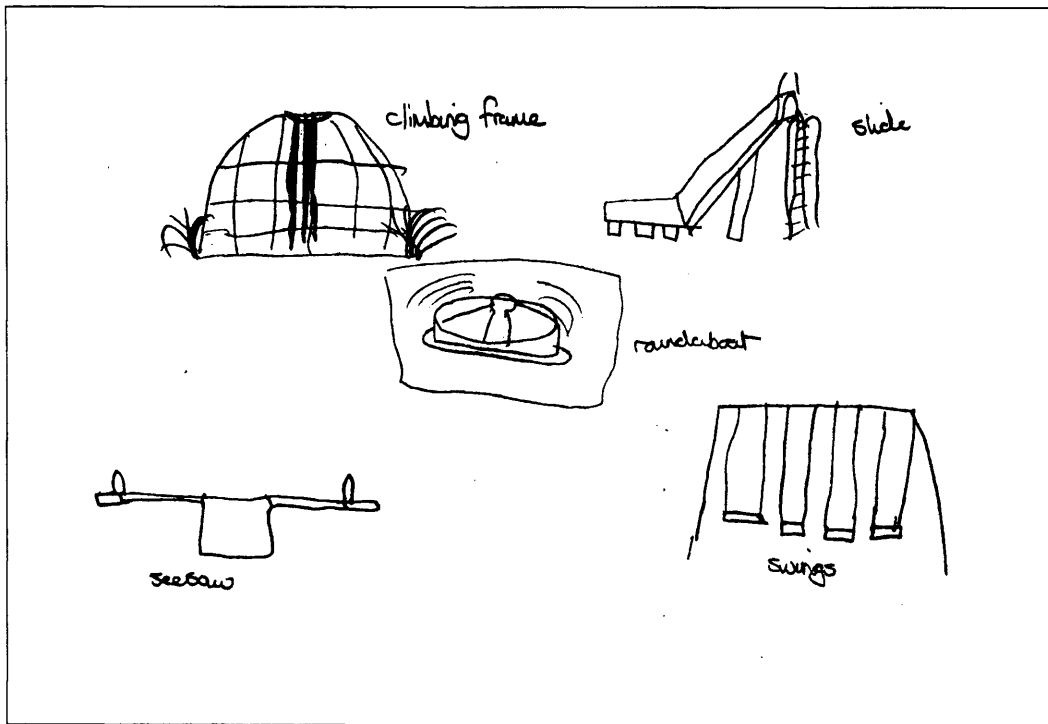


Figure 7.2 The playground. Drawing by 10 year old girl, Greens Norton.

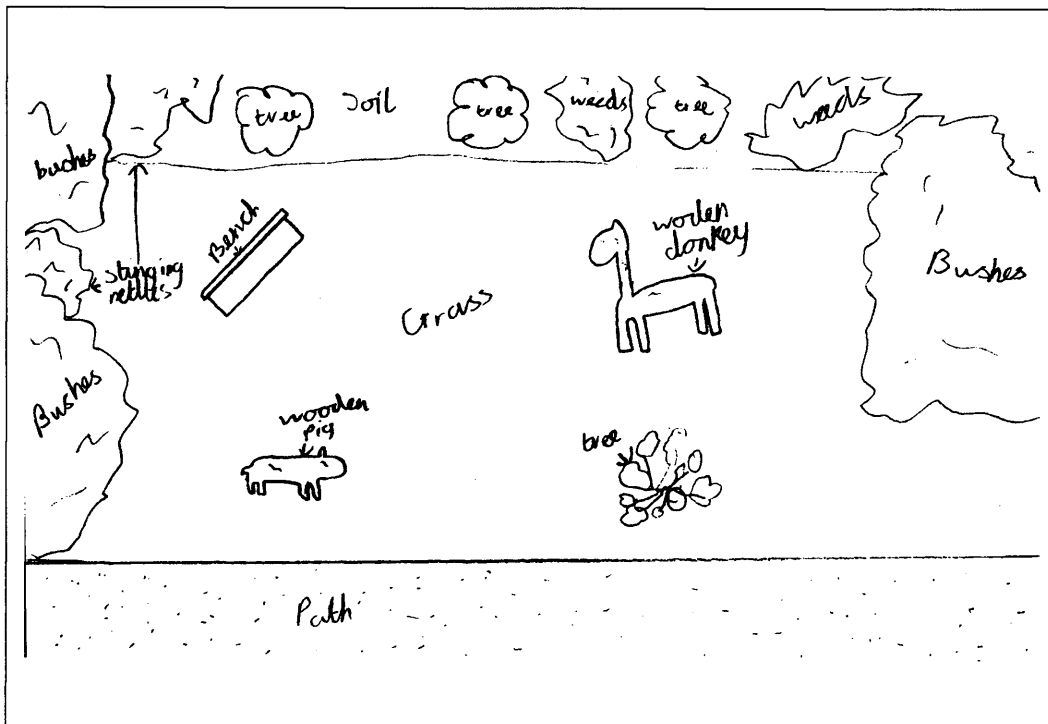


Figure 7.3 The playground. Drawing by 11 year old girl, Towcester.



It is not just in the sample of drawings, however, that these opposing views towards playgrounds are illustrated. Some of the photographs taken by the girls, and the comments that they linked to these in their photo posters, also demonstrate diversity in the location preferences of young people. The girls' written comments, together with statements drawn from the group interviews, can be used to unravel some of the reasons behind the different values young people hold towards playgrounds.

In many of the photographs of those play areas which are described in a positive manner girls are shown to be active users of these spaces, often pictured using the play equipment. These photographs show the girls and their friends as the sole users of these spaces. In contrast, in many of the photographs linked to negative statements about play areas young people are not pictured. The comments made by the girls are revealing. For these young people play areas are not spaces for fun and recreation but sites of conflict, with the presence of gangs discouraging these girls from favouring these places. For those girls able to claim autonomous social space in play areas these locations provide a valued environment in which to meet friends. The spaces may not be so valued by those unable to gain autonomous space due to the presence of other (dominant) groups.



*Fun place.*

*Chelsea, 10, Towcester*

*Plate 7.6 The playground in the 'Trees' housing estate, Towcester.*



*I like the park because the swings and roundabout are really fun. So is the seesaw.*

*Shannon, 11, Greens Norton*

*Plate 7.7 The playground, Greens Norton.*



*Dangerous place drugys (sic)  
hang out here.*

*Justine, 13, Towcester*

Plate 7.8 *The recreation ground, Towcester.*

The 'wooden park' was mentioned by many of the girls resident in Towcester. This play area is located close to a large residential area and so can be reached easily by a large number of young people. Opinions about this place ranged from it being a favourite place to meet friends to being an area to avoid. As with the comments made above with regard to play areas, this diversity can be linked to the different groups of young people accessing the site. Whilst older teenagers use the wooden park as a meeting place, and relish the opportunity to use the play equipment in an area which is partly screened on all sides by vegetation, preventing adults and other young people from witnessing such behaviour, younger children often feel disinclined to use the space because they are fearful of the presence of these older teenagers. Thus, what is a sought-after social space for some girls may be a disliked space for others.



*I like this place here because  
it's a nice place to sit. It's a  
nice place to come and sit with  
your friends. And it's kind of  
nice if you want to play on the  
little things [play equipment]!*

*Alisha, 15, Towcester*



Plate 7.9 *The 'wooden park', Towcester.*

Hope: *Some older teenagers hang around the wooden park and they say things to you.... And they stand outside the shops and you think "I'm not going past them", or if you do they shout rude comments.*

Natalie: *... And they smoke and all that, and think they are really cool. And they really can kind of be horrible to you.*

Hope and Natalie, 13, Towcester



One group of younger girls resident in Towcester talked at length during the video tour about the wooden park. For this group it was not the presence of older teenagers that made them view the location as an unattractive place, rather it was vandalism to the wooden park which influenced their place use. The girls stated that some pieces of play equipment were broken and others covered with graffiti, and it was this physical degradation of the site they disliked. These girls did not regularly meet with friends at the wooden park because the damage to play equipment meant that one of their main criteria for meeting friends – to socialize through using play equipment – was not met.



Plate 7.10 The rope bridge at the 'wooden park', Towcester.

Angelica: *This is just basically a wooden park. Everyone calls it the wooden park. It's got lots of stuff [play equipment] but people, big people [older teenagers], have been putting stuff on it. Graffiti. This [climbing frame], as you can see, it's got graffiti on it. Like here [pointing]. It's got swear words on some bits.*

Tamara: *Oh yeah, and it's broken round here.*

Angelica: *This is another one of the wooden park things. The bridge. We always used to go on it.*

Tamara: *But now it's broken. And it's got some graffiti on it.*

Angelica: *This is the little house thing.*

Tamara: *People go there for a picnic. Well we used to, but people have been spilling stuff... and put graffiti and loads of stuff in it... And it's really horrible now.*

Angelica: *And that thing over there behind you [climbing frame], that used to have two chains that you walked across... But that's been vandalized.*

Angelica and Tamara, 10, Towcester

Similarly contrasting views were voiced with regard to a shelter at the edge of the recreation ground in Towcester. This hut, very much like a bus shelter in design, was a location where a group of older teenagers frequently gathered, both during daylight hours and in the evening. This structure is roofed, providing shelter from the rain, and within it are benches where you people can sit.



*Plate 7.11      The hut at the recreation ground, Towcester.  
(Photo taken by Natalie, 13, Towcester.)*

Jodie valued the hut as a meeting place. She would regularly go there to chat with friends and smoke. Other girls, however, although recognizing that the place was valued by some young people for valid reasons, chose not to visit the site themselves. For these young people their desire to use the location was overcome by their fear of being associated with perceived 'trouble-makers'. These girls felt constrained in their place use by both parental and peer pressures to avoid 'anti-social' behaviour.

*I hang out with friends at the shelter. We just sit and chat and smoke. We have a laugh.*

Jodie, 13, Towcester

*Even if I knew the people there [hanging out at the shelter] I wouldn't like even talk to them.*

Hazel, 13, Towcester





Plate 7.12 *Inside the hut at the recreation ground, Towcester.*

*People come here just to smoke and drink and to take drugs as well. Everyone knows that they come down here to take drugs. And you can see there's swear words and things, and bottles and paper and litter everywhere. And mud everywhere. This is a very dangerous place. It would be an ideal place to be if it wasn't so used by older people who just sort of smoke and things. You can say it's quite a good place - it's quite warm and it's a good place to chat and things. But you can't really stay here as long as there are other people here that are bigger than you.*

Rebecca, 14, Potcote

Although some girls who did not use the shelter were happy to go there when making the video tour, others would not. One group of girls talked at length about the shelter from a vantage point some distance away. The girls stood alongside a river which created a physical boundary between the recreation ground and an area containing several shops. This physical barrier divided them from the group of older teenagers, giving them confidence to talk about the place.



*It's been attempted to be burnt down, and as you can see there's a gang in there at the moment. And they'll probably be smoking... And all the bad people hang out here. We don't want to get too close.*

Natalie, 13, Towcester.



Plate 7.13 *Young people in the hut at the recreation ground, Towcester.*

## Indoor Spaces

Some girls preferred to spend time with their friends in 'indoor' environments - those leisure opportunities (outside the home) which have been privatized by adults in the form of leisure centres, coffee shops and so on. These commercial environments enable young people to participate in consumption cultures. These facilities also provide shelter and warmth, which are especially appreciated during the winter months. The close proximity of other people, particularly adults, also provides a sense of security for some. Not all young girls were eager to spend all their leisure time away from the watchful eye of parents and other adults. Some welcomed this surveillance, arguing that conflict with and bullying from peers was less likely to occur in these 'indoor' environments.

*When I'm going out with my friends we usually just go down [supermarket] and go and hang out in the coffee shop.*

Mary, 14, Towcester

*You know you're going to be safe there [leisure centre]. People only go in there to use the facilities. Teenagers don't hang around inside.*

Eleanor, 11, Silverstone

For some young girls the village shop provided a meeting place. These girls regularly gathered in the vicinity of the shop, some to hang out with friends who also gathered there and others hoping to meet those friends who visited the shop in order to make purchases. However, not all girls choose to spend their leisure time at such locations. The comments detailed on the drawing (Figure 7.4) and the extract from the photo poster below indicate that the presence of other groups of young people deters some from visiting the shop and using the location as a place to meet friends.



*This is where my friends and I usually meet after school or at the weekend, and it is also our local shop.*

Eleanor, 11, Silverstone.

Plate 7.14 The village shop, Silverstone.



Plate 7.15 Outside the shop, Buckingham Way, Towcester.

People come here and just stand and sit on the wall and things like that. And it's just another place that everyone knows so you can just come and see your friends... And a lot of people come here after school as well, 'cos it's just a place where you know you're going to find your friends walking past here.

Rebecca, 14, Potcote

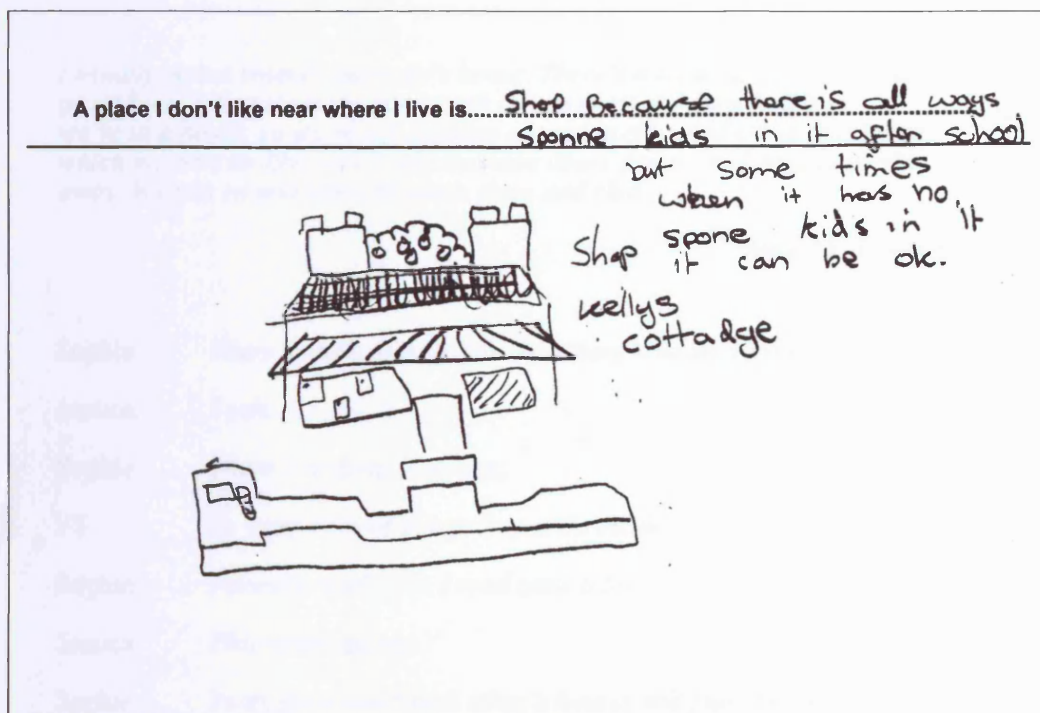


Figure 7.4 The shop. Drawing by 10 year old girl, Greens Norton.





Plate 7.16 The shop, Buckingham Way, Towcester.

*I don't like it here because lots of strange people hang around.*

*Natalie, 13, Towcester.*

The majority of young people stated that they spent some time with friends either within their own home or that of their friends (see Chapter 6, sections 6.3.2 and 6.4.2). Meeting friends within the home may reflect a positive desire to participate in 'indoor' activities such as watching television, listening to music or completing homework, or may be due to a lack of enticing alternatives outdoors.

*I usually go out round somebody's house. There's a bloke up my street that I go and see, either to do my homework or just to sit and chat with him. But we're in a house, so we're not walking around at all... And we're in a house, which my parents like, and I only live nine doors down... so I'm only yards away. We just sit and listen to music there and chat.*

*Sara, 15, Towcester*

Sophie: *There's more to do inside than there is to do outside.*

Jessica: *Yeah.*

Sophie: *There's nothing to do out.*

FT: *So what sorts of things do you do inside?*

Sophie: *I usually read a lot. I read quite a lot.*

Jessica: *Play board games.*

Sophie: *Yeah, go around each other's houses and play. Do homework... and we make up dance routines.*

*Sophie, 13, and Jessica, 12, Tiffield*



Diversity exists with regard to how welcoming girls find their home environment. Some parents (such as Mrs Ross whose thoughts are transcribed in section 7.3.3) actively encourage their children to socialize with friends within the home. Others, such as those described by Rebecca and Joy below, set firm limits on the numbers of young people that they allow into the house at one time. Although some young girls feel comfortable within their home environment, others prefer to spend time outdoors where they can experience privacy denied to them in domestic spaces.

*My parents will only let me have one friend to stay at a time.*

Joy, 13, Towcester

*One time I just went into Towcester to go and watch the 'Titanic' film which someone had on tape. And we were just walking around town looking for someone's house where we could play it at. Some parents wouldn't let boys in the house. Others wouldn't have so many people. Others just wouldn't let anyone in at all.*

Rebecca, 14, Potcote

*I like spending time at friends' houses. I feel safe, and we can just chat. When friends come to my house we can watch TV or videos in my room and we don't get disturbed.*

Claire, 15, Silverstone

*I have to share a room with my sister and I hate her! I wish I had my own room. Jessica's got her own room. I love going there. We can talk then.*

Sophie, 13, Tiffield

## **7.5 Understanding Diversity in Girls' Use of Recreational Spaces**

Young girls use and value recreational spaces in a myriad of ways. Locational factors and family background influence experiences of growing up within a rural area. Although these influence young girls as a group, individuals respond to these in different ways. The individuality of agency means that girls are able to make different choices about where to spend their leisure time.

Childhood is becoming increasingly commodified, with young people being lured in a culture of consumption (McKendrick *et al.*, 1999; 2000a; 2000b). Yet many young people are restricted in their means to participate in activities such as visiting cinemas, fast food restaurants, coffee shops, bowling alleys and so on. Within rural South Northants locational disadvantage, economic circumstances and dissatisfaction with those services and facilities provided all combine to create geographies of disadvantage. Issues of accessibility are particularly pertinent where girls are concerned, with boys being dominant users of open green space and the indoor spaces of clubs and youth organizations.

Although girls may appear a disadvantaged group, there is diversity within this group. Differences exist with levels of independent mobility and access to public transport. The influence of locational factors and recreational opportunities combine to impact upon girls' opportunities for socializing and the composition of friendship groups. This creates multiple experiences and diversity in girls' use of recreational spaces.

Family background and parenting strategies cut across differences in age and location to give rise to a complex series of geographies of girls' use of recreational spaces. Variations in access to a private car influence levels of accessibility to leisure facilities and opportunities for socializing. Some parents are both willing and able to provide transport in order for their children to pursue active social lives, whereas others are constrained by economic considerations and the 'higher' priorities of other family members. Many young girls in rural South Northants were reliant upon their parents for transport. Since parents control access to the private car they are able to regulate their daughters behaviour, determining to which locations they are willing to provide transport.

There is also diversity in the home ranges of the girls. For many, spatial boundaries are continually reviewed and negotiated, and temporal dimensions may cut across these. Some young girls actively contest these boundaries, while others are content to remain within sanctioned zones. Baumrind's (1971) concept of authoritarian and permissive parenting styles can be mapped on to the spatial behaviour patterns of girls. From this it can be seen that much variation exists with regard to levels of control and autonomy.

Young girls' use of recreational spaces varies according to their own interests, capacities and inclinations. Great diversity exists in the ways individuals choose to spend their leisure time. Individual differences can be explored using the concepts of life course and lifestyle. The leisure preferences of girls may change through the life course, and what is considered to be an important recreational space for a 10 year old girl may hold a different meaning for a 15 year old. Girls' participation in and subsequent rejection of a particular activity forms a rite of passage (Van Gennep, 1977).

Individual lifestyle choices influence the leisure spaces girls choose for solitude or socializing. Whilst some young girls in rural South Northants regularly sought 'rural' spaces when they wished to be alone, others chose environments close to the family home. Diversity was also apparent in the recreational spaces chosen when these girls meet with friends. Indoor commercial spaces were particularly valued by some, while others preferred to spend time outdoors. A further set of factors cut across these preferences for indoor or outdoor environments, with the same space often holding different meanings for different individuals. What for some girls is a valued recreational space, is a site of risk or conflict for others.

Jones (1997a) has argued that the country childhood idyll is a middle-class resource which parents can exploit as part of a package of bringing up children in rural locations. There is no longer a sense that growing up in the countryside is a complete childhood on its own, with most children regularly attending organized events and visiting formal leisure spaces that are located in urban areas (Jones, 1997a). This argument is reflected in the data collected in South Northants. Contrary to the ideas of the country childhood idyll, the 'rural' does not feature greatly in girls' accounts of their leisure time. Formal recreation spaces within the village and commercial leisure facilities further afield are more valued. The leisure opportunities of many young girls in this affluent, middle-class area are not restricted to those in their home village; the majority regularly access sites outside the village. Indeed, many of the rural childhoods described here are similar to those outlined in studies of urban childhoods (for example, Matthews *et al.*, 1998a; Percy-Smith, 1999b; Skelton, 2000).

It has been shown in this research that young girls often have less spatial freedom than boys. Although the home ranges of boys and girls are similar, boys dominate many outdoor spaces in rural settlements. Further, boys are more likely to travel independently and are less often accompanied when travelling to recreational spaces. It is perhaps a result of boys' command of local facilities that many young girls seek recreational opportunities outside their immediate neighbourhood. Yet in seeking access to these leisure opportunities many girls are reliant upon parents providing a 'taxi service'. In effect, rather than providing more spatial freedom for girls, the rural offers parents more control over their children's use of public space.

The difference and diversity shown in this chapter indicates that there is no single experience of the 'country childhood' (or the 'country girlhood'). The young girls have been shown to use and value recreational spaces in a variety of ways. It has been signalled that spaces hold different meanings for different individuals. In the next chapter this theme is further examined, with the ways in which the social ownership of space is contested between different user groups (adults and young girls, rival groups of young people, and girls and boys) explored.

## Chapter 8 Contested Countryside Spaces

### 8.1 Introduction

Country childhoods, it has been argued, can be understood in terms of “a synthesis of innocence, wildness, play, adventure, the companionship of other young people, contact with nature, agricultural spaces and practices, healthiness, *spatial freedom, and freedom from adult surveillance*” (Jones, 1997a, p. 162, emphasis added). Country children are seen to be free to run across fields and through woods, able to explore distant hills and forests (Aitken, 1994) and develop a close association with the ‘natural’ environment in which they live (Jones, 1997a; Valentine, 1997a). According to the rural childhood ‘myth’ young people are able to use spaces apart from the ordered adult world (Maxey, 1999) and they “*do not usually have to share their play spaces* with other groups of children or adults” (Aitken 1994, p. 58, emphasis added). In this chapter evidence is presented which challenges such notions. In contrast to the rural childhood idyll, geographies of anxiety, tension and disharmony are uncovered, and conflict arising between adults and young people over the social ownership of recreational spaces is examined.

Conceptualizations of youth are commonly associated with representations that problematize their use of outdoor space (Breitbart, 1998; Collins and Kearns, 2001; James and James, 2001; Matthews *et al.*, 1999; Valentine, 1996a). Furthermore many villages are extremely limited in terms of the public facilities, such as playgrounds and youth clubs, available to young people (see Chapter 5, section 5.3.2). Informal recreational space in the open countryside increasingly has been privatized (Shoard, 1980) as landowners restrict and remove access or, as in the past few months due to the Foot and Mouth Disease crisis, withdraw open spaces from any public use. In this situation adult needs often prevail and conflict between young people and adults over the use of social space is not uncommon (Davis and Ridge, 1997). In “staking claims for the legitimate use of public space which collide with the wishes of other local residents, young people rarely win” (Dee, 2000, p. 20).

In this chapter some multiple realities of girls' use of spaces within a rural environment are uncovered, and coping strategies for dealing with conflict and collision are revealed. The chapter focuses upon two areas of conflict over the use and social ownership of space. First, some different environmental priorities of girls and adults are explored and sources of tension between these groups are identified. Examples are used to illustrate the ways in which the use of both outdoor and indoor spaces is contested. Second, conflicts over the social ownership of recreational space between rival groups of young people are described, with specific attention paid to age-related collisions. Third, conflicts associated with gender are discussed. The theoretical constructs of liminality and habitus (discussed in Chapter 2, section 2.2.2) are used to help make sense of the complex performances of place use and the social ownership of space. Data are drawn from the questionnaire survey, discussions with groups of girls and interviews with mothers.

## **8.2 Conflicts between Girls and Adults**

Katz (1998) has argued that increasingly young people are faced with lessening choice and fewer opportunities of where they can go, without adult interference. She describes an eroding ecology of childhood (and youth), an outcome of the "pernicious effects created by the decay and outright elimination of public environments for outdoor play" or 'hanging out' (p. 135). Valentine (1996a) too suggests that increasingly adults are defining all aspects of the public realm as part of their private domain, a critical issue given the scarce recreational opportunities afforded by many village settings. The term 'adult' masks a broad range of reactions and responses to young people's behaviour. Not all adults will seek to move young people on where their presence is deemed to be inappropriate or unacceptable. What is referred to in this chapter is the structural position of the adult-child relationship characterized by a superordinate-subordinate stance.

Where it is acceptable *to be* is determined by adults, such that teenagers' occupancy of particular public places creates zones of tension and discontinuity. Places, such as parks after dark, define territories where neither young people nor adults retain complete social ownership (McKendrick, 1999c; Matthews *et al.*, 2000c; Sibley, 1995b). For adults, the experience of moving young people on provides a sense of recovery, the cleansing of a polluting presence, whereas young people's continual movement into these spaces, in the face of such harassment, represents the (re)claiming of social space.

With adults defining what is acceptable, clashes between adults and young people are inevitable. Collisions occur over two types of recreational space: outdoor and indoor spaces. Matthews *et al.* (2000a) use the term 'the street' as a metaphor for all public outdoor spaces in which young people are found, such as roads, cul-de-sacs, vacant plots and derelict land. In this discussion the term 'outdoor' space comprises those spaces of 'the street', together with other recreational spaces provided by adults in the form of recreation grounds and playgrounds, and distinctively rural spaces such as fields and woodland. The term 'indoor' is used to refer to those leisure opportunities (outside the home) which have been privatized by adults in the form of leisure centres, coffee shops and so on. Young girls exhibit a range of coping strategies within both outdoor and indoor environments through which they negotiate their use of space.

### **8.2.1 Conflict in Outdoor Spaces**

One of the consequences of a lack of public space in rural areas, particularly play space such as recreation grounds, is that young people, both girls and boys, can become highly visible and subject to adult scrutiny (Davis and Ridge, 1997). Contrary to the rural childhood myth and the notion of freedom from surveillance, nearly one in two of the girls who participated in the group discussions reported that they had experienced clashes with adults over their use of outdoor spaces. These girls voiced the opinion that adults viewed them as a problem when they socialized with friends when out and about on 'the street'.

A number of authors have argued that (urban) streets are often seen as an extension of the private domain of adults (Breitbart, 1998; Collins and Kearns, 2001; Cresswell, 1996; Matthews *et al.* 2000a; 2000c; Matthews, forthcoming; Sibley, 1995b; Valentine, 1999c). The presence of young people in such spaces therefore may be seen as a threat to social order. A number of the mothers interviewed used the word 'intimidating' to describe their encounters with young people in outdoor spaces, indicating that they felt uneasy and unsafe in their presence. Through implying that this *should not* be the case - that their lifestyles should not be influenced by the presence or behaviour of young people - these women reinforce notions of young people being 'out-of-place' in these outdoor environments.

Matthews (forthcoming) has suggested that the 'street' may be interpreted as a liminal space, a place of separation and a domain of transition (see also Winchester *et al.*, 1999). He argued that such outdoor spaces represent places on the margin, locations in which young people can take on the fluid identity of the hybrid, persons who are not quite adult yet no longer child, and in so doing establish their independence and set out their own identity. Those recreational spaces provided for young people by adults, such as recreation grounds and parks, may also be interpreted as liminal spaces. In the early evening and after dark, groups of young people often congregate in these places - not to behave as children and use the play equipment - but to participate in 'rituals of resistance' (Winchester *et al.*, 1999), such as smoking, drinking and establishing their own identities, through which they can discard the mantles of childhood.

In this research several instances were recounted where girls were told off by vigilant adults for "making too much noise" and disturbing local (adult) sensibilities. In some cases the clashes described by the girls seemed to reflect an over-sensitivity on the part of vigilant adults. The girls described confrontations which occurred in playgrounds and parks, 'legitimate' spaces for young people to use. The complaints made by the adults were with regard to the noise made by young people as they played games or "mucked about". In many of the villages, playgrounds and parks are not situated in densely populated residential areas - they are often on the outskirts of the settlement. Thus when complaints were made by adults who did not live in close proximity to the site, many girls felt that these were unjustified. These young people were acutely aware of discrimination against them, while their exclusion is much less likely to impinge upon the consciousness of adults (Sibley, 1995b).

*Mr M tells people off for making too much noise.*

Gemma, 11, Whittlebury

FT: *So when you go to the playing field, do adults ever tell anyone off?*

Jessica: *For screaming. If you scream, these old people go "shut up" and stuff.*

Sophie: *But we've got nowhere else to hang around and muck about.*

Jessica, 12 and Sophie, 13, Tiffield

The issue of noise was also raised by one third of the mothers interviewed. The comments below refer to one group of young people in their mid-teens who regularly meet at the centre of a large village. Clashes here appear to be a reaction to a genuinely troublesome group. These middle-class mothers, both of whom lived close to the meeting place, demonstrated different responses to the noise levels produced by these young people. Mrs Lucas took a fairly passive stance. She was reluctant to enter into conflict with the group, fearing retaliation. Mrs Lewis, however, described a number of arguments and long-running battles with the group, several of which resulted in her calling the police to the scene.

*I think any group of kids looks like a problem because they always talk too loud, they're sort of showing off to each other, and they can look quite intimidating... I just try to ignore them.*

Mrs Lucas, Silverstone

*Well the problems have been when, in the summer time, they hang out in their dens and they get drunk. And there's lots of screaming going on from the girls when they're being chased or tickled or whatever... and we've called over and told them to stop it and we've got abuse there... There's one set of kids that are really nasty. They chuck things in the garden. They'll come in and urinate. They'll do all sorts of things, you know, really, really nasty. We've had the police out to them several times.*

Mrs Lewis, Silverstone

By stating that young people 'make too much noise', adults are in effect suggesting that young people behave in a manner which challenges what Cahill (2000) terms the 'rules of the neighbourhood'. These outdoor spaces therefore become sites of resistance in which young people may rebel against certain (adult) 'rules'. Different groups of young people respond in different ways to these 'rules' of acceptability. Three coping strategies can be identified: compliance, retreat and resistance. Many girls responded to confrontations through *compliance* to the demands of adults, ceasing that behaviour deemed discrepant. Another common response was to *retreat* from the site of conflict, the girls moving to another place where their actions would be tolerated. A minority of the girls, however, ignored the pleas and demands of adults in a further show of *resistance*.

*We have to shut up or just go somewhere else.*

Jessica, 12, Tiffield

*We just move on, go somewhere else. It ain't worth the hassle.*

Jodie, 13, Towcester





*The man who lives next to the park shouts if people play in the trees because it's council property, but there's nothing else to do in this boring old park so we just do it anyway.*

*Chelsea, 10, Towcester*

Plate 8.1 The playground in the 'Poets' housing estate, Towcester.

*The other night they had the radio blaring out from a car, and I asked them to turn the volume down a bit because I was trying to get the kids to sleep. They did, but after 30 minutes or so the volume had crept back up and they were still shouting and singing.*

Mrs Lewis, Silverstone

Research which has highlighted conflict between young people and adults in urban areas has often focused upon shows of resistance (see, for example, Lucas, 1998; Matthews *et al.*, 1998a; Percy-Smith, 1999b; Vanderbeck and Johnson, 2000). In these studies groups of young people are shown to contest actively the use of space. In rural South Northants, however, resistance was rare. This may reflect the tight-knit nature of village communities. Those young people hanging out on the street in rural areas are likely to be known by name by the adults who observe them (Davis and Ridge, 1997). Any resistance to requests to move on or cease anti-social behaviour may be noted and reported back to parents and guardians. Fear of this often unspoken threat influences young girls' responses to collisions with adults, making compliance or retreat more attractive options. Acts of resistance were rare in the smallest villages and most commonplace in the market town, perhaps reflecting that in larger settlements young people may be less well-known to vigilant adults. One of the girls stated that she travelled to a nearby village in order to avoid conflict with adults in her home village. Gathering with friends in this location she felt more able to perform acts of resistance, as it was unlikely that reports of these would reach her parents.

Approximately one in four of the girls reported feeling unwelcome in the very spaces set aside by adults for their use - namely recreation grounds, playgrounds and parks. Age appears to be an important determinant in this reaction. Sibley (1995b) has noted how teenagers who congregate in these recreational spaces in the early evenings, when adults are no longer commonly around, are perceived as discrepant and 'out-of-place'. Their presence is no longer acceptable and grates against the sensibilities of vigilant adults. Many of those conflicts reported between adults and young people in parks and playgrounds involved older teenagers. Damage to property, ranging from graffiti on play equipment to more serious incidents where cars and security devices were targeted, was the most frequently mentioned reason for conflict.

*There's only three or four of them [children in their mid- to late-teens who hang out at the playground during the evening]... and they do cause a bit of a problem around here for the people who live near there and the people using the Reading Room [next to the playground]. They have caused problems. The Parish Council had security lights put up and they got taken down promptly by who they were supposed to be watching!*

Mrs Hughes, Whittlebury

FT: *What about the gang [of older teenagers who hang out] up at the park? Are they ever in trouble?*

Nicola: *Yes.*

Gemma: *With Mr W.*

Nicola: *They start fires and stuff.*

FT: *What does he do?*

Gemma: *He phones the council and stuff.*

Nicola: *Yeah, and gets the police.*

Nicola and Gemma, 11, Whittlebury

*A group of kids hang around a little play area next door but one to us... We've had the car windscreen smashed in... And we have had problems at two in the morning there and we've had to call out the police. Particularly when we had an old lady living next door on her own, because they were smashing bottles against her fence and things... It didn't sound like they were an enormous gang. I'd say that there were just three or four of them.*

Mrs Blackwell, Towcester

The teenagers responsible for the behaviour described above were not members of large gangs or groups - the largest group of young people in these cases numbered four. Although the criminal damage reported in this research was believed to have been carried out by a relatively small number of individuals, those young people hanging out in larger groups (say of six or more persons) were also seen as potential trouble-makers. Hence, regardless of the size of the friendship group, older teenagers were understood to be 'out of place' in parks and playgrounds in the early evening and after dark. Given their high visibility in public space in a rural environment, the anti-social actions of a small minority can lead to all young people being labelled as troublemakers (Matthews *et al.*, 2000c). Similar stories about conflicts in these spaces were related by girls from all types of rural settlement, indicating that factors such as scale and location do not strongly influence this form of conflict.

Aitken (2001b) has argued that collisions between adults and young people over the use of spaces such as recreation grounds and playgrounds have resulted in a decline in the availability of places in which young people can try out new identities and roles in their transition to adulthood. Transitional places of "unmitigated potential, creativity and imagination are diminishing because they are threatening to adult control and comfort", thus young people are denied the privacy to play and to experiment with new identities (Aitken, 2001b, p. 177).

None of the girls or the mothers reported any collisions in 'rural' spaces. This may reflect the infrequency with which such spaces are used by the majority of girls (see Chapter 6, section 6.4.2). It may also be that the mothers themselves rarely visit such spaces, reducing the likelihood of confrontations with young people.

### **8.2.2 Conflict in Indoor Leisure Spaces**

Commercial environments, such as coffee shops, leisure centres and fast food outlets, are a favoured haunt for young girls (see Chapter 6, section 6.4.3). Although only a minority of girls travelled outside their home village to use outdoor recreational spaces, the majority travelled to larger settlements nearby in order to gain access to these indoor spaces. Not surprisingly, therefore, surveillance by adults is present and also extends into these indoor spaces. Like 'the street', adults control the habitus of indoor spaces, defining the social structures and 'rules' within which some behaviours are deemed acceptable and others unacceptable.



*You do get questioned when you come [to the Leisure Centre], especially if you go inside. They always ask you if you're using the facilities and you have to buy something if you want to go inside. You're not allowed around here because they've now set up new security cameras and have guard dogs around here, which stops you from coming here to relax.*

Rebecca: *Some people come there to swim and other people just come there to meet their friends that are swimming and they wait outside. And it's just somewhere where you know there's going to be people. And it's like if you were coming out to go and see someone, or you don't know what to do, like on a Friday, then it's usually around now [6.00pm] that people would be going up there. They won't have any intention of swimming.*

Rebecca, 14, Potcote and Jodie, 13, Towcester

- Alisha: *I go down to the Leisure Centre, normally on a Friday night, because my crowd goes round there. We don't normally go inside. We just stay outside because they don't like us to go inside. We just hang around.*
- FT: *Why don't they like you inside the Leisure Centre?*
- Alisha: *Well it's because we're not actually doing any sports or swimming. We just use the restaurant there. Otherwise they don't like us there.*
- FT: *So if you're not actually using the facilities they want you to go outside?*
- Alisha: *Yeah, normally. That's a bit... I don't know really. It's fairly warm and it's a nice place to go.*

Alisha, 15, Towcester

Although a number of girls acknowledged that the Leisure Centre staff may have valid reasons for not liking their presence, they complained that all young people were treated the same and that the staff made no distinctions between those young people deliberately 'causing trouble' through vandalism and those who visited the Centre just to meet with friends and chat.

*It's hard in the winter because there isn't a lot of choice... And people do destroy the nets and things [at the basketball courts at the rear of the Leisure Centre in Towcester] and we often get blamed for it. And it's quite usual that you get moved on. Because if you stand there too long they give you an ultimatum - either go in and swim or come out.*

Rebecca, 14, Potcote

- Claire: *I find that the Leisure Centre is really negative with teenagers. When it first opened it was really popular with teenagers and quite a lot of people went there to meet. But now you get asked every time you go in, what are you doing there and if you are going to use the services and everything. So you find like that you don't really want to go there because you are questioned all the time. It's just really negative.*
- Victoria: *It feels like people are watching you all the time.*
- Sara: *I don't think you're allowed to hang around there.*
- Victoria: *No, not no more.*
- Sara: *You have to be there for the facilities.*
- Victoria: *But there's now a lot of people who go out on a Friday and just around, around the bridge at the brook. And they just hang all around there 'cos they're not allowed near the Leisure Centre.*

Claire, 15, Silverstone and Victoria and Sara, 15, Towcester

Hazel: *We always used to meet down the Leisure Centre on a Friday night, and that used to be the 'in' place, but it's sort of gone down now. But it was fun because everyone used to go swimming or hang about outside. Until we all got moved on.*

FT: *Why did you get moved on?*

Hazel: *Because they [Leisure Centre staff] think that we're too rowdy, but we're not. It's just a great big group of us outside the Leisure Centre, so they think that we're going to do something. And we're just sort of sitting around talking. Usually the older people go down there, like who are sixteen, and they usually get drunk. So they obviously think that us younger ones are going to do it as well.*

Hazel, 13, Towcester

In exploring the striated spaces of childhood, Jones (2000b) has argued that three categories of space may be identified: monomorphic spaces, polymorphic spaces and disordered spaces. Monomorphic spaces are sites which are devoted to a single use that excludes the possibility of 'other' uses. Polymorphic spaces are those which are in use within adult structures but which can accommodate the differing uses of adult and childhood spatial configurations. Disordered spaces are spaces which young people can use and reconstruct without incurring the outright hostility of adults, spaces that are in some way 'otherable'.

Jones's (2000b) categorization can be used to disentangle the different ways in which adults and young girls perceive the Leisure Centre. Adults appear to view the Leisure Centre, like the shopping mall, as a monomorphic space, a commercial site where consumption governs. Groups of local young people appear to be challenging this view and attempting to change the place into a polymorphic space. The girls acknowledged that the Leisure Centre is a business and that it needs to attract visitors and make a profit. (The number of people using the site is in fact one of the features that the girls found attractive. Given the lack of other local meeting places, the Leisure Centre is a focal point, a place at which they can meet and make friends.) However, they also argued that their presence outside the building and their use of the facilities should not be prescribed by adults, and that the space can accommodate both adults' and young people's different uses.

Conflicts over the use of indoor spaces were not confined to the Leisure Centre. The girls also complained about their treatment by adults when in other commercial environments, such as coffee shops, fast food outlets and supermarkets. The majority of girls greatly favoured these places, yet around two out of three girls felt that these were places of conflict. Nearly one in two of these girls reported that they were often viewed as potential 'trouble makers', sometimes leading to confrontations with adults. These girls voiced the opinion that adults treated all young people (when unaccompanied by an adult) in the same way.



Hope: *The [supermarket] staff come up to, "are you buying anything?". And if you say "no, we're just meeting a friend", they go "can you go and wait outside?" or something like that.*

Natalie: *Yeah. We haven't actually had any trouble with them, if you're in the café and you're having a drink. But if you're wandering around, 'cos there is quite a few people that do steal things from there, and obviously 'cos they presume everyone's like that.*

Hope: *They're suspicious.*

Hope and Natalie, 13, Towcester

*Me and my friends sit outside [supermarket] and we're always getting moved on, getting the blame for damage and stuff... Inside the shop we get followed by the security guard as well... It's like because you're there and you're young you get the blame. They say "you can't hang around here no more because of all this trouble, and you're not doing anything, so go somewhere else".*

Jodie, 13, Towcester



Plate 8.3 Outside a supermarket, Towcester.

*Youths are banned from here [supermarket] quite a lot. And I think it's just false accusing really, because it's not our fault that other people have done that [vandalism], and we do get the blame for it quite a lot.*

Rebecca, 14, Potcote

The sometimes intensive monitoring of young people's behaviour when they visit shops and other commercial spaces (for example, security guards following them around a shop to ensure that they do not steal anything) helps to reinforce notions of these commercial spaces being adult spaces in which young people are 'out-of-place'. Indeed, many local shops restricted the number of young people using the facility at any one time. In one case adults have redefined an indoor leisure space, a village social club, as 'for families only' in order to prevent young people who are unaccompanied by adults from using the facility.

*Recently we've been chucked out of the [social] club. 'Cos we've been getting complaints because there's about twenty of us that all go down there... The committee wanted us chucked out because "it's for families" and we "shouldn't go down there". But there's not really anywhere else to go in that village.*

Victoria, 15, Towcester

In contrast to the response of young people towards conflict at the Leisure Centre, the girls surveyed did not see the 'solution' as redefining these spaces so that young people and adults could both use these spaces in their own ways. Rather, in recognizing that these groups valued spaces in different ways, the girls voiced the opinion that separate indoor spaces are needed in which young people can socialize without the scrutiny of adults.

Victoria: *I don't think that it's entertainment that we need. It's somewhere that we can go and sit down and play pool. Just a room.*

Sara: *A room where you can sit and chat and have something to drink.*

Victoria: *Somewhere out of the cold.*

Claire: *Just like a teenage type pub, but obviously without alcohol and everything. But just like somewhere you can meet your friends.*

Victoria: *... I know that we only go down the club because it's warm down there and it's getting to winter. And there's a pool table and there's somewhere that you can buy like soft drinks and stuff.*

Victoria and Sara, 15, Towcester and Claire, 15, Silverstone

Around one in three girls described indoor places as being free from conflict. For these girls, indoor spaces were understood to be neutral zones in which young people and adults can share resources without confrontation. In some cases the girls seemed to view these locations as places of retreat from conflict with adults. They felt confident that they could socialize with friends in these indoor places without fear of clashes with adults which were in some cases regular occurrences in outdoor spaces.



*You can socialize in the library without getting told off.*

*Justine, 13, Towcester*

Plate 8.4 *Inside the library, Towcester.*





Plate 8.5 A supermarket coffee shop. Towcester.

*When I'm going out with my friends, we usually just go down [to the supermarket] and go and hang around in the coffee shop. We're left alone there.*

*Mary, 14, Towcester*



Plate 8.6 Outside a fast food restaurant, Towcester.

*There's benches outside [the fast food restaurant] and you can sit there as long as you want and no one moves you on. You just sit there, eating your food slowly, and talking.*

*Rebecca, 14, Potcote*

The regular use of indoor spaces by groups of young people in defiance of requests to move on may signify other dimensions to how girls perceive public places. There is a paradox here, in that the presence of adults provides security, yet it is also seen as a source of tension. Unlike the anarchy of the rural outdoors, where real dangers may lurk, commercial environments provide safe, delimited, overseen spaces where young girls can mix and socialize with their peers in safety. From this perspective, the presence of adults provides these young girls with opportunities to express individuality and even carry out limited acts of social rebellion, but always without having to confront the more unpredictable threats of the street.

Miller *et al.* (1998) have argued that in 'safe', privatized indoor spaces people can occupy roles other than those derived by the nuclear family. It may be that those indoor recreational spaces valued by the girls present a similar 'safe' environment in which young people can try out different roles to those of their home and school life. Featherstone (1998) has linked the concept of the 'flaneur' to the social experience of shopping, arguing that people can move through the crowds with a high sense of invisibility. For some young girls, indoor facilities provide such a mask, enabling them to try out new identities by asserting new roles and experimenting with fashion. By moving away from the village (the known) where trying new identities may be seen as difficult, the move to the unknown facilitates the transition.

### **8.3 Conflicts between Groups of Young People**

The lack of leisure facilities in many rural villages means that different groups of young people often compete for access to particular resources (Davis and Ridge 1997). In the settlements of this study, young girls drew attention to the conflict that often occurred over the social ownership of micro-spaces such as the bus shelter, the steps of the Church or Village Hall and the climbing frame in the park. Rivalry between groups is often, although not exclusively, based on age differences, with younger children excluded from play spaces by the presence or actions of their elders (Percy-Smith, 1999b). The inevitable outcomes of this are antagonism and displacement. Rivalry between groups of young people is complex. Subtly different geographies were articulated by the participants, with some girls keen to find ways to share spaces, and others retreating from spaces of conflict.

#### **8.3.1 Sharing Outdoor Spaces**

##### ***Marking Territories: The 'Social Scenting' of Place***

Groups of young people appear to mark out their recreational space territories in three ways: through their physical presence at the location; by leaving evidence of their activities there; and in the case of playgrounds and parks, by vandalizing play equipment to remove the main reason for others to visit the location.

The presence of a rival group of young people can sometimes prevent other groups from using that location (Harden, 2000), creating what Percy-Smith and Matthews (2001) describe as 'tyrannical geographies'. The group that has claimed the territory may exclude others through acts, looks and gestures. Children may verbally threaten those young people trying to 'invade' their space or warn them off by making it clear through their conversations that the newcomer is not an 'insider' and so does not belong there.

The behaviour of a group may also prevent others using a play space. Many girls mentioned gangs of (older) young people smoking or taking drugs and reported avoiding those places where such groups were found so as not to be associated with young people perceived to be 'trouble-makers'. Denscombe (2001) has argued that teenagers may choose to smoke in order to convey to others the appearance of being 'hard' or 'tough'. It appears that this form of image management may occur in rural South Northants.

Remnants of another group's activities, for example empty beer bottles, graffiti and litter, can be likened to acts of 'social scenting', whereby powerful messages are left behind as to the social ownership of place. As Eleanor's comment makes clear, evidence of another group using a particular space even at a different time can preclude another group from that space.

Eleanor: *Up in the pocket park they've got all those trees, and behind them you can make little dens. Loads of people have got dens up there. And me and my friend had a den. But we don't go up there much. We don't use it anymore.*

FT: *Why is that?*

Eleanor: *Well we went back one day and there were all these smashed beer bottles and everything. So we left it. [pause] We'd made like entry things to make it look like a tree so no one would come in, but they'd ruined it. They were going to come in again, so there wouldn't be much point.*

Eleanor, 11, Silverstone



Plate 8.7 *The sand pit at the playground, Greens Norton.*

Anna: *This is meant to be a sand pit, apart from I don't think there's much sand! There's only litter like cigarette stuff.*

Shannon: *And beer cans [picks up multi-pack cardboard wrapping].*

Anna: *It's disgusting.*

Anna, 11 and Shannon, 10, Greens Norton





Plate 8.8 The back of the Leisure Centre, Towcester.

*Lots of gangs hang at the back of the Leisure Centre, and smoke around there. And they put all the ash on the pole which is why it's so dirty. It gets all vandalized and there's broken bottles and stuff. Gangs normally hang around here and you can see all the litter and stuff.*

Hope, 13, Towcester



Figure 8.1 The bus shelter. Drawing by 11 year old girl, Silverstone.

Vandalism and damage of play equipment prevents others from using such facilities. By removing the reason for other groups to go to a particular play space, through twisting the swings to the top of the frame, tearing down basketball nets or putting paint on the slide, one group can prevent another from using the same site.



*Sometimes the teenagers wind the swings up so that they were so high that you can't sit on them. And they broke the chains and dismantled it.*

*Helen, 11, Silverstone*



Plate 8.9 The recreation ground, Silverstone.

*My brother and my mum went down the rec. and my brother wanted to have a go on the swing. And there were some teenagers down there, spinning it around so it was really high up... and so he couldn't go on the swings, which was really bad. And they put paint on the slide, so when my brother went on it his clothes got covered in the stuff.*

*Joy, 13, Towcester*



*No one goes into the fort [wooden play building] any more 'cos the boys used to go to the loo in there...It's too gross. Some of the kids like to play in there but it stinks. You get out pretty quickly.*

*Sophie, 13, Tiffield*

Plate 8.10 The fort at the recreation ground, Tiffield.

Clearly, where there is a lack of sanctioned space for young people to play and congregate, some groups become 'excluded' as rival groups claim territory. Acts of 'social scenting' were described by girls resident in both the villages and the market town, indicating that competition for social space occurs in many types of rural space. The girls offered two solutions to the problems of territory and exclusion. First, to impose age limits on the use of certain facilities. Many, however, believed that this would be difficult to enforce. The second solution was generally seen to be more effective, namely to improve play space and transport provision to give all young people more choice over where and how they spend their leisure time.

It is important to note that the boundaries of young people's territories are not static: they are continually redefined in response to a number of factors. Three factors were mentioned by the girls. First, changes may reflect the life cycle of a young person. The increasing demands of school work meant that for some, particularly the oldest girls, hanging out at the shop or leisure centre was no longer a desirable recreation activity. Second, changes in friendship groups may result in some girls choosing to spend time in different parts of the village or market town according to the place preferences of a new set of friends. Third, in the market town in particular, the development of new commercial spaces such as a fast food restaurant or supermarket may create new sites for social interaction. In response to such factors the boundaries of a young person's territory may contract or expand.

### *Conflicts over the Social Ownership of Places*

Collisions between groups of young people are common: every girl who participated in the in-depth discussion work described at least one incident. The younger children tended to report conflicts with groups of young people in their mid-teens, whilst those in their mid-teens generally described clashes with people in their late-teens. Two types of conflict can be identified through which dominant groups retain the social ownership of space. First, dominant groups may actively seek to exclude others through bullying and intimidation. Second, rival groups of young people may exclude themselves from these spaces through a fear of association with groups displaying 'undesirable' or 'anti-social' behaviours. A number of coping strategies emerged through which young girls respond to these situations.

Confrontations between groups of young people often involved name-calling and intimidating behaviour. Around one quarter of the girls stated that they were stared at if they played or walked nearby a dominant group. This surveillance regularly led to these younger children leaving the location, feeling excluded from the space by the intimidatory gaze of older teenagers. Girls of all ages mentioned that this sort of bullying was commonly used to reinforce a group's territory by making other young people feel threatened. The same tactics appear to be used by young people of different ages, being reported in conflicts with people in their early, mid and late-teens. Percy-Smith and Matthews (2001) have reported a similar use of these tactics in both urban and suburban settings, indicating that this sort of bullying is not exclusive to rural environments.

Natalie: *Groups of people [hang out at the rec.]. They intimidate you.*

FT: *How do they intimidate you?*

Natalie: *They just, like, sit there and stare at you. Or they come up to you and say something horrible.*

Natalie, 13, Towcester

Eleanor: *I don't like going past the bus stop.*

FT: *What is it that you dislike about that?*

Eleanor: *All the people shout at you and stuff.*

FT: *What sorts of things do they say?*

Helen: *Stupid things.*

Eleanor: *Sometimes they just shout "hello", but you don't know them so you don't answer. And then they start shouting other things at you.*

FT: *Do you avoid going up to the shop if they're there?*

Helen: *Yes!*

Eleanor: *I used to walk on the other side of the road, but now I don't. I just don't take any notice of them.*

Eleanor and Helen, 11, Silverstone

The reputation of a certain group also discourages some girls from attempting to share outdoor spaces. Around one third of the girls stated that the girls and boys who had claimed a specific social space were 'tough', 'hard' or 'rough' people with whom they did not wish to associate. Two of the girls, Victoria and Jodie, acknowledged that their presence at a location would discourage others from visiting that site. The girls stated that the reputation of their friendship group was such that others, especially younger children, would feel intimidated and uncomfortable about using that space.

FT: *How old are the people who hang around the Church?*

Megan: *Our age, a bit older.*

Louise: *But they're sort of [interrupted]*

Megan: *Hard people.*

Louise: *Yeah. People with attitude.*

Megan and Louise, 15, Silverstone

*Some of the people I hang around with are a bit, erm, they are nice people when you get to know them properly.... But if you don't really know them they treat you as outcasts and stuff. They're not really fair on people.*

Victoria, 15, Towcester

FT: *Do other people hang around there or is it just your group?*

Jodie: *Just usually us. But normally people don't want to come and sit there when we're there, because we're, like, rough people!*

Jodie, 13, Towcester

The girls responded to the potential for conflict in three ways: they avoided sites of potential conflict, reached a compromise over the use of the space, or used the space only in the presence of adults. Approximately two in three girls sought to *avoid* conflict with groups of older teenagers. These girls identified those places where confrontations were most likely to occur and avoided these. This strategy was most often embraced by those girls resident in the larger villages and market town, settlements in which there were more opportunities for girls to choose an alternative route or place to visit.

Sara, for example, knew that gangs of sixteen to nineteen year olds regularly gathered next to a bridge and so always avoided this location. Megan, Mary, Louise and Alisha described a number of avoidance strategies to minimize the risk of conflict. These ranged from taking a different route around the village - in this case involving a walk of three-quarters of a mile - to avoiding eye contact with the older teenagers.

*I don't ever go there because... there's lots of gangs around who are drinking and can get very violent.*

Sara, 15, Towcester

Megan: *People hang around the Church gates, and when you walk past it's not nice.*

Mary: *You just kind of walk twice as fast and you don't look at them.*

Alisha: *You try not to go there.*

Mary: *You walk around them. You make sure there's a gap between you and them.*

Megan: *You don't really want to walk past them. You try to avoid it if you can. I sometimes walk the long way round so I don't go near them.*

Alisha: *But if you have to go past them, you do it as quick as you can, basically.*

Louise: *I walk on the other side of the road.*

FT: *Do they ever say anything to you as you go past?*

Megan: *Not normally... but you think it is kind of unsafe because of the kind of reputation they have.*

Megan and Louise, 15, Silverstone; Mary, 14, and Alisha, 15, Towcester



Not all of the girls, however, were prepared to take a passive stance. Around one third described ways in which they attempted to obtain access to some of those spaces dominated by groups of older teenagers. These girls would seek a *compromise*. This response was most often described by girls resident in small villages, locations in which choosing an alternative route or social space is often difficult.

Sophie and Jessica, for example, described how they had reached a compromise with a group of older boys. The boys exerted a measure of control over the use of space at the village recreation ground and had made dens in the trees which border the site on three sides. Sophie and Jessica were eager to use the recreation ground, particularly since there are few other areas of open public land in the village. After a number of confrontations in which the older boys expressed their dislike of the younger girls' attempts to use the dens and tried to discourage them from visiting the site, a compromise was reached. Sophie and Jessica were able to use the swings and climbing frame located near to the entrance to the recreation ground without any name-calling or intimidation from the boys, and the girls in return did not go near the dens.

Sophie: *The older boys that hang out [at the rec.], there's quite a lot of them.*

Jessica: *They leave us in peace now. But if you go near their den, get on their nerves, they shout at you.*

Sophie, 13 and Jessica, 12, Tiffield

Other girls compromised through using spaces valued by dominant groups of young people only at times when they know their rivals will not be there. Chloe, for example, regularly played in the tree houses built by a group of older boys. When the boys used the tree houses she was prevented from doing so by the intimidatory behaviour of this group. The boys would resort to name-calling and making threats in order to exclude her from the place. However, at certain times of day or week, such as early on a Saturday or Sunday morning, Chloe knew that the boys rarely used the tree houses, and so she visited the location at those times.

A minority of girls, all of whom were 13 years or younger, demonstrated compromises during the course of the research. Viewing the disposable cameras and video camera as empowering tools, these girls made sorties into another group's territory. This was made evident in two ways: through remarks made by the girls about the research process, and in the contradictions between the images captured on photographs and film and the comments the girls made about these places. The examples detailed below indicate the fluid nature of place use and highlight young girls' continual struggle to obtain autonomous social space.

Sophie and Jessica, girls resident in one of the smallest villages, gleefully discussed an encounter with a group of older boys which had occurred whilst they were taking photographs. The girls had decided that in order to include photos of 'unsafe places' (see Chapter 5, section 5.5.2), they must capture an image of a group of boys who would regularly meet near the playing field. In order to get a good photograph of this place, Jessica had decided that they must 'invade' the boys' territory.

Sophie: *We saw some of the older boys when we went out taking photos.*

Jessica: *I said, "I'm going to take a picture of you 'cos you're dangerous, 'cos I hate you!"*

Sophie, 13 and Jessica, 12, Tiffield

Jessica and Sophie were clearly proud that they had confronted the group of older boys. When asked what the response of the boys was to their actions, Jessica stated that they had asked what the girls were doing, to which she replied that they were "doing research". With cameras in their hands and the 'justification' of the research project, these girls felt able to enter the boys' territory. The girls stated, however, that they were reluctant to confront the boys again.

Some of the younger girls demonstrated a compromise - using a space when the dominant group was absent - in the photographs that they took. The images below contrast greatly with the comments linked to them on the photo posters. Joy's photograph shows a group of her friends sitting on a piece of play equipment at a playground. Joy and her friends talked at length about their avoidance of this location because it was often used by a group of older teenagers. When taking the photographs, however, they had found the playground deserted. Joy reported that they had chosen this particular place to take the photograph as it was close to the exit, meaning that they could leave the area quickly if the dominant group returned. When completing the video tour this playground was deserted, but the girls were reluctant to enter the territory again.



*The dangerous rec.*

*Joy, 13, Towcester*

Plate 8.11 *The recreation ground, Towcester.*

A girl resident in one of the smallest villages, 11 year old Chloe, took a series of photographs of a small area of woodland close to her home. This area was regularly used by a group of older boys, and girls were frequently excluded from the site. In order to photograph this 'boys' place', Chloe visited the area with her sister early one Saturday morning - a time at which she knew the boys were unlikely to be using the space. Chloe encouraged her sister to climb the trees, demonstrating that, although this was very much a 'boys' place', girls could use the space too.



*I think this is a boys' place  
because they like to gang up.  
Boys' like to mess about on the  
trees.*

*Chloe, 11, Litchborough*

Plate 8.12 Woodland near Banbury Road, Litchborough.

During a video tour, a group of 13 year old girls visited a place that they usually avoided because a group of older teenagers would regularly meet here and become involved in conflict with adults. This area, at the rear of a leisure centre, was favoured by the older teenagers because there was a gap in the fence through which they could gain access to a climbing wall. During the video tour one of the girls demonstrated how the older teenagers gained access to this area.



*Gangs normally hang around  
here and you can see all the  
litter and stuff. And they climb  
through the fence here and go  
on the [climbing] wall. They  
break in here and go and climb  
up the wall.*

*Hope, 13, Towcester*



*[Hope demonstrated how the gang climbs through the fence. She saw what she thought was a security camera - it is actually a floodlight - and quickly climbed back out. She then decided to leave this area immediately in case any adults had seen her.]*

Plate 8.13 The climbing wall at the rear of the Leisure Centre, Towcester.

Some of the youngest girls described another way in which they could share leisure spaces with older teenagers and yet avoid conflict. Tamara, Katie and Chelsea, all aged 10 years, stated that they could use a local play area without fear of confrontation with a group in their mid-teens who regularly used the site if they were accompanied by parents. The *presence of adults* discouraged the teenagers from challenging the presence of younger children. Name-calling occurred less often when a parent was on hand to respond to any remarks made.

*My mum sometimes takes me and my little brother to the rec. Sometimes Chelsea comes too. Then the gang leaves us alone. They don't say stuff if my mum's there.*

Katie, 10, Towcester

*We sometimes go to the play place at that pub in Stoke Bruerne. There's an indoor play area for little kids, which my little brother likes. Mum takes us there because he can play in peace and won't get bullied.*

Joy, 13, Towcester

Some complex personal geographies exist with regard to how younger children and older teenagers share outdoor spaces. In a rural setting where there is little public space and few focal points within the community, the ownership of social space may be strongly contested. Wyn and White (1997) use the term 'spatial apartheid' to refer to local authority by-laws which impose boundaries and controls on the landscape (such as 'no ball games') and which serve to control and contain young people's use of public space. It can be argued that, as well as this adult imposed 'spatial apartheid', another exists through which groups of young people impose social boundaries and controls on the landscape, determining which young people may define territories and use social space.

### **8.3.2 Sharing Indoor Spaces**

Conflicts between rival groups of young people in indoor spaces were reported infrequently by the participants, with only one in ten girls describing an incident. The contrast between the levels of rivalry reported for outdoor and indoor environments may be the result of several factors. Young people of different ages may prefer different types of indoor leisure spaces (see Chapter 6, section 6.3.2). Where contact between different age groups is minimal, conflicts are less likely to result. Further, younger children are often accompanied by adults when using facilities such as coffee shops and fast food outlets. Hence, unlike outdoor spaces where groups of younger children are often present, in these indoor spaces fewer are found, reducing the likelihood of conflicts with groups of older teenagers.



Indoor environments are adult-dominated spaces in which young people are usually expected to display behaviours acceptable to adults. The name-calling and intimidation practised by some groups of older teenagers in outdoor environments may be 'unacceptable' in settings where adults are close by. The presence of adults in these spaces may reduce the number of conflicts because of a fear of being asked to 'move on' if any conflict arose. Perhaps girls anticipate the 'rules of the neighbourhood' in indoor spaces and seek out those places where they know they will be accepted or temporarily sanctioned. Although for some girls the experience of the outdoors involves attempts to push back the barriers of adult-defined acceptable behaviour, in indoor leisure spaces this does not appear to occur.

Unlike outdoor spaces such as play areas and bus shelters, indoor recreational spaces may be able to address the needs of several groups of young people at one time. Some of the commercial environments favoured by the girls are sufficiently spacious that rival groups may access the resources without coming in direct contact of each other. Confrontations may be more numerous in outdoor environments because for the majority of young people they are the most frequently used recreational spaces (see Chapter 6, section 6.3.2). Although girls do appear to favour commercial environments, issues of access mean that they cannot visit these sites every day. Indeed, conflicts over the use of indoor spaces may be perceived to be less important as for most young people the use of these facilities is not a daily occurrence.

Some interesting remarks made by the girls hint that conflict within indoor spaces does sometimes occur. Victoria and Sara spoke about the potential for collisions between rival groups of young people at a youth club in Towcester. They described the club as being dominated by a group of older teenagers who had a reputation for being 'hard' (aggressive and unafraid of confrontation with both adults and other young people). The presence of this group discouraged younger children from visiting the youth club. There are few opportunities for young people to gain access to this sort of recreational facility: the club is open for just four hours on two evenings each week and, apart from a small church-run group, is the only youth club in Towcester. The rivalry described by Victoria and Sara indicates that, where access to particular types of indoor resources is limited, collisions between groups of younger and older children are likely.

Victoria: *There's the 'Coffee Shop' [youth club] which is open certain days, but there's only one certain group that will go into the Coffee Shop.*

Sara: *Nobody else will go there apart from that group, because of that group.*

Victoria: *....They're mainly quite old, you know, seventeen and eighteen. They are sort of 'harder', and that's why not many, why no other groups of people go.*

Victoria and Sara, 15, Towcester

Girls in one village suggested that more indoor recreational facilities are needed in order to reduce conflicts over the social ownership of outdoor spaces. These younger children stated that their local play area was often dominated by groups of older teenagers, and that these older groups used name-calling and other intimidatory behaviours to discourage younger groups from using this space. Anna and Shannon believed that a youth club and other indoor spaces would be more attractive leisure options for older teenagers, enabling younger children to gain control of some outdoor places.

Anna: *Greens Norton needs a youth club and some stuff for the older people [older teenagers]. They need something everyone knows the older people would like, and then the older people... wouldn't like be hanging around in one particular area. They wouldn't hang around the park, if they had somewhere else to go.*

Shannon: *You need something for the older people, basically, so that they don't just hang around and torture the little people.*

Anna, 11, and Shannon, 10, Greens Norton

Conflicts between rival groups of young people within indoor settings may be greater in urban areas. In rural South Northants, where few such commercial settings exist and access is often difficult, collisions between groups of young people are rare.

## 8.4 Conflicts between Girls and Boys

Recreational space is also contested through the rival demands of boys and girls. Those girls who were members of single sex friendship groups often reported that their use of outdoor space was regulated by the presence of boys. None of the girls discussed any confrontations in indoor spaces, perhaps reflecting the fact that more girls than boys travelled to these commercial places (Wridt, 1999). These girls, the majority of whom were aged 13 years or younger, identified certain village locations as 'boy places', where groups of teenage boys would often congregate. When these boys were around, girls regarded these spaces as unsafe and undesirable.

Particular places, such as playing fields and recreation grounds, were commonly described as 'boy places'. Here groups of teenage boys would congregate, to play football, smoke and chat. No 'girl places' were identified by the participants, suggesting that where boys gain social control over play space, many girls feel compelled to stay outside these 'boundaries'.



*I think the rec. [recreation ground] is a lot more for boys than girls. Boys play football and basketball there.*

*Joy, 13, Towcester*

Plate 8.14 The basketball court at the recreation ground, Towcester.

Hope: *The rec. 's [recreation ground] not that safe really is it?*

Natalie: *I'm not allowed to go there.*

Justine: *And normally all the boys hang around there.*

*Hope, Natalie and Justine, 13, Towcester*

Sophie: *Some of the older boys made ramps down the bottom of the road. And they used to hang around there.*

Jessica: *They'd skateboard there.*

Sophie: *But now they go to the tree houses.*

Jessica: *I think the tree house is quite good, as they stay out of the way.*

*Sophie, 13 and Jessica, 12, Tiffield*

*The girls don't really have a hang out place like the boys do [the boys have a tree house]. They just go to each other's houses...You never see them out unless they are walking to each other's houses.*

*Sophie, 13, Tiffield*

Chloe: *[Boys' places are] the dens across the road.*

FT: *Do the boys not allow girls to go there, or do the girls choose not to go there?*

Chloe: *Sometimes, when they're not there, we go in. And when they're there we don't go in, because the boys will just fight with us and tell us to get out 'cos they like to hang around there.*

FT: *Are there any places where just girls hang out?*

Chloe: *No. Just on the path, they like sitting on the path.*

*Chloe, 11, Litchborough*

The girls responded in similar ways to conflict with groups of boys as to confrontations with groups of older teenagers. Around one in three girls *avoided* areas where groups of boys gather. Instead of actively contesting their right to use these spaces, the girls preferred to spend their outdoor time on the move, choosing to 'walk around the village' rather than staying in one place. There is a contradiction here between the dynamic nature of girls' outdoor behaviour and the wishes of their parents to 'know exactly where they are'. Around one in three of the girls *compromised* by choosing certain times of day to visit locations when they knew that the groups of boys would not be there (Valentine 1989; 1992).

Anna: *[Boys] hang around the village green. Sometimes you can get scared to walk to the shop... because you know they're there.*

Shannon: *If you're on your own... then you get really scared.*

Anna: *You don't even want to walk past. When the boys start to leave, they all live in different places around the village so you can see them heading off in different directions. It's like "shall I go that way? shall I go that way?" so I can avoid them.*

Anna, 11, and Shannon, 10, Greens Norton

*We went on a picnic the other day, down by the river, because we went to Greens Norton. We cycled to Greens Norton and when we got there this group of boys kept nicking our bikes and that. And we just decided to leave.*

Natalie, 13, Towcester

Around one in three girls did not describe any conflicts with groups of boys. For these girls, many of whom were aged 14 or 15 years, there is nothing sordid or unusual in mixing with boys. To them, hanging out on the sidelines, "watching the talent" (Jodie, 13, Towcester) is a natural part of growing-up. These girls often choose to visit locations where groups of boys often gather in order to socialize with them. Perhaps through a mirroring of parental attitudes, there is a perception amongst some of the girls who belong to single sex friendship groups that those who hang out in mixed gangs are not 'proper' girls. Terms like 'tarty', 'mature' and 'rough' are used as negative labels to symbolize a social distancing. By immersing themselves in acts and behaviours that provide credence to the masculinity of boys, these girls are seen as socially undesirable and 'cheap'.



## 8.5 Space, Place and Conflict

Contrary to the rural idyll, country childhoods do not necessarily involve spatial freedom and freedom from adult surveillance. Much of the idyll is built around the notion of freedom of movement in the countryside, with children spending time in the open countryside of fields, streams and woodland. The fact that so few young girls engage in this activity means that young people often have to share their play spaces with adults and other groups of young people and that conflict is inevitable. Anxiety, tension and disharmony appear to be commonplace, arising from conflicts between rival groups over the social ownership of recreational spaces.

Conflicts between adults and young people over the use of both outdoor and indoor spaces appear to be linked to the 'rules of the neighbourhood' (Cahill, 2000), those invisible yet implicit social understandings of what behaviour is acceptable. These rules serve a disciplinary function that prevents disruption to the social order, keeping young people invisible to maintain the status quo (Cahill, 2000). Where young people challenge these adult-defined rules of behaviour, conflict and collision are the inevitable outcomes.

Rival groups of young people also define spaces of acceptability, with dominant groups using 'social scenting' to mark and reinforce territories. Using a form of 'spatial apartheid' (Wyn and White, 1997), dominant groups of often older teenagers exclude others from that space. Bullying, especially verbal intimidation, is used to reinforce the social ownership of space. Antagonism and displacement are the outcomes of rivalry between groups of young people. Although some young girls are keen to find ways to share spaces, many others retreat from sites of conflict.

The conflicts described between groups of boys and girls suggest that, although girls may be habitual users of street environments (Matthews *et al.*, 1999), the ways in which they use and experience space differ from those of boys. For many girls the presence of groups of boys in public spaces such as recreation grounds discourages them from using such spaces themselves. These girls argue that boys are dominant users of outdoor recreational spaces and that it is difficult for girls to obtain autonomous social space in these circumstances. Yet other girls are willing to share spaces with boys, even though in so doing they risk being negatively labelled by their peers.

In their accounts of conflicts over the use of recreational spaces, both the girls and their mothers drew upon notions of Self and Other, illustrating that rural life is fractured along numerous lines of difference (Philo, 1992). In conflicts between young people and adults, young people are sometimes viewed as Other, being out of place and defiling the landscape (Cresswell, 1996; Sibley, 1992; 1997), and this demonstrates unequal positions of power and authority. Groups of young people also define 'acceptable' behaviours, and through marking and reinforcing the social ownership of space identify Same and Other. By excluding groups or individuals deemed Other, these notions are strengthened. Issues of identity are also indicated by conflicts between girls and boys. Young girls, as a social group, may consider themselves to have different leisure preferences to boys. Individual girls may also seek to identify themselves as different from other girls who display different place behaviours. For instance, those girls who share recreational spaces with groups of boys risk being negatively labelled - Othered - by their peers.

The types of conflicts and collisions described here are commonplace in urban and suburban areas (see for example, Matthews, forthcoming; Matthews *et al.*, 1999; 2000a; Percy-Smith and Matthews, 2001; Skelton, 2000; 2001). However, some distinctly rural aspects have been identified. With the withdrawal of so much open countryside from public access (Shoard, 1980) and a lack of formal recreational space in many villages, adults and young people, and different groups of young people, frequently come into contact, and so collisions would seem inevitable. In rural settings adults often know young people by name and thus are able to use the threat of reporting back to parents any 'unacceptable' behaviour. Further, given the high visibility of groups within the rural environment, the anti-social behaviour of a minority of young people may lead to all young people being viewed as troublemakers.

This chapter has focused on the ways in which social space is contested between a number of user groups. It has been shown that the locational factors, diversity in family background and individual differences explored in Chapter 7 do not in themselves allow a full picture of the influences on girls' use of recreational space to be seen. It has been demonstrated that social relations between different groups of young people, and between young people and adults, also have an effect. In the following chapter notions of risk and safety are explored in order to understand more fully the range of factors that influences girls' experiences of growing up in the countryside.

## Chapter 9 Spaces of Risk and Safety

### 9.1 Introduction

The idyllised countryside is commonly understood to be a safe place for children, where they are free to run across fields and through woods, and are able to explore distant hills and forests (Aitken, 1994; Jones, 1997a; Valentine, 1997a). The countryside is often imagined to be a safe environment and is contrasted with images of the dangerous, crime-ridden spaces of the city (Williams, 1985). Ward (1990b) details a rich popular literature of country childhoods which promotes a 'purified identity' of rural childhood. The rural is commonly understood to be the optimal setting for innocent childhood, with country children perceived to be protected from 'urban evils'. There is general nostalgia for an imagined past in which children played safely throughout a carefree innocent childhood (Jackson and Scott, 1999), although this nostalgia is particularly prevalent with regard to country childhoods, with the rural commonly portrayed as a place where the 'golden age' of childhood still exists (Scott *et al.*, 1998).

This imagining of rural childhoods sits awkwardly with contemporary concerns about young people's safety in public space (Valentine, 1997a). Today we live in a climate of heightened risk awareness. The murder of toddler James Bulger in 1993 was the stimulus for a broad public debate about the nature of childhood. It occurred in an urban setting, strengthening the image of the city as a place of risk. In 2000 a young girl, Sarah Payne, was murdered in West Sussex. This crime may be an important turning point in the notion of the countryside as a place of safety, as 8 year old Sarah was abducted in a rural setting. Media coverage of the case contrasted the idyllic rural environment with the details of the crime, questioning how such an incident could occur in this 'safe' setting (Harvey, 2000a; 2000b; 2000c; MacKean, 2000). The media attention paid to this case may be creating a new perception of the countryside as a place of risk.

Media reporting of attacks upon children, particularly when these have occurred within 'rural' settings, has meant that some parents no longer feel confident that their children are safe anywhere. Valentine (1997a) has neatly expressed the rural dilemma:

"on the one hand, the rural is supposed to be an idyllic, safe place for children to grow up; on the other hand, the countryside, like urban space, is potentially fraught with dangers from strangers, traffic and so on" (p. 138).

The ways in which both young girls and their mothers define spaces of risk are explored in this chapter, with attention paid to the sexualization of risk and how this impacts upon girls' use of space. First, 'risk' is defined and differences between 'social' and 'environmental' fears are highlighted. Second, girls' perceptions of 'safe' or 'unsafe' places are explored, and fears of gangs, stranger-danger and traffic hazards are revealed. Third, the risk anxieties of a group of mothers are identified, and their perceptions of gangs, stranger-danger and traffic hazards are explored. Fourth, attention is paid to risks associated with 'rural' spaces. The chapter concludes by considering the impact of perceptions of risk and fear upon the everyday lifestyles of young girls growing up within a rural area. This chapter explores some emotional responses to place.

## 9.2 Defining Risk

Risk and danger are now seen to be part of the everyday experiences of young people (Green *et al.*, 2000; Roberts *et al.*, 1995). Within the geographical and sociological literature, there is considerable looseness over the use of the terms 'fear', 'risk', 'hazard' and 'danger'. Fox (1999) has argued that the term 'risk' refers to "a negative or undesirable outcome, and as such, is synonymous with the terms *danger* or *hazard*" (p. 12, emphasis in original). This definition is used in this chapter, with these three terms used interchangeably. Smith (1989) has argued that the term 'fear' means more than an awareness of crime: fear is a state of constant or intermittent anxiety, and it may be manifested in spatial perceptions and behaviour (Pain, 1997). Fear is a reaction to risks, and fear of crime is much more pervasive and diffuse than the actual experience of victimization (Burgess, 1995).

Contrary to this notion of risks being negative and undesirable, risk taking may also be perceived to be positive. Denscombe and Drucquer (1999), in their discussion of young people's willingness to take health risks, have argued that risk taking is part of the process of growing up. In this sense risk is understood to be something which must be embraced in order for young people to complete the transition to adulthood. Further, risk taking may be viewed in a favourable light by young people themselves, as it can be understood as an expression of opposition to adult control. It is important to recognize that young people and adults may have different perceptions of acceptable levels of risk and of what constitutes a risk (Scott *et al.*, 1998).

There is a paradoxical perception of children as both *at risk* and *as a risk*. Children are seen to be active, knowing and autonomous, as well as passive, innocent and dependent; as dangerous and endangered (Jackson and Scott, 1999; Scott *et al.*, 1998). This perception maps on to popular constructions of childhood and notions of children as 'angels' or 'devils'. In this context young people are viewed as either innocent victims of neglect ('angels') or junior mobsters ('devils') (Drakeford and Butler, 1998).

Drawing upon the notion of children as innocent angels, risks to children are represented as inherently more grave than risks to adults (Jackson and Scott, 1999). Risks are seen to threaten the very nature of childhood and to rob children of their innocence. With regard to risks from strangers, it is the loss of the sexual innocence of childhood that is threatened. It is almost beyond debate that adults should protect (innocent, angelic) children and that any potential risk should be taken very seriously (Jackson and Scott, 1999).

In these constructions of childhood it is often argued that young men pose *a risk* whilst young women are *at risk* (Green *et al.*, 2000). Girls are often perceived to be more vulnerable to risk, particularly sexual abuse, than boys and are understood to be less able than boys to defend themselves (Harden, 2000; Valentine, 1999c; Valentine and McKendrick, 1997). This explanation has been used in many studies to account for why girls generally experience greater spatial restrictions than boys.

The socialization of children and Western societal norms mean that girls learn to be afraid of sexual crimes in particular, and so learn to be afraid of men (Goodey, 1994). Girls are socialized to stay closer to home and to feel at risk in outdoor spaces (Blakely, 1994). The notion of girls (and women) at risk is so ingrained that even when risk is low, the idea of females as endangered in public space endures (Day, 2001; Koskela, 1997). Boldness and spatial confidence are almost taboo, with girls and women expected to be fearful when in public spaces.

The risks identified by both the girls and the mothers can be categorized into two types: 'social' and 'environmental'. Social risks are concerned with interpersonal crimes, and these include stranger-danger, drugs, conflict with gangs and bullying. Environmental risks are those which are associated with specific environments. These include traffic hazards and fears connected with 'rural' spaces such as fields and woodland.

### 9.3 Girls' Fears

In this research, the vast majority of girls perceived there to be few 'safe' places in which they could hang out within the public domain (see also, Anderson *et al.*, 1994; Harden, 2000). Indoor spaces were most often described as safe, reinforcing the notion of private space as safe and public space as dangerous. The most frequently mentioned fears were centred on specific (micro)spaces and the 'known' in the form of local gangs. Fear of the 'unknown' in the form of stranger-danger was also voiced by many young girls. Traffic hazards were also commonly mentioned.

Common Fears
Gangs
Traffic hazards (speeding traffic/narrow roads)
Stranger-danger
Poor street lighting

Table 9.1 Common fears of girls (see also Chapter 6, Figures 6.27 and 6.28).

### 9.3.1 Safe Places/Unsafe Places

As part of the in-depth discussion work the girls were asked to take photographs of the local area. The photographs were to reflect eight themes which had been highlighted by responses to the questionnaire survey: places I like; places I dislike; places I like to be alone; places I like to be with friends; safe places; unsafe places; boys' places and girls' places, and the countryside (see Chapter 5, section 5.5.2). To allow and encourage the girls to set their own agendas and talk about their own views, it was stressed that the girls should focus upon those issues most important to themselves and that they did not have to take photos for each category. Of the 315 images taken, more than one-fifth represented 'unsafe places'. In contrast, only one-tenth of the images showed 'safe places' (see Chapter 5, Table 5.12).

No variations were apparent in the number of images of safe places according to age, with 10-12 year olds and 13-15 year olds including such images in an equal measure. Some diversity was apparent, however, as regards location. Those girls resident in the villages were more likely to include photos of safe places than those resident in the market town. Several researchers have noted that children resident in rural areas draw upon the notion of the country as a safe place when compared with the city (King *et al.*, 1989; Maguire, 2001; Valentine, 1999c). It may be that the young girls who lived in the villages drew upon this idea when choosing places to portray on the photo poster.

The images reinforce the notion of private (indoor) space as safe and public (outdoor) space as dangerous (Figure 9.1). Of those photos representing safe places, 86% were of indoor environments. Approximately half of the locations characterized as safe were residential spaces, namely the family home or a friend's house. A third of the images showed indoor commercial spaces such as shops and leisure centres. The minority of images which indicated that outdoor spaces were safe all referred to 'rural' spaces such as fields and woodland.

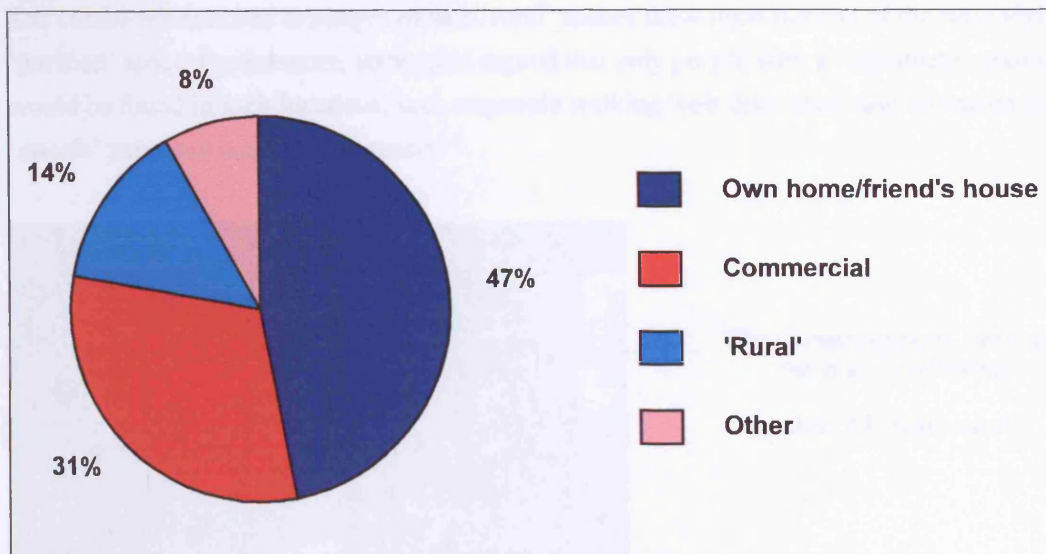


Figure 9.1 Content of photographs taken to illustrate safe places.

These spaces were deemed safe for a number of reasons. The family home and friend's houses were understood to be safe because of the 'protection' provided by parents and other well-known adults. Familiarity with these settings also added to feelings of security. (For reasons of anonymity and confidentiality the photos which accompany the remarks below are not included.)

*I think my house is safe because my mum and dad are protective.*

Jessica, 12, Tiffield

*This is a friend's house near to my own house. I often come here in the evenings as I feel it is safe.*

Claire, 15, Silverstone

*I think my street is safe because I know a lot of people who live there.*

Sophie, 13, Tiffield

The presence of other people, especially adults, in commercial settings led some girls to describe these places as safe. Building upon the idea of 'safety in numbers', these girls argued that they would be safe in spaces where there were lots of people "keeping an eye on things" (Joy, 13, Towcester). In their research with young women aged 15-21 years, Watt and Stenson (1998) found that young women often prefer commercial settings to outdoor (public) space, especially at night, as such spaces were perceived to offer a more secure environment in which to meet other young people. These environments were also viewed as minimizing the risk of unwanted or threatening male attention. The young girls in this study may describe commercial settings as safe for these reasons.



The comments attached to images of safe 'rural' spaces drew upon notions of the rural idyll as 'purified' space. Furthermore, some girls argued that only people with a 'legitimate' reason would be found in such locations, such as people walking their dog - they saw no reason for 'unsafe' people to occupy such spaces.



*The swimming pool. Very safe but it is a bit boring.*

*Joy, 13, Towcester*

*Plate 9.1 The leisure centre pool, Towcester.*



*This [supermarket] is a safe place due to many people around.*

*Sara, 15, Towcester*

*Plate 9.2 A supermarket near the centre of Towcester.*



*Countryside - safe. Nobody goes there, only people walking their dogs.*

*Hope, 13, Towcester*

*Plate 9.3 A field next to Wood Burcote Road, Towcester*

More than 95% of the images of 'unsafe places' were of outdoor spaces, reinforcing the notion of public space as a place of risk (Figure 9.2). The comments associated with the photographs on the posters indicate that around two fifths of the images represented spaces where gangs of (often older) teenagers would regularly hang out - places such as recreation grounds, playgrounds and bus shelters. A third of images showed concerns about speeding traffic and busy roads. Approximately one-tenth of the photographs were used to illustrate stranger-danger. 'Rural' spaces were identified as unsafe places in only 4% of the images. Of course, this is not to say that 'rural' spaces are necessarily safe - it may reflect the fact that few young girls regularly visit such spaces. If the question had been asked another way, however, it may be that a high proportion of girls perceived the rural to be safe.

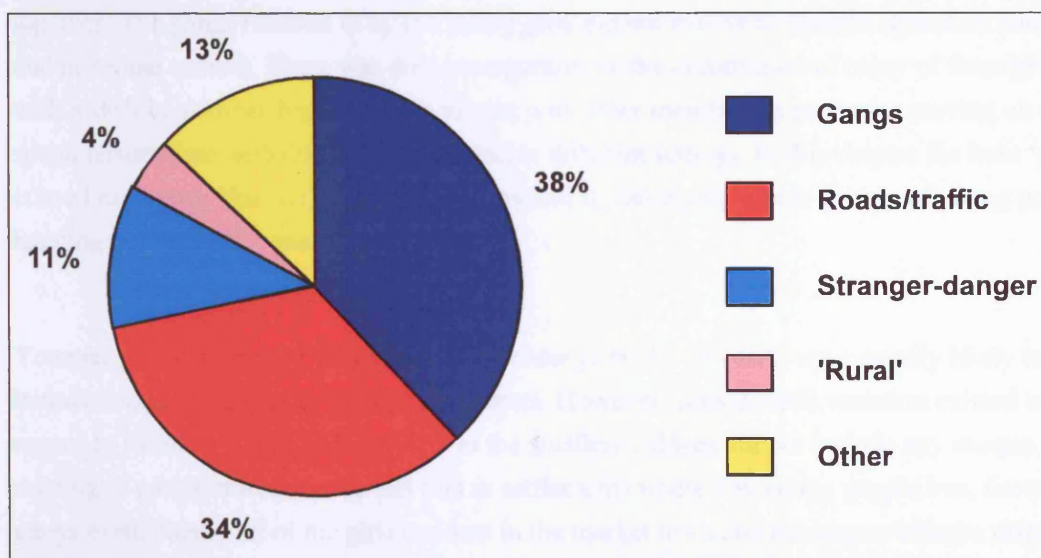


Figure 9.2 Content of photographs taken to illustrate unsafe places.

A myriad of reasons was given by the girls to justify the classification of these places as unsafe. Three reasons were most frequently given: the presence of gangs; stranger-danger, and traffic hazards.

### 9.3.2 Gangs

‘Gang’ is a value-laden term. In academic literature it is used to describe a close-knit, exclusive group of young people who show commonalities in dress and speech (Campbell, 1991; Esbensen *et al.*, 1999; Evans *et al.*, 1999). The term is emotive and is often linked to a negative stereotype of youth in urban environments (Thrasher, 1966). Members of gangs are generally perceived to be a risk rather than being at risk, although gangs may be seen as at risk from members of rival gangs. The young girls in this study frequently used the word ‘gang’ to describe those groups of young people who would regularly hang out in public spaces. Rather than being a gang in a stereotypical sense, these were groups of young people hanging out together. The gangs referred to by the young girls did not exhibit an intense close-knit nature and none had a name. There was also a temporality in the constitution of many of these groups, with a shift in membership from year to year with older members in particular moving on to spend leisure time with different people and in different settings. In this chapter the term ‘gang’ is used in the way that the young girls understand it, namely to refer to groups of young people hanging out in public spaces.

Younger girls (those aged 10-12 years) and older girls (13-15 years) were equally likely to include images of gangs on their photo posters. However, considerable variation existed with regard to location. Those girls resident in the smallest villages did not include any images relating to gangs, reflecting the fact that in settlements where few young people live, fewer gangs exist. Nearly all of the girls resident in the market town and the largest villages displayed images of gangs on their photo posters. In these larger settlements several gangs exist, increasing the likelihood that young girls would encounter these groups on a fairly regular basis.

Around three quarters of the girls who defined places where groups of teenagers regularly meet as ‘unsafe places’ referred to bullying. Confrontations and conflicts with other young people over the social ownership of space meant that for many girls these locations represented a place of risk (see also Chapter 8). Percy-Smith and Matthews (2001) identify four types of bullying: ‘barging in’ involves the disruption of children’s games; ‘extortion’ concerns incidents in which young people are coerced into some form of anti-social behaviour; ‘intimidation’ includes insults, threats and pushing; ‘name calling’ concerns verbal aggression.



In the vast majority of cases mentioned by the participants, bullying took the form of name-calling and intimidation: only one incident of physical violence was described. Bullying was a regular occurrence for approximately half of the girls who photographed these places, although those under 13 years of age were more likely to experience this than older teenagers. The potential for bullying appears to be strongly linked to the perception of such spaces as unsafe.



*This is a place that I dislike because there are always large gangs hanging around at the bus stop. It is quite dangerous here and I try to avoid coming here.*

*Claire, 15, Silverstone*

Plate 9.4 The bus shelter, Silverstone.



*Dangerous - teenagers shout things at you.*

*Hope, 13, Towcester*

Plate 9.5 Outside the supermarket coffee shop, Towcester.

Eleanor: *There's a gang around by the bus stop. It's quite intimidating when you're trying to walk past them up to the shop.*

Helen: *But the ones by the bus stop, they shout at you.*

Eleanor: *Say horrible things to you.*

Helen: *Yeah. They sometimes swear at you.*

Eleanor and Helen, 11, Silverstone

In their research in inner city and suburban areas, Percy-Smith and Matthews (2001) have argued that, although some spaces were identified in which bullying was most common, much was sporadic, spontaneous and dependent upon social encounter rather than place. In the rural spaces explored in this study, however, bullying was most common in specific places, and few incidents were reported which were dependent upon social encounters. With many settlements having little public space, gangs appeared to spend little time on the move, remaining in their own particular (micro) territory for much of the time. Thus encounters according to place are more frequent, with excluded groups of young people forced to move around the village in search for autonomous social space.

Another difference between the urban and suburban gangs described by Percy-Smith and Matthews (2001) is that in the rural settings the majority of girls knew by name every member of the dominant groups. With relatively few young people resident in these rural settlements, and contact between different age groups common within the small village schools and on the school bus, it is common that both the bullies and the victims know much about each other. As the following quotation shows, some young people may draw upon their personal knowledge of another:

Joy: *That gang were being really horrible to Amy the other day, weren't they?*

Hope: *Yeah.*

FT: *What sorts of things were they doing?*

Joy: *They were trying to make her cry on purpose, because she's quite sensitive and they know that. They just think "oh she's sensitive, we'll go for her". And they started going "oh you cried on Sports Day and you cried the other day", and it made her cry again. And then they thought it was absolutely hilarious.*

Natalie: *Yeah, they went "you always cry about everything".*

Joy, Hope and Natalie, 13, Towcester

Remarks made by two of the older girls, 15 year old Claire and 13 year old Hazel, indicate how the nature of friendships may vary according to location. Claire described how she altered her place behaviour in accordance with that of a group of her classmates. Although Claire was happy to spend time with some of these people within the context of school, the 'turf politics' of her home village meant that collisions could result in bullying. Hazel described a similar situation.

Claire: *You get quite big gangs that hang around down the rec., and you don't really want to go down there. I mean most of the people there are really nice, but you just get some people... [interrupted]*

Victoria: *Yeah, some of the people I hang around with down there are a bit [pause]. They are nice people when you get to know them properly. But if you don't really know them they treat you as outcasts. They're not really fair on people.*

Claire: *I don't go down the rec. at night. It can be really intimidating when you see this big group of people just walking towards you.*

Claire, 15, Silverstone and Victoria, 15, Towcester

*There's a gang who hangs around the rec. at night. I know some of the people there, and some are good friends, but I won't go down there. It's not safe to go there, especially at night when they hang out. If I saw them there then, I probably wouldn't even speak to them.*

Hazel, 13, Towcester

Knowledge of others may also reduce levels of fear. Where an older sibling is a member of a gang, younger siblings may feel more confident to use nearby spaces. Further, where older siblings are of a similar age to the gang members, younger children may feel more confident about using public space, safe in knowledge that the young people in the gang may be unthreatening friends of their brother or sister.

*My brother is one of the boys at the tree house. He shouts at me anyway, so I ignore him if he and his friends start having a go at me.*

Jessica, 12, Tifffield

*There are sometimes older boys at the park, playing football... My sister knows some of them, so if she's with me she'll go over and talk to them.*

Eleanor, 11, Silverstone

Around half of the girls linked the presence of gangs with smoking, underage drinking and drug abuse, perhaps indicating that they may also have been concerned about peer pressures to conform to this behaviour, or feared that they would gain a 'bad reputation' if they spent time at these places. Where the girls know many members of these gangs, peer pressure can become a real issue. Concerns about drugs were most frequently voiced by residents of the market town. Rather than seeing drugs as an 'urban' problem, these girls argued that it was a real, everyday risk in their local area. Although some girls in the larger villages referred to instances of gangs smoking and drinking, drug use was infrequently mentioned.

Alisha: *You do not want to go around there [the recreation ground] because there's a lot of dodgy people.*

Mary: *Yeah. And it's not very well lit. And there's drug dealers and stuff!*

Alisha: *Supposedly. It's kind of scary.*

Alisha, 15 and Mary, 14, Towcester

Hazel: *At night there are drunk people that walk around, especially down the rec.*

Rebecca: *The rec. 's not really safe at night because you do get people drinking and things like that. And they're people our age.*

FT: *So does it stop you going there because they are there?*

Rebecca: *Yes, at night. Because they get really bad at night.*

Hazel: *Like on a Friday night, I wouldn't go there. Even if I knew the people there I wouldn't talk to them.*

Hazel, 13, Towcester and Rebecca, 14, Potcote

Hope: *The rec. 's not that safe really, is it?*

Natalie: *No. I'm not allowed to go there.*

Justine: *And normally all the boys hang around there.*

Joy: *You hear stories of drug dealing and things like that. I don't know if they're true.*

Hope: *They're all rough down there.*

Hope, Natalie, Justine and Joy, 13, Towcester

Pain (1997) identified a series of coping strategies employed by women when in public space. These strategies for reducing risk of crime include not going out alone, being watchful when walking, avoiding certain streets and areas, and choosing certain forms of transport. Some of these strategies were embraced by those girls who wished to minimize the risk that they associated with the gangs. These include avoiding areas where gangs gather, taking different routes around the village according to where the gangs congregate, and choosing certain times of day to visit locations when they know that the gangs would not be there (see also Koskela, 1997; Pain; 1997; Valentine 1989; 1992; Warr, 1990).

In a discussion with one group of 15 year old girls a number of strategies emerged through which the girls reduced the potential risks they associated with a gang who regularly meet outside a village:

- Megan: *People hang around the Church gates and when you walk past it's not nice.*
- Louise: *No. And they smoke and drink.*
- FT: *So when these people are there do you avoid the place?*
- Mary: *No, but you just walk twice as fast.*
- Alisha: *You try not to go there.*
- Mary: *You sort of walk around them. You make sure there's a gap between you and them.*
- Megan: *You don't really want to walk past them. You avoid it if you can.*
- Alisha: *But when you have to go past them you go as quick as you can.*
- Louise: *I go the other side of the road.*
- FT: *Do they ever say anything to you as you walk past?*
- Megan: *Not normally. It may not be unsafe, but you think it is kind of unsafe because of the reputations they have.*

Megan and Louise, 15, Silverstone, Mary, 14, Towcester and Alisha, 15,  
Towcester

Similar coping strategies were detailed by Anna and Shannon, younger girls aged 10 and 11 years, suggesting that young girls of all ages use similar avoidance strategies in order to minimize the risk potential they associate with gangs. In this instance the gang in question is a group of boys who hang around on the village green just in front of the shop:

- Anna: *Sometimes you get scared to walk to the shop in the dark because you know they're there... When the boys start to leave, you can see them heading off in different directions. It's like "shall I go that way? shall I go that way?" to avoid them.*
- Shannon: *Sometimes they follow you. And when you're at the park they'll come in, and they'll push you off the swings.*

Anna, 11 and Shannon, 10, Greens Norton



Those girls who were members of single sex friendship groups - around two thirds of the girls who participated in the in-depth discussions - often reported that their use of space was regulated by the presence of boys. This finding lends support to Porteous's (1998) view that much bullying is perpetrated by boys. Places such as playing fields and recreation grounds were commonly described as 'boy places', where groups of teenage boys would congregate to play football, smoke and chat (see Chapter 8, section 8.4). When these boys are around, the girls frequently regard these spaces as unsafe and undesirable. Green *et al.* (2000) have also noted that for many girls, gangs of older boys are perceived to be a real threat.



Plate 9.6 The village green, Greens Norton.

Anna: *The boys hang around the village green. Sometimes you get scared to walk to the shop in the dark because you know they're there.*

Shannon: *And sometimes if you're on your own... and you see them all there, then you get really scared.*

Anna: *You don't even want to walk past... They shout and stuff at you.*

Shannon: *They shout and like be really nasty.*

Anna, 11, and Shannon, 10, Greens Norton

Natalie: *Groups of boys [hang out at the rec.]. They intimidate you. They just sit there and stare at you.*

Hope: *Yeah. They think they're the best. They think they rule everything.*

Natalie: *They don't really have any consideration for anyone else. Once they're there playing football then no one else exists.*

Natalie and Hope, 13, Towcester



*Quite a lot of gangs of boys hang around here. They just come here to smoke and drink, 'cos it's quite a quiet area. So quite a lot of girls stay away from here, 'cos like especially in the evening it's quite scary to come around here.*

*Claire, 15, Silverstone*

Plate 9.7      *The Infant School, Silverstone.*

The fact that the boys and girls are often well known to each other sometimes has an effect on name-calling and intimidation. In particular, some of the younger girls stated that the 'big boys' drew upon their knowledge of others to exploit their weak points, choosing to focus their banter on the subjects most likely to elicit a response from the girls. In the case of Chloe (age 11, Litchborough) derogatory comments were made about her academic record at school. Helen (11, Silverstone) described how a local gang would tease her because she is softly-spoken, alternatively shouting and whispering remarks to her. Anna (11, Greens Norton) complained that one particular gang of older boys would wolf-whistle as she walked past, making her very conscious of her body when in outdoor spaces.

As with bullying which is not gender-specific, it is not in the market town or smallest villages that knowledge-based bullying is most common: this form of bullying is most frequently described by girls resident in larger villages. It may be that the experience of bullying varies between the rural and the urban in the extent to which young people draw upon their knowledge of individuals in their banter.

The girls' notions of risk help to establish and maintain ideas about self and 'Other'. The girls see themselves as *at risk*, and the boys as posing *a risk*. Although many of the gangs referred to consist of both boys and girls, they were frequently described as 'gangs of boys'. Some of the girls used negative labels - such as 'tarty' and 'rough' - to symbolize a social distancing from those girls who belong to mixed gangs.

- FT: *Is it just boys who go there?*
- Natalie: *Some girls go there.*
- Justine: *They are all like...*
- Natalie: *Tarty. Normally quite rough girls, who do kind of pick on you a bit if you're a bit different. They are bitches, basically.*

Natalie and Justine, 13, Towcester

Those girls who belonged to these mixed groups saw nothing unusual in their behaviour. Furthermore, they rarely linked places of risk with those spaces in which groups of boys regularly congregate.

It may be that some girls used the idea of a fear of bullying to justify their own use of outdoor spaces. The vast majority of young people (71%) described themselves as an 'outdoor person'. However, closer examination of the leisure choices of girls suggests that 'indoor' leisure spaces are favoured by many and that some girls who described themselves as an 'outdoor person' actually spend a great deal of their leisure time in 'indoor' spaces (see Chapter 6, section 6.4.2 and Chapter 8, sections 8.2.2 and 8.3.2). This may be because of some social stigma associated with choosing to spend time indoors; perhaps these young people wanted to portray themselves as having an active social life in which they frequently socialized with friends outside of the home. By identifying themselves as the victims of bullies when they use outdoor spaces, the choice to spend time in 'safe', supervised indoor environments may be seen to be more socially acceptable to their peers.

### 9.3.3 Stranger-Danger

Only a small proportion of those images reflecting unsafe places related to stranger-danger, indicating that for many girls fear of the 'known' (in the form of local gangs) is greater than fear of the 'unknown'. Alleyways were frequently identified as places where strangers may be present. No 'rural' spaces, such as fields and woodland, were linked with stranger-danger. The comments associated with these images suggest that rather than fear of attack, the girls may be more concerned with feeling 'uncomfortable' because of the presence of unknown adults, whether or not these adults are dangerous. For the majority of young girls these fears appear to be based on perceptions of risk rather than actual experiences.





*I think the alley is dangerous  
because you can't see if people  
are there or not in the dark.*

*Jessica, 12, Tiffield*

Plate 9.8 An alleyway, Tiffield.



*The lay-by on the main road  
can be dangerous as drivers  
park here and you can feel  
uncomfortable when you walk  
past.*

*Louise, 15, Silverstone*

Plate 9.19 The A43, Silverstone.

It may be that the paucity of photographs linked to stranger-danger reflects a perception that stranger-danger is a risk everywhere and that particular places of risk cannot be readily identified and photographed - that stranger-danger is not amenable to photographs. However, comments made during the group discussions suggest two reasons why stranger-danger is not considered to be a significant danger by many young girls, namely that stranger-danger is an 'urban' phenomenon which is not relevant in this rural location, and that the village community provides safety and security by "keeping an eye on things and watching out for kids" (Eleanor, 11, Silverstone).

When asked whether their home village was a safe place, some of the girls compared their neighbourhood with Northampton (a nearby large town), London, and other urban areas in which they had previously been resident. Without exception these girls stated that their home rural environment was much safer than urban areas, often remarking that ‘dodgy people’, ‘weirdos’ and ‘strangers’ were to be found in towns and cities. Other studies of rural children have also highlighted this attitude (for example, Jones, 1997a; Maguire, 2001; Moran *et al.*, 1997; Valentine, 1997c).

The majority of girls who had been brought up in the country since their early years spoke positively about the safety of the rural environment. These girls viewed the countryside as a safe haven in which “there are no muggings or murders like what you see on the telly” (Shannon, 10, Greens Norton). Furthermore, several girls referred to stranger-danger crimes portrayed in the media and stated that these were not relevant in their rural home setting. In contrast with the group of mothers, none of these ‘local’ girls discussed actual instances of crime in a rural setting.

All of the girls who had recently moved to rural South Northants from an urban or suburban location voiced greater concerns about stranger-danger. These girls brought their ‘urban’ fears into the rural setting, stating that “nowhere is ever going to be totally safe” (Joy, 13, Towcester). These girls argued, however, that the likelihood of crime was less in rural areas.

*I used to live in London. It's polluted and there's loads of robberies and things there. And there was a man who'd hang around at night and if he saw a kid he'd scare it and stuff. So it's safer here.*

Gemma, 11, Whittlebury

*If you're in the city, then it's like quite unsafe. I think in a village you're a bit more free to do what you want, because there's no weirdos around.*

Claire, 15, Silverstone

Hope: *Compared to Northampton, Towcester is extremely safe.*

Joy: *Everywhere has dangerous places.*

Natalie: *But if you're walking through the streets in London, then you're a lot more cautious than you are walking through the streets of Towcester. Compared to London, Towcester is really safe. Even Northampton is safe compared to London.*

Joy: *But nowhere is ever going to be totally safe.*

Natalie: *There's quite a lot of dodgy people about [in Northampton], in alleyways and that.*

Hope: *And strangers.*

Hope, Joy and Natalie, 13, Towcester

For these girls the concept of stranger-danger is linked to urban spaces and deemed alien to the rural. Two of the girls, Sophie and Jessica (aged 13 and 12, Tiffield), described an incident when they believed they were being followed by a stranger. They had found the incident distressing but had not told their parents about it as it would be dismissed as “just their imagination” because “that sort of thing doesn’t happen here”. (This ‘not in my backyard’ attitude contrasts strongly with the views of many mothers, as is demonstrated below.)

Sophie: *There was a man in a maroon car and it looked like he was following us. When we went one way he would turn around and follow us.*

Jessica: *And he just kept following us.*

Sophie: *It was really scary. He just kept following.*

Jessica: *And we went into the phone box and then he went, really fast. So we walked home.*

FT: *What did your parents say about it?*

Jessica: *I didn’t tell them.*

Sophie: *I didn’t tell them.*

Jessica: *They’d probably say “it was your imagination” because that sort of thing doesn’t really happen here.*

Sophie, 13 and Jessica, 12, Tiffield

Around one quarter of the girls drew upon notions of the rural idyll in their explanations of the levels of safety in their home village. These young people described tight-knit communities and a feeling that “people look out for each other” (Helen, 11, Silverstone). In these rural communities, they argued, strangers could be easily identified and avoided and young people could roam the village confident in the knowledge that if they were in trouble there would be someone friendly close at hand.

Reay and Lucey (2000a; 2000b), in their research with young people in an inner city environment, also found that young people drew upon notions of familiarity and local knowledge when describing feelings of safety and security in their home area. However, unlike the girls in rural South Northants, these young people stated that their in-depth knowledge of the local environment, rather than familiarity with local residents, made them feel secure. Fear of strangers may be different in a rural environment due to scale. Particularly in the smallest settlements there are many familiar people around and few real strangers.

*I know most people in the village.*

Chloe, 11, Litchborough

Sophie: *In a village like Tiffeld<sup>1</sup> you know all the people. I know nearly all these people up this road. And I feel safe.*

Jessica: *You know them. You don't really know them all well, but if you're in trouble they'll help you.*

Sophie, 13 and Jessica, 12, Tiffeld

Helen: *Most of the time when you meet somebody you either smile at them and say "hello" or you have a talk, a chat.*

Eleanor: *Yeah, because it's basically just people in the village. The only time you get people asking you questions is when the Grand Prix is on and people come past you in their cars and ask you where it is.*

Helen and Eleanor, 11, Silverstone

*In villages you've got more freedom to do stuff. And if you were in trouble, then just walking down the street my parents would see someone that would know. If you see people when you're out then you know the other person. In a city you would hardly know anybody.*

Sara, 15, Towcester

These notions of community safety were drawn upon by 10 year old Shannon as she described an incident in which her sister believed that she was followed home by a stranger. Shannon stated that the village was safe and that if she did encounter a stranger she would be able to "knock on someone's door" or "go into someone's house" because "we know most people in the village". Shannon's remarks suggest that for some young people the notions of community and safety are sufficiently strong that reports of encounters with strangers do not necessarily engender fear.

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1 There is a young offenders' unit located in the village of Tiffeld. Although Sophie and Jessica stated here that their village was safe and that they knew many of the residents, on another occasion the girls spoke about their concerns that "someone could escape" from the unit (Sophie, 13).

Shannon *My sister, a little while ago, she got followed in the dark. So mum always says that if you see anyone, if you're walking for quite a way and they're just walking the same way as you, either knock on someone's door, or if there's a gate nearby go in through it and act as if that's your home. Or if you're walking along where there's no gates or anything, then put your head down and just walk quicker. Just leg it, basically, but watch out if you're crossing roads and stuff.*

FT: *So is your sister more nervous when she's outside now?*

Shannon: *No, it doesn't worry her anymore. 'Cos it was quite a while ago and she knows that there's not anyone about like that now. We know most people around the village anyway, so if anything did happen, she'd just go into someone's house.*

Shannon, 10, Greens Norton

The perceptions of stranger-danger held by the girls help to reinforce notions of private space as safe and public space as unsafe. Although many of the girls voiced concerns about stranger-danger, it was seen by most to be an urban-based risk. These girls drew upon idyllic images of the rural community to support their view that “that sort of thing doesn’t really happen” in the countryside.

#### **9.3.4 Traffic Hazards**

Environmental fears refer to those risks associated with specific environments rather than interpersonal dangers. Although these fears may be linked with interpersonal crime, it is the setting which is crucial to the identification of these risks. A particular environmental hazard - traffic - was frequently referred to by all girls. Their concerns were based on one issue, namely the risk of injury from cars and other vehicles.

Three factors were identified by the girls as contributing to a real risk of traffic-related accidents. First, many referred to the speed at which traffic travels through the villages, arguing that the speed limit was not enforced and that cars would regularly travel at up to twice the speed limit. Second, narrow lanes, winding roads and a lack of pavement contributed to a fear that pedestrians would not be highly visible. Several of the girls stated that crossing the road in order to reach the shop or school bus stop was difficult as the winding roads did not enable them to check that the way was clear before stepping out onto the road. Concern about narrow roads was most commonly mentioned by those resident in the smallest settlements.



*Litchborough is an unsafe place. The speed limit in the village is supposed to be 30 miles per hour, but some of the cars are doing like 70 or 60. And there's lots of lorries and tractors.*

Chloe, 11, Litchborough

*When we go to the bus stop in the morning we have to cross this road, and we can't see either way. And there's cars that come along fast.*

Nicola, 11, Whittlebury

Anna: *We have to cross the road to get to school. And the cars, they're meant to go at about 30 miles an hour. But you step out and you can suddenly see a car going like 'zoom' next to you at about a hundred miles an hour.*

Shannon: *... The thing is, the road bends and you can't see round to your left. You can't see. And where we cross you can't really see to your right very much either.*

Anna: *My mum, always every morning, even though it sounds babyish and everything, she always has to walk me over the road [to the bus stop] or she won't let me go to school.*

Anna, 11 and Shannon, 10, Greens Norton

Third, in one village in particular, concerns were raised about the volume of traffic on the roads. The village of Silverstone is bisected by a major trunk road. (A bypass is currently being built in order to divert traffic away from the centre of the village.) All the girls resident in Silverstone commented about the road and the obvious dangers associated with it. Several girls remarked that they were not allowed to cross the road in order to visit friends because of the difficulties in crossing the road safely.



*This is the A43. I don't feel safe coming here. As you can see, it's very busy, so I don't come here at all. I mean, the only time when I'd come across here would be like when I was with a parent or a friend.*

Claire, 15, Silverstone



Plate 9.10 The A43 at an entrance to the village, Silverstone.

*The A43 is really dangerous. I'm not allowed to cross that road.*

Helen, 11, Silverstone

Traffic fears restrict the leisure opportunities of some young girls. Busy roads and speeding traffic in one location, Towcester, were described as barriers to girls being able to visit a new fast food restaurant which is situated at the edge of the market town. Busy roads also prevented some girls from spending time with friends who lived 'on the other side of the road'. The risks of crossing the road were deemed by some to be too great, meaning that girls were reliant upon parents to provide transport in order for them to visit their friends.

Hazel: *Everyone wants to go up to [fast food restaurant] but because of the road it's really dangerous. It's a shame that it's not closer into Towcester instead of out on the main road.*

Rebecca: *Or they should get a proper path there or something.*

Hazel: *You feel like you're going to be run over. There's all these lorries going around there.*

Hazel, 13, Towcester and Rebecca, 14, Potcote

*I can only go to my friend's house if mum takes me. I know it's only half a mile away, but she doesn't like me crossing the main road.*

Megan, 15, Silverstone

Although there has been a 25-fold increase in traffic since 1923, now half as many children are killed in road accidents (Hillman and Adams, 1992). However, places which have a good accident record often reflect the fact that children are forbidden to play in the street or cross the road. The spatial boundaries set by parents are often bordered by roads which children must not cross. Traffic dangers are seen to be one aspect in which parents can influence the safety of their children. By forbidding their children to play in the street or cross busy roads they can reduce the likelihood of their children being involved in a traffic accident.

The fears reported by the girls, particularly those associated with the presence of gangs, suggests that many young girls are not confident users of public space. Some girls rely heavily on their parents to provide transport to leisure opportunities and many are always accompanied when in public spaces. The perceived risks which make this a 'necessity' may result in these girls failing to learn how to negotiate space, being dependent on others when negotiating public space.

## 9.4 Mothers' Fears

Many adults find it difficult to let go of those myths and stereotypes that define public spaces as places of danger for young girls (Matthews *et al.*, 2000c). Skelton (2000) has argued that teenage girls in the Rhondda Valleys of South Wales can be conceptualized as occupying the ambiguous position of “being the ‘wrong’ gender and being in the ‘wrong’ place” (p. 80). Where girls occupy public spaces, they may be seen by adults as being the ‘wrong’ gender in the ‘wrong’ place, being exposed to risks in such ‘unsafe’ spaces.

The group of mothers were asked to rank twelve potential sources of danger with regard to their concerns for their children’s safety in the local area: farm machinery, rivers, bullying, quarries, gangs, lack of street lighting, busy roads, drugs or alcohol misuse, woods, stranger-danger, narrow roads, older children (see Appendix C). (These categories were drawn from the themes recurrent in the questionnaire survey and in-depth discussions.) Within this group there was both consensus and a divergence of views, reinforcing the notion that the label ‘mothers’ marks a variety of perspectives and experiences.

In contrast to the views of the girls, the mothers’ greatest fear was stranger-danger (Table 9.2). Many studies in both urban and rural settings have also highlighted that stranger-danger is the primary concern of many parents (Harden, 2000; Jackson and Scott, 1999; Moran *et al.*, 1997; Valentine, 1997a). Concerns about gangs and traffic were also widespread. When discussing concerns for their children’s safety none of the mothers identified any indoor (private) spaces as unsafe places. These parents externalize risk, seeing public spaces as places of risk.

Common Fears
Stranger-danger
Traffic hazards (speeding traffic/narrow roads)
Drugs/alcohol misuse
Gangs

Table 9.2      *Common Fears of Mothers.*

### 9.4.1 Gangs

Concern over gangs was not as widespread amongst the mothers as amongst the girls. Around one third of the mothers stated that gangs were not an issue as regards their children's safety. These mothers, all of whom were from professional households, viewed gangs as 'fairly harmless' and as posing no threat. The fact that many gang members were known to both the girls and their mothers was important to this, as the mothers did not perceive any threat from young people with whom they were familiar and whose families they knew. This attitude contrasts strongly with the view of many of the girls, indicating that mothers' perceptions of risk may vary considerably to those of their children. It also hints that when negotiating home ranges a social fear which may be very real to young people may not be considered by those setting spatial boundaries.

*I think the sort of youth that you have hanging around in a village is actually out to have a laugh rather than to be vicious. I mean, yeah, you see them hanging around in groups in the village and they do jeer at you and things, but I think it's a more light-hearted thing. Whilst the gangs in towns tend to be more intent. And I think that gangs in towns may not intend for something nasty to happen or violence or whatever, but for some reason it would appear to happen more readily. I don't think they're a problem. I think they're fairly harmless. I know there's been times when the bus shelter has been burnt down and things, but I actually don't think it was particularly malicious. And young people do like to congregate together.*

Mrs Ross, Silverstone

*Where we lived before my children were bullied by gangs of older children when they were out playing... But that's certainly never been a problem here. But I think that's partly because they don't go out. But on the other hand, I've never seen situations in the village where that sort of thing was happening.*

Mrs Thompson, Silverstone

One of the mothers dismissed the idea of gangs being a threat to young people. Mrs Clarke described an incident in which her youngest daughter had come into conflict with a gang of older teenagers. Rather than seeing this as an indication of an unsafe area for her child to visit - a view strongly expressed by her daughter - Mrs Clarke believed that a little teasing was no reason for her daughter to avoid the site.

*The kids just watch other children using the skateboard ramp. I think they're a bit scared actually! And recently, apparently, some youngsters teased them and said that there was a sign saying 'no under 16s on this ramp' and they told them that the police had been around checking. And they actually believed this and I said "oh no, I think you've been teased".*

Mrs Clarke, Towcester

Like the girls, one third of the mothers linked gang membership with drugs and alcohol and voiced concern about this. These mothers tended to be middle-class professionals, many of whom were teachers who thus had experience of working with a range of young people. Places where gangs regularly meet were seen by this group of mothers as places of risk in terms of peer pressures upon children to indulge in these sorts of behaviours. The mothers discouraged or forbade their children from visiting such places, seeing these sites as places where their children could become corrupted through the influence of 'undesirable' young people.

*I don't think the parks are safe for them to go to at the moment. There's a lot of vandalism there. There's lots of bullying and drugs. Down by the shop there are a lot of problems with gangs and drugs. I don't think I'd want them hanging around there!*

Mrs Brown, Towcester

*Gangs are a worry because of links with drugs and alcohol. And they're often around Towcester, you know, drinking lager and things. And I think it's quite intimidating for children. I wouldn't let [10 year old daughter] go to the supermarket at six o'clock in the evening even if it is light because there's gangs around there then.*

Mrs Blackwell, Towcester

*The gang that meets at the park, they drink and smoke, and their behaviour can be quite appalling. They do vandalism and things. I wouldn't let my children hang around there.*

Mrs Taylor, Whittlebury

One mother spoke in detail about this issue. However, where she differed to the other mothers was in her decision not to deny her teenage children access to spaces where gangs regularly meet. Mrs Bailey, a middle-class professional, argued that children could be exposed to drug and alcohol abuse in many settings and she relied upon the fact that she had instilled strong principles in her children. She stated that her children knew the dangers associated with drugs and alcohol, and were able to make informed decisions about whether they should participate in such activities or use spaces where gangs regularly meet.

One third of the mothers viewed gangs in a similar way to their daughters. This group of mothers stated that groups of (often older) teenagers could be intimidating. Some of the mothers also recognized that the spatial behaviour of their children was to an extent governed by the presence of gangs, drawing upon issues of bullying and verbal intimidation.

*I don't actually have too many concerns that they're getting threatened by other people or gangs or what have you, but I know that it does sometimes restrict their movement of where they go, as to who else is around and about.*

Mrs Lucas, Silverstone

*I think bullying is a problem. Not only in schools, but if they do go down to the park and there's children there that perhaps don't live up this area. There is a lot of bullying going on and sometimes they won't go down there because of it.*

Mrs Lewis, Silverstone

*They feel threatened, I would say, by older children. Certainly [16 year old son] has felt that... Teenagers haven't got anything to do so they hang around in their gangs or groups, and that can be threatening itself. And they're bored so they might pick on somebody who looks weaker than them who just happens to be wandering past... Gangs are threatening to children. I think it is a problem. It certainly threatens younger children, and they find it not so easy to go places where the gangs are.*

Mrs Bailey, Towcester

Although gangs were considered to be a real threat by many young girls, their mothers often displayed contrary views. For many mothers, gangs are not a major threat. Where members of gangs are known to them, many mothers fail to perceive any risk; the 'known' is not seen to be threatening. In those instances where mothers do fear gangs, concerns are equally shared between drugs and alcohol and bullying. This contrasts with the views of the girls, whose main concern is intimidation.

#### **9.4.2 Stranger-Danger**

Stranger-danger was seen by around two thirds of the mothers as being a real risk within the rural environment. (Only one of the mothers did not perceive stranger-danger to be a risk at all.) Rather than being viewed as an urban phenomenon, these mothers stated that it was a risk to all children - girls and boys, pre-teens and teenagers. The majority of the mothers did not identify specific places where the potential for stranger-danger may be greatest. Instead, it was viewed as a problem which may occur anywhere: it was regarded as a generic rather than a place-specific risk.

*Stranger-danger, I think that's a worry anywhere. You know, it is dangerous for children to walk the streets and to go anywhere. That is a concern, all the time, wherever your children are.*

Mrs Blackwell, Towcester

*Stranger-danger, that's the unpredictable one. It can happen anywhere.*

Mrs Lucas, Silverstone

*Stranger-danger is something that you may not expect but it can happen. Although I consider it fairly safe here, I might be slightly optimistic. You know, I'm sure that it can be a problem.*

Mrs Bailey, Towcester

Around one quarter of the mothers did associate stranger-danger with particular environments which are distinctly 'rural'. Some features of the rural landscape, such as woods and open agricultural land, were seen to make girls particularly vulnerable to stranger-danger. These spaces were described either as isolated and secluded, prime territory for people to hide, or as places which might attract strangers such as New Age Travellers. Mothers from small villages, large villages and the market town were equally likely to refer to these spaces, indicating that these concerns are not dependent upon any particular type of rural setting.

*I don't particularly like the area by the river very much. It always strikes me as places where people could hide. It's quite secluded really. Not many houses there. So I wouldn't be too keen on them going there unless there was a big group of them.*

Mrs Clarke, Towcester

*The woods, I don't like them going up there... I think what brought it to the fore was the New Age Travellers. Probably quite harmless, but you don't know who's lurking amongst them.*

Mrs Lewis, Silverstone

*I know it's true that the woods in Silverstone do attract people who you may not want your children to socialize with, shall we say.*

Mrs Thompson, Silverstone

*Well it's not the woods themselves that are unsafe, it's who's in them.*

Mrs Hughes, Whittlebury



Comments made by some of the mothers suggest that they perceive risk to be gendered. Girls are described as being more vulnerable to stranger-danger than boys: they are seen to be passive, innocent, and in need of protection from active, independent and aggressive males. The following quotations, from mothers who have both teenage daughters and teenage sons, illustrate what Scott *et al.* (1998) refer to as the sexualization of risk.

Mrs Brown: *For [son] I would say the biggest danger is gangs... For [daughter] I would say the biggest danger is probably stranger-danger.*

FT: *Why do you say that?*

Mrs Brown: *Well at that age, you know, young girls out on their own. I suppose you worry who's about.*

Mrs Brown, Towcester

Mrs Ross: *When [daughter] goes running in the late afternoon or early evening, I do feel happier if her brother goes with her.*

FT: *Do you have different worries with [daughter] than her brother?*

Mrs Ross: *Definitely. I mean, when I talk to you about it I think "this is completely illogical, because they're both young people". I just feel she's more vulnerable to, I suppose, men lurking in the field or something... I'm sure that she's more than capable of probably out-running them, but I guess that's what I worry about her. But equally I ought to worry about [son]. I mean, I don't feel happy, I wouldn't feel happy if he was out in the dark or something like that. I just feel that a male is less of a target.*

Mrs Ross, Silverstone

None of the mothers who had sons who were younger than their daughters talked about gendered risks in this way. These mothers voiced concerns about attacks from strangers for both their sons and daughters. Valentine (1996a; 1996b; 1997a; 1999c) has argued that publicity given to cases involving the sexual assault and murder of boys has heightened parents' anxieties about the safety of boys in public space. Valentine has suggested that parents' attitudes towards boys' and girls' vulnerability in public space may be changing. From the data gathered in this study it appears that, although less gender-specific care-taking practices may exist with regard to young girls and boys, traditional views of teenage girls being more at risk than teenage boys remain.

A fear of 'outsiders' was voiced by half of the mothers, the majority of whom lived in villages. Like the parents in Valentine's (1997a) survey, the mothers spoke of a fear of strangers coming to the rural area from the city. The uncertainty of who may be in the village and the surrounding fields and woodland undermines popular imaginings of the rural as a safe and predictable place. The idyll is threatened by these urban intruders.

*There seem to be a lot of people we don't know walking down the road.*

Mrs Brown, Towcester

*Lorries drive through here and perhaps stop off for a while for a break. You never know who they are.*

Mrs Lewis, Silverstone

*I suppose here the people in the village tend to be people who come from the village... But you could always be in the wrong place at the wrong time, get someone passing through.*

Mrs Hughes, Whittlebury

*You know full well that once they've turned that corner anyone could come along and pick them up and they're off. You wouldn't have a clue where they were because it is a through road.*

Mrs Taylor, Whittlebury

The mothers contrasted the risk posed by urban intruders with the increased safety provided by the local community: they rationalized their perceptions by mobilizing notions of urban-rural dichotomies. Approximately three-quarters of the mothers argued that the community played an important role in enabling them to manage their children's safety, offering additional surveillance both of children's behaviour and that of strangers, and providing a safe haven if dangers were encountered. These mothers drew upon notions of a community idyll in which all local (rural) residents are vigilant against threats from those outside the community.

*I think if the children were wandering around Towcester and there was a problem, then there are houses that they could go into, people that they know. People are more, I think probably more protective [in rural areas]. I mean, certainly in Towcester people speak to you... I think that makes it safer. And you know when there's somebody - well no, you don't always know when there's a stranger about - but it's safer because the children know safe places, safe houses, safe people about.*

Mrs Bailey, Towcester

*Now the girls are growing up, the family in Banbury [about 20 miles away] wanted them to go and stay for the weekend. And I was an absolute nervous wreck, because I was thinking "they're not used to this [being in a town]". And it is so different from here, because here they can just go anywhere and in Banbury it's much more dangerous for the children to go out. The thought terrified me. They're not used to it. They don't know the area. They've never had to be in that situation, and they wouldn't know people like they do here.*

Mrs Giles, Litchborough

*I think it's reasonably safe here in the fact that a lot of people know each other, and a lot of people know your children so they would know if there was a problem. So that would probably improve the safety aspect.*

Mrs Clarke, Towcester

Mothers who had most recently moved to South Northants were least likely to draw upon notions of community spirit and a 'shared' surveillance of their children. It may be that an important criterion here is not the size of the community or the fact that it is rural. Rather, parents' own familiarity with the location and its inhabitants appears to play a crucial role. This idea maps onto the attitudes of the girls, with knowledge of local people supporting their view that they are relatively secure in their home village.

#### **9.4.3 Traffic Hazards**

The traffic hazards identified by the girls - speeding traffic, narrow lanes and a lack of pavement, and the volume of traffic passing through villages - were also highlighted by the group of mothers.

*The cars travel so fast around here. They think this street is a through road not a cul-de-sac so they come screeching down here at top speed.*

Mrs Brown, Towcester

*Going down to the park, that worries me. I don't like the lack of pavement there because some points I know how fast the cars are going, and I know that if kids are walking by the side they can be very vulnerable on some of those turns. And when it's dark you can't see them. It's horrendous. It's horrendous. It is dangerous, but rather than it being a lack of pavements I think it's a lack of control of the speed of traffic.*

Mrs Lucas, Silverstone

*Being situated on the A43, busy roads has to be my main concern. I mean, they're 15 now and I know they do know how to cross the road... but in the morning when they're going to catch the bus [to school] they still don't go on their own. We still take them to get them across because it is impossible to get across that road, there's so much traffic.*

Mrs Ross, Silverstone

However, some mothers raised another issue - concern over the large vehicles associated with agriculture. This hazard was only mentioned by mothers resident in villages. Agricultural vehicles were seen to pose similar risks to other vehicles, such as speeding and poor visibility of pedestrians. This demonstrates a purely 'rural' aspect to the environmental concerns of these mothers.

*Farm machinery is a worry - not farm machinery in farms where children are likely to go and play, because I don't think they would do that - but as more of a road hazard. Because I do very definitely see road hazards as an issue.*

Mrs Thompson, Silverstone

*We have a lot of grain lorries travelling through the village. This is the main route up to Farthingstone, and in the summer, as you can imagine, with all the grain lorries it's quite busy. And then you have all the tractors as well. It's quite dangerous for the kids to play out. The lorries shoot up the lanes like there's no tomorrow. So if a child's just crossing the road, you know, it's just dangerous. They [the lorry drivers] don't bother looking! It doesn't matter how many times you tell them [children] to be safe, it could be them getting hurt.*

Mrs Giles, Litchborough

A number of mothers, regardless of their social status or where they lived, described how the perceived risks associated with traffic influence the boundaries they set upon their daughters' use of public space. These mothers described how they forbade their children to visit certain locations, such as the fast food restaurant situated in the outskirts of the market town, where traffic hazards were seen to be severe. Although many of these mothers complained about the volume of traffic upon rural roads, they themselves added to this problem by using their private cars to transport their children to places deemed too dangerous to reach on foot.

*I think traffic dangers are the essential dangers here. I mean, they are the most likely things that are going to happen to children in Silverstone - that they're going to get run over. And especially obviously with the main road, which very much divides the village into two halves. [Daughter] has got a friend who lives on the other side of the A43 and she never goes to see her except if I take her in the car, because simply crossing the road is life-threatening.*

Mrs Thompson, Silverstone

*The older ones [daughters aged 13 and 16] are allowed [to cross the main road to get to the fast food restaurant] because they'll be able to do it in an appropriate place and the right way. But it's not something I'd particularly encourage. I mean, I'd be more likely to drive them through the drive-through bit than say "oh yes, go and get yourself a burger"... But if they went with a group, because they were with a group they'd be allowed to go. But the younger ones [daughter aged 10, son aged 8] wouldn't.*

Mrs Clarke, Towcester

## 9.5 'Rural' Fears

South Northants, as a rural area, contains many environments which are alien to the urban. Although many of the spaces referred to by the participants in the study are 'any place' spaces common to many environmental settings, for example, parks, playgrounds and shops, some features are distinctly rural. Open agricultural land, woodland and the grounds of estates, for instance, are 'rural' spaces.

Fears associated with 'rural' spaces were mentioned infrequently by both the girls and the mothers. Farm machinery was seen to be a possible danger by just one in ten girls, all of whom were resident in the smallest villages. Only one of the girls who participated in the in-depth discussions reported spending a large proportion of her leisure time in settings which she shared with farm machinery. Around one in twelve girls and a similar proportion of the mothers spoke about risks associated with farm animals. In many of the villages footpaths lie across fields in which cattle graze. Stories about locals being chased by cows are commonplace, and a minority of participants drew upon these.



Plate 9.11 The Lane, Potcote.

*This place is dangerous  
because of the farm machinery.*

*Rebecca, 14, Potcote*

FT: *Would you say that Silverstone is generally a safe place?*

Eleanor: *When you're in the fields you're fine, apart from when the cows  
come and chase you!*

*Eleanor, 11, Silverstone*

*We wouldn't let them through the fields with the dogs now, because a cow  
rammed a woman who was with a dog. Supposedly they were new cows, a new  
herd, and they were protecting their calves. But the cow just went for them. So  
of course now, even though the cows are split off with two barbed wires, that to  
me isn't enough. And if a child's around there with a dog there is a chance that  
a cow would go for the child. So they're not allowed in the field now.*

*Mrs Taylor, Whittlebury.*

Approximately one in ten girls reported that they were denied access to 'rural' environments such as fields and woodland because of the fears their parents associate with these settings. These 'rural' spaces were perceived to be isolated, and with few people nearby girls were seen to be more vulnerable to attack from strangers, especially at night.

Mary: *My mum isn't too keen on me going in the fields on my own. The  
fields at the back, that go around Wood Burcote.*

FT: *Why doesn't she like you going there?*

Mary: *I don't know. She's just paranoid. But they're perfectly OK to go  
walking in.*

Megan: *What? If it's in the day or the night?*

Mary: *I think at night they might be a bit dodgy. But it's usually not that  
bad.*

*Mary, 14, Towcester and Megan, 15, Silverstone*





*This end of the village is dangerous because there are lots of fields around.*

*Sophie, 13, Tiffield*

Plate 9.12 The village outskirts, Tiffield.

A number of explanations can be given as to why 'rural' fears were so infrequently mentioned. First, the vast majority of young people growing up in rural South Northants have little or no direct contact with agricultural practices. For example, only 3% of those participating in the questionnaire survey were from farming families.

Rural land is increasingly being privatized, and the realities of childhoods in South Northants seem a far cry from the freedom described in the rural childhoods of *Cider with Rosie* and *Lark Rise to Candleford*<sup>2</sup> (see Chapter 3, section 3.4.1). Contrary to the rural idyll, girls often do not have access to these spaces and are unable to run freely across fields and through woods, exploring distant hills and forests. Where access is granted this is often formalized through footpaths and signposts, and policed by vigilant adults, in such a way that young people's use of space is severely restricted. Shoard (1980) has argued that the 'theft of the countryside' - the loss of hedgerows and public access to woods and fields - has had no significant impact upon children's play. Yet in rural South Northants the privatization of these spaces has been shown to restrict the type and number of places in which children may play.

Second, young girls may not perceive the countryside as offering attractive recreational spaces. Indoor, commercial spaces were highly valued by young girls (see Chapter 6, Figure 6.26). Data collected in the in-depth discussion work shows that young girls favour the formal leisure spaces of their local rural environment, such as playgrounds and shops, rather than the open spaces integral to the rural childhood idyll.

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2 It is interesting to note that 'Lark Rise' is in fact just across the South Northants border.



Furthermore, as Jones (1999b) has argued, connections between childhood, nature and the countryside in popular discourses of rural childhood leave little space for girl children to adopt female identities. In constructions of perfect country childhoods (where childhood activities are associated with nature and the outdoors, such as tree climbing, getting dirty and the like), girls have to become nominal boys - tomboys - to take part. Such notions of masculinity and femininity were evident in the study, with girls explaining that only boys had tree houses and dens, and that girls stayed in cleaner environments nearer the home. Some girls do visit dens and tree houses made by groups of boys, but only one of the girls in this study had created such an environment for herself. Perhaps popular notions of masculinity and femininity cut across the real life experiences of young girls, discouraging them from using 'rural' spaces.

Third, some girls are denied access to 'rural' environments such as fields and woodland because of the fears their parents associate with these settings. As those mothers participating in the survey explained, it is not a fear of any specifically 'rural' hazard that means restrictions are imposed on their daughter's behaviour. Rather, it is a more general concern about stranger-danger. Some 'rural' environments were perceived to make girls more vulnerable to attack, and, although this risk may in reality be very low, the general fear of strangers governs girls' use of rural space.

The lack of 'rural' fears described by the girls and the group of mothers suggests that 'any place' risks were considered to be of greatest relevance to the everyday experiences of girls growing up in a rural area. Fears of gangs, stranger-danger and traffic hazards are generic rather than place-specific.

## **9.6 Summary**

In this chapter some emotional responses to place have been explored. The fears and concerns described by the girls and mothers impact upon individuals in different ways. However, some trends can be identified which give an indication of the extent to which perceptions of risk and safety may influence girls' spatial freedom. The questionnaire survey suggested that mothers played the most important role in setting the spatial and temporal boundaries on children's use of outdoor spaces. The fears of mothers are reflected in the spatial freedom that they allow their children. Some girls made direct reference to the concerns their parents had for their safety and the effect of this on their lifestyle. Children's activities may be curtailed by the risk anxieties of their mothers.

Approximately three quarters of the mothers stated that they had moved to rural South Northants following the birth of their children, and many of these remarked that they had chosen this location as it would be a 'good place' in which to bring up children. These mothers talked about increased levels of safety and spatial freedom which they perceived were denied to children resident in urban environments. Yet these mothers appear to bring 'urban' fears into this rural setting, in some cases resulting in quite severe restrictions on their daughter's use of public space.

Many of these mothers referred to the benefits of living within a small community. They saw the increased levels of surveillance provided by villagers 'keeping an eye on things' as a means through which they could be reassured about their children's safety. Poor public transport and the perception by many that it is too dangerous for young people to travel between settlements by bicycle (both due to traffic risks and the fears of stranger-danger) mean that the private car is used by many in order for children to gain access to leisure opportunities outside their home village. By deeming this to be the only 'safe' option, mothers are able to determine the places in which their daughters spend their leisure time and the peers with whom they may associate. In effect, rather than providing more spatial freedom for children, the rural is seen to offer parents more control over their children's use of public space.

The city and its public spaces have always been unevenly available to men and women (Miller *et al.*, 1998); the evidence presented here suggests that the same holds true for boys and girls in rural settings. Fears of stranger-danger and gangs limit and constrain the spatial freedom of young girls. The notion of girls' vulnerability to sexual attack is clearly held, with many mothers viewing stranger-danger as a real threat.

Both mothers and young girls draw upon images of the rural idyll in their narratives, arguing that the countryside is a safe environment in which to live. However, this perception of safety is relative - the countryside is safe when compared to the urban. Paradoxical views are held, with the local area being seen as both safe and a place of risk. Girls and mothers express concerns about risks such as stranger-danger, gangs and traffic hazards which may be applicable to any location, rural or urban. However, the rural setting does appear to play an important role with regard to the characteristics of their fears.

## **Chapter 10 Making Sense of Young People's Worlds: Some Concluding Comments**

### **10.1 Introduction**

Valentine (1997d) has suggested that researchers need to look beyond the simple notion of children's geographies as being those apart from the adult world, and instead recognize that both 'adult' and 'child' are "unstable and fluid performances" (p. 83). There has been a call, too, for a re-invigorated geography (Aitken, 1994; 1998a; 2001b; Aitken and Herman, 1997; Holloway and Valentine, 2000a; 2000b; 2000c; Matthews, 2001a; Matthews and Limb, 1999; Skelton and Valentine, 1998; Valentine, 1996a; Valentine *et al.*, 1998) which understands children to be social actors and challenges those discourses concerning public space that continue to marginalize and exclude young people. This thesis has attempted to respond to these challenges and, like Wyn and White (1997), has advocated an understanding of young people that is based on the realities of their lived experiences, focusing on the connections between different aspects of their lives.

Wyn and White (1997) have recommended an approach which moves beyond discipline boundaries. This thesis has drawn upon a wide range of 'vignettes' from existing theoretical literature to illuminate different aspects of the rural childhoods under study. In effect, a 'postmodern' perspective was adopted. Sceptical of the claims of 'grand theory', the thesis has not advocated a single coherent theory for the geographical study of (rural) children and childhoods.

In childhood research there is an ever-growing celebration of difference amongst young people (Valentine, 2000). Recently, scholars interested in the study of childhood have begun to investigate the importance of diversity in the physical, social and imaginative aspects of young people's worlds (Philo, 2000a). In presenting some geographies of the diverse spaces of the rural, this thesis has added to the rapidly expanding body of geographical work which explores the heterogeneity of young people's worlds.

In this chapter the main findings of the research are drawn together in order to elucidate some rural childhood geographies. First, the principal research findings are summarized. Second, attention is paid to the ways in which young people's experiences of growing up in the countryside are structured 'from without' and experienced 'from within'. Third, the research project is evaluated. The research aims are revisited and the limitations of the project are considered.

## **10.2 Summary of the Principal Research Findings**

In Chapters 2, 3 and 4 various literatures on young people were considered in order to conceptualize rural childhood geographies, especially from the perspective of young girls. These chapters drew upon a wide range of social theories, illustrating the value of these approaches in geographical studies. Childhood was shown to be socially constructed and young people to be social actors. However, the importance of the structural domain and the contingency effects of place were seen to be woven into young people's lives. In these chapters the need for the study of some neglected rural and childhood geographies was demonstrated.

The methodological strategies and techniques used in the study were detailed in Chapter 5. The ways in which adult researchers can access young people's worlds were considered, and the value of adopting a 'least adult' role in childhood research was highlighted. The importance of using a range of methods to capture the worlds of young people was outlined.

Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9 were concerned with exploring empirical data in order to uncover some rural childhoods. Chapter 6 drew upon an extensive questionnaire survey to illustrate how young people's experiences of growing up in a rural area may vary according to location, age and gender. It was demonstrated that although there are some commonalities in the experiences of young people living in rural areas, a multitude of rural realities exist. It was indicated that a series of factors will cut across each other in a variety of ways to produce complex geographies of the rural experience. A typology to aid understanding of the complex series of rural childhood geographies was presented. Three issues worthy of more detailed examination were identified: difference and diversity in girls' use of recreational spaces; contested countryside spaces, and places of risk and safety. These themes were considered in the subsequent chapters.

In Chapter 7 the great diversity of rural childhoods that exists both between and within settlements, and between individuals, was discussed. Young girls were shown to use and value recreational space in a myriad of ways. The chapter focused on how locational factors and family background impact on experiences of growing up within a rural area. These factors, as well as age and gender, cut across rural childhoods to produce diversity in girls' use of recreational spaces.

Three principal issues were uncovered through analysis of locational factors. Variations were shown to exist in the recreational opportunities offered by different settlements. The ability of girls to access these facilities was found to vary according to levels of mobility. It was demonstrated that the combined forces of these factors impact upon the composition of friendship groups and opportunities for socializing. Diversity associated with family background was shown to include variations in mobility, parenting strategies and levels of spatial freedom. The ways in which individuals choose to spend their leisure time, according to their own interests, capacities and inclinations, was also shown to create difference and diversity in girls' use of recreational spaces.

The ways in which recreational spaces are contested were examined in Chapter 8. It was demonstrated that, contrary to the rural idyll, country childhoods do not necessarily involve spatial freedom and freedom from adult surveillance. Young people often have to share their play spaces with adults and other groups of young people. Anxiety, tension and disharmony appear to be commonplace, arising from conflicts between rival groups over the social ownership of recreational spaces.

Conflicts between adults and young people over the use of both outdoor and indoor spaces appear to be linked to the 'rules of the neighbourhood', those invisible yet implicit social understandings of what behaviour is acceptable. Where young people challenge these adult-defined rules of behaviour, conflict and collision are the inevitable outcomes. Rival groups of young people were also shown to define spaces of acceptability, with dominant groups using 'social scenting' to mark and maintain territories. Bullying, especially verbal intimidation, was commonly used by young people to reinforce the social ownership of space.

Conflicts between groups of boys and girls indicated that although girls may be habitual users of street environments, the ways in which they use and experience space differs from that of boys. Where boys are dominant users of outdoor recreational spaces it may be difficult for some girls to obtain autonomous social space. Those girls who are willing to share spaces with boys risk being negatively labelled by their peers.

Perceptions of risk and safety were explored in Chapter 9. The views of young girls and their mothers were compared, and perceptions of risk were shown to impact upon the ways in which young girls understand and use space. Both mothers and young girls were shown to draw upon images of the rural idyll in their narratives, arguing that the countryside is a safe environment in which to live. However, this perception of safety is relative; the countryside is understood to be safe in comparison to the urban. Paradoxical views are held, with the local area being seen both as a safe place and a place of risk.

Girls and mothers expressed concern about stranger-danger, gangs and traffic hazards. These fears limit and constrain the spatial freedom of some young girls. The notion of girls' vulnerability to sexual attack is clearly held, with many mothers viewing stranger-danger as a genuine threat. Girls' spatial freedom was shown to be curtailed by the risk anxieties of their mothers in many cases. The perception of many mothers that it is too dangerous for young girls to travel by bicycle (both due to traffic risks and the fears of stranger-danger), combined with poor public transport provision, means that the private car is often used to enable girls to access leisure opportunities outside their home village. By deeming this to be the only 'safe' option, mothers were shown to determine the places in which their daughters spend their leisure time and the peers with whom they may associate. In effect, rather than providing more spatial freedom for children, the rural is seen to offer parents more control over their children's use of public space.

In essence, the research has shown that what might appear from an 'adult' viewpoint to be a realm of *sameness* - a group of girls with very similar backgrounds in terms of class, ethnicity, age and so on, living in a particular locality with few internal differentiations - is from a 'child' viewpoint a realm cross-cut by numerous axes of *difference*. The complexities of friendship groups, gangs and territories, and how these are linked to anxieties about bullying and feelings of being 'in place' and 'out of place', are full of meaning for the girls concerned. Yet these subtleties are often unrecognized from an 'adult' perspective, being viewed as part of the general 'rough and tumble' of growing up.

### **10.3 Understanding Some Rural Childhoods**

Philo (1992), in his review of Ward's (1990b) *The Child in the Country*, drew attention to the paucity of studies on rural childhoods. Philo identified the value of exploring the worlds of rural young people in terms of how these are structured 'from without' and experienced 'from within'. In this study the complex geographies of young people growing up within rural South Northants have been investigated from both perspectives.

### 10.3.1 Structured 'from without'

Young people can be recognized as occupying multiple worlds. Not all young people will experience a common way of seeing - they may have different wishes and expectations - yet they have some commonality in that they are not adults (Matthews *et al.*, 1998a). In much childhood literature it has been argued that adult society constitutes the 'structure' which determines or socializes childhood (James *et al.*, 1998). Qvortrup (1997) has argued that the ways in which young people 'see' the world are in some measure constrained by those adult structures which surround them. Adult values are imprinted on the physical and built environments in which young people live, and social constraints are imposed by the adult gaze (Matthews and Limb, 1999).

In this thesis four ways in which the experiences of young people growing up within a rural area are structured 'from without' have been identified. First, there is the structural position of being young. The adult-child relationship results in young people, as a group, being disadvantaged. In this thesis the ideas of habitus and 'rules of the neighbourhood' have been drawn upon to help understand some complex geographies. Bourdieu's (1977) notion of the 'rules of the neighbourhood' suggests that adult society defines rules of behaviour which are bounded by invisible yet implicit social understandings of what is acceptable. These rules serve a disciplinary function that prevents disruption of the social order to maintain the status quo (Cahill, 2000). The ways in which young people understand and interact with space are intimately bound with these rules. Young people have "a highly developed understanding of environmental protocol and can 'read' the environment in specific ways" (Cahill, 2000, p. 251). Young people learn which behaviours are deemed acceptable in specific spaces and choose either to conform to these adult-defined norms or to act against them. In performing acts of resistance young people challenge the habitus of place.

The second way in which young people's lifestyles are structured is through 'local' (rural) and 'national' (urban) influences. Lucey and Reay (1999) have argued that young people from middle-class families are often exposed to a range of media, particularly visual media such as television and the internet, and that they have greater opportunities for travel. This, they argued, creates somewhat 'nomadic' identities; young people's horizons extend beyond the local and encompass a range of influences. In South Northants, an area dominated by middle-class households, the lifestyles of young people were found to be influenced not only by their daily interactions with the local rural environment, but also through the images presented by various media. The girls drew upon images of urban youth cultures and took on complex hybrid identities. Many girls, particularly those in their early teens, aspired to urban living. They sought to copy those lifestyles, fashions and behaviours presented in the (national, urban) media.



Third, young people's lives were shown to be structured by the culture of rural living. Notions of the rural idyll are perpetuated through both the media and what Jones (1997a) terms 'rural writing'. The ideas of the idyll impact upon young people's lives through presenting a set of 'rules' through which rural living is understood. The rural is seen to be the ideal place for bringing up children (Jones, 1999b), and any behaviours or desires of young people that are contrary to the notions of the idyll, are seen to be discrepant and to threaten the status quo. In contesting countryside spaces young people challenge the myths and stereotypes that are wrapped up in notions of the rural.

Some notions of rural living have a specific impact upon young girls. Jones (1999b) has argued that connections between childhood, nature and the countryside in popular discourses of the rural leave little space for girls to adopt female identities. In constructions of idyllic country childhoods, activities are associated with nature and the outdoors, such as tree climbing and getting dirty. Within these constructions girls have to become nominal boys - tomboys - to take part. These structures play an important role in determining the place use and behaviour of young girls growing up within a rural environment.

Cutting across these three factors are a number of contingency effects. This thesis has examined how location, gender and age combine in various, complex ways to create difference and diversity in young people's experiences of growing up in a rural area. It has been demonstrated that there is no cultural universal of young people living in the countryside, and that the experiences of young girls also cannot be reduced to a single, universal experience. Rather, a complex series of geographies exist. In this rural setting, the conventional structures of adult-child relations within modern Western societies are arguably being intensified rather than freed up. In this context, this thesis has adopted a 'critical' stance showing that a lack of independent travel, anxiety about the safety of children in public space, and the prevalence of the adult gaze within rural communities, may result in high levels of surveillance and supervision of young people's leisure activities.

### **10.3.2 Experienced 'from within'**

The recent 'policy turn' in geography expresses a growing frustration with those aspects of cultural geography that appear (to some) to be inward-looking and apparently oblivious to the 'real world'. Anderson and Smith (2001) have argued that the quest for a 'policy turn' in geography is a key area where an awareness of how emotional relations shape society and space is important. In exploring some multiple rural childhood geographies this thesis has begun to unravel some 'emotional geographies'. This research has recognized that emotions are a key set of social relations through which lives are lived and societies made, and that to exclude these relations from research leaves a gap in how we understand the world.

Children's geographies are implicitly 'emotional geographies'. More than twenty years ago Hart (1979) argued that childhood researchers need to recognize the variability of young people's experience of the world, and in particular how different situations and different moods or emotions give rise to this diversity. In exploring the ways in which young people understand and experience the world it is important to consider how emotions, a complex set of social relations, influence young people's experiences. According to Gibson (1979), places 'afford' opportunities which are often unexpected and exceed their functional purpose. Some of these affordances are bound by place feelings - likes, dislikes, fear, safety. These place feelings vary from person to person (Matthews *et al.*, 1998a) and may change over time.

In this thesis young girls' use of recreational spaces has been shown to be connected to a series of emotional responses. Difference and diversity in girls' leisure choices may reflect variations in access to facilities and parenting strategies, however, girls' choices also reflect place feelings. Conflict and collisions over the social ownership of recreational spaces are a result of contrasting priorities as well as the desire for autonomy. Yet these contested spaces are invested with many meanings. In studying perceptions of risk and safety, emotions have been shown to have real, spatial impacts on young girls' lifestyles. The girls not only identified spaces of risk with regard to the likelihood of physical or social dangers, but also in terms of their emotional responses to these places. If emotions were excluded from this analysis an incomplete picture of these girls' worlds would be presented. By using methodologies that give voice to young people and listening to their (emotional) articulations of place, this thesis has connected with some emotional geographies.

## **10.4 Evaluating the Research Project**

In this section the research project is evaluated in two ways. First, the research aims are revisited. Second, the limitations of the research are considered.

### **10.4.1 Revisiting the Research Aims**

Two principal aims were set out at the beginning of the research process:

1. to investigate whether locality constitutes a contingency effect upon rural childhood(s) - particularly whether 'the rural' matters as a defining experience for young people growing up in UK society today;
2. to examine whether gender and age are important factors in the outdoor behaviour and experiences of young people who are growing up in a rural area.

These are evaluated in turn.

The significance of locality was examined on a number of scales. Rural childhoods were shown to be similar to urban childhoods in a number of respects. Young people in South Northants were shown to use similar 'any place' environments - few young people spent much of their leisure time in 'rural' spaces - and to be subject to the same media influences as their urban counterparts. Rather than a cocooned existence in which the urban was seen to be 'other' and inaccessible, the young participants drew upon urban cultures in their identity formation and regularly accessed leisure sites outside the rural environment.

Comparisons with studies of urban childhoods showed similarities between the lifestyles and experiences of rural and urban young people. The concept of the 'country childhood' is too simple to help understanding of the complex factors which give rise to similarities and differences in young people's experiences of growing up in different locations.

Rural childhoods were found to differ from urban childhoods in a number of respects. Issues of accessibility are particularly pertinent within a rural setting. One of the consequences of a lack of public space in rural areas, particularly play space such as recreation grounds, is that young people, both girls and boys, can become highly visible and subject to adult scrutiny (Davis and Ridge, 1997). In close-knit rural communities, reports of young people's behaviour may be passed on to parents, with young people having few opportunities to hide from the adult gaze.

Place has also been shown to be significant at a more local scale. Diversity in rural childhoods has been illustrated both between and within settlements. A complex sets of structures has been revealed which combine to create difference and diversity. Young people have been shown to understand and value the rural environment in different ways. Location influences the recreational opportunities available to young people, and through considering some emotional geographies of young girls the role location plays in leisure preferences has been revealed.

Gender and age cut across location to give rise to multiple childhoods. Differences in boys' and girls' leisure preferences and use of space have been outlined. The rural landscape has been shown to be 'gendered' through conflict between boys and girls over the ownership of social space, through the dominance of boys in particular spaces, and through the sexualization of risk. However, as well as difference between these groups, diversity within them is also apparent. There is no such thing as a 'rural girlhood'. There is considerable diversity in girls' experiences of growing up in the countryside. Girls are just another disadvantaged group within which much diversity exists.

#### **10.4.2 Limitations of the Research**

The scope of the project has meant that an overview of a complex series of geographies was obtained. In this study the geographies uncovered relate to one specific rural area, South Northants. This accessible area is characterized by an affluent, middle-class population. There are many types of rural area and there is value in uncovering some childhood geographies of these different areas. Experiences of growing up in a remote rural area, an area experiencing out-migration, or an area dependent on tourism, for example, may vary from those outlined in this study.

Rural populations are dynamic. There is considerable scope for further study into the ways in which newcomers and 'locals' reflect upon rural childhoods. It would be interesting to examine how 'local' young people respond to the influx of newcomers, and how newcomers are accepted into rural communities. The ways in which spaces and territories are contested between these groups is also worthy of study, particularly in areas where newcomers are from wealthy, middle-class families and 'locals' are from working-class family backgrounds. Attention could also be paid to the experiences of rural living from the perspective of children from farming families.

A longitudinal study which examines young girls' use of rural space and their confidence in using public space in later life may also be of value. Through studying the life course transitions of a cohort of young people, the impacts of a rural upbringing on future lifestyles could be traced. This study has indicated that as young people grow older many become increasingly dissatisfied with rural living. A longitudinal study could provide insights into young people's transitions into this teenage group and those causal factors which lead to this dissatisfaction. Study of the life course transitions of newcomers and the process of their integration into country childhoods may also be of value, particularly where attention is paid to the set of structures through which this integration takes place.

The choice of South Northants as a study area has meant that the geographies of white, middle-class young people have dominated the discussion. It has been well documented that the English countryside is dominated by a white population (Agyeman, 1989; Agyeman and Spooner, 1997; Gilroy, 1987; Kinsman, 1995; Ling Wong, 1998; Watt, 1998). There is considerable scope for geographical enquiry into the ways in which ethnicity cuts across young people's experiences of growing up within a rural area. Lucey and Reay (1999), in their study of urban youth, have argued that the experiences of middle-class children have frequently been hidden from analysis. They highlight the need for more research into middle-class childhoods, although it must be recognized that the geographies of *all* rural young people have been neglected and that the experiences of working-class young people are of equal interest to those of their middle-class counterparts. There is considerable scope for research into the lifestyles of children from working-class households in rural areas.

This thesis has begun to explore the ways in which rural childhoods are structured 'from without'. There is a need for research into the ways in which young people build up perceptions of the rural environment. Researchers need to move beyond those critiques of representations of the rural to examine how young people understand and respond to such images and to images of national (urban) cultures.

The study has identified some spaces which are often used by boys, namely sports facilities and recreation grounds. Further research could establish how boys achieve and maintain dominance of these spaces, why these spaces are valued by boys, and how the provision of leisure spaces can take into account the needs and wishes of both boys and girls.

There is a need for further research which encourages the participation of young people, particularly studies in which young people are equal partners. These studies would help to empower the young participants, and would be studies not just *of* and *with* young people, but also *for* young people.

Responding to Philo's (1992) call for research into the neglected rural geographies of young people, this research has begun to tease out some differences in the experiences of young people growing up in a rural area and has uncovered a series of complex geographies. It has been demonstrated that there is not one single experience of a country childhood, and that rather than being such a thing as a 'rural girlhood', rural girls represent just another disadvantaged group within which difference and diversity is common. In the context of the burgeoning research of the new geographies of childhood, this thesis has drawn attention to the invisible geographies of young girls growing up in a rural area. As such it is presented as an attempt to breach some gaps in our knowledge and to provide new insights into the complexity of what it means to be a child in a part of UK society today.

## **Appendix A**

Sample of the questionnaire that was completed by 193 young people aged 10-15 years.

## Experiences of Growing Up in South Northamptonshire

### A PERSONAL DETAILS

#### 1 Sex

male ☐ female ☐

#### 2 Age

10 ☐ 11 ☐ 12 ☐ 13 ☐ 14 ☐ 15 ☐

#### 3 Please state your address, including the street name and the town/village.

.....

#### 4 How long have you lived at this address?

..... years

#### 5 If you have not always lived at this address, where did you live before? Please list the most recent place you lived first, stating the town/village and street.

Place 1 ..... how long for? ..... years

Place 2 ..... how long for? ..... years

### B ATTITUDES TOWARDS PLACES

#### 6 For someone your age, what are the good things about living in your town/village? Please list up to 3 good things, putting the best first.

(a) .....

(b) .....

(c) .....

#### 7 For someone your age, what are the bad things about living in your town/village? Please list up to 3 bad things, putting the worst first.

(a) .....

(b) .....

(c) .....

#### 8 Would you like to live in your town/village when you are older?

Yes ☐ (please go to question 9) No ☐ (please go to question 10)

date:

school:

year group:

number:



**9 If Yes, why would you like to live there? (please go to question 11)**

.....

**10 If No, why not?**

.....

**11 What would you like to change about your town/village to improve it?  
Tick all which you would like to change.**

better bus service	<input type="checkbox"/>	more youth clubs	<input type="checkbox"/>	swimming pool	<input type="checkbox"/>
more street lights	<input type="checkbox"/>	adventure playground	<input type="checkbox"/>	more cycle paths	<input type="checkbox"/>
less traffic	<input type="checkbox"/>	more houses	<input type="checkbox"/>	cinema	<input type="checkbox"/>
more sports clubs/teams	<input type="checkbox"/>	community centre	<input type="checkbox"/>	more trees	<input type="checkbox"/>
café for young people	<input type="checkbox"/>	more fast food shops	<input type="checkbox"/>	more shops	<input type="checkbox"/>
computer centre	<input type="checkbox"/>	more speed ramps	<input type="checkbox"/>	fewer new houses	<input type="checkbox"/>
nothing	<input type="checkbox"/>	other .....			

**12 Do you feel that you live in the countryside?**

Yes ☐ (please go to question 13)      No ☐ (please go to question 14)

**13 If Yes, why do you feel that you live in the countryside? (please go to question 15)**

.....

**14 If No, why not?**

.....

**15 Would you prefer to live in a village, a small town or a large town?**

village ☐ (please go to question 16)  
small town ☐ (please go to question 17)  
large town ☐ (please go to question 18)

**16 Why would you prefer to live in a village? (please go to question 19)**

.....

17 Why would you prefer to live in a small town? (please go to question 19)

.....

18 Why would you prefer to live in a large town?

.....

19 What is the countryside like? Please circle the word which you feel best describes the countryside.

- |                     |            |         |          |               |
|---------------------|------------|---------|----------|---------------|
| (a) very exciting   | exciting   | neither | boring   | very boring   |
| (b) very unfriendly | unfriendly | neither | friendly | very friendly |
| (c) very noisy      | noisy      | neither | quiet    | very quiet    |
| (d) very clean      | clean      | neither | dirty    | very dirty    |
| (e) very dangerous  | dangerous  | neither | safe     | very safe     |

20 What are towns like? Please circle the word which you feel best describes towns.

- |                     |            |         |          |               |
|---------------------|------------|---------|----------|---------------|
| (a) very exciting   | exciting   | neither | boring   | very boring   |
| (b) very unfriendly | unfriendly | neither | friendly | very friendly |
| (c) very noisy      | noisy      | neither | quiet    | very quiet    |
| (d) very clean      | clean      | neither | dirty    | very dirty    |
| (e) very dangerous  | dangerous  | neither | safe     | very safe     |

## C TRAVEL

21 How many cars do your family own?

None ☐ 1 car ☐ 2 cars ☐ 3 or more cars ☐

22 Who is able to drive the car/cars?

.....

23 How do you usually travel to and from school?

Walk alone ☐ Walk with friend ☐ Walk with adult ☐ Bicycle ☐  
Bus ☐ Parent's Car ☐ Friend's Car ☐ Other .....

24 How long does this journey usually take?

..... minutes

**D FREE TIME - OUTDOORS**

**25 Would you say that you are an indoor or an outdoor person?**

Indoor ☐ Outdoor ☐ Don't know ☐

**26 How much of your free time do you usually spend outdoors? Say in hours/minutes per day.**

After school in summer ..... At weekends in summer .....

After school in winter ..... At weekends in winter .....

**27 When you go out, what time do you usually have to be back in?**

After school in summer ..... At weekends in summer .....

After school in winter ..... At weekends in winter .....

**28 Who usually decides what time you must be back in? You can tick more than one box.**

Self ☐ Mum ☐ Dad ☐ Sister ☐ Brother ☐ Other .....

**29 If you think it is fair that you must be back in at this time, please say why.**  
(please go to question 31)

.....

**30 If you think it is unfair that you must be back in at this time, please say why.**

.....

**31 Please name 2 things you most like about being outdoors in your town/village.**

(1) .....

(2) .....

**32 Please name 2 things you most dislike about being outdoors in your town/village.**

(1) .....

(2) .....

- 33 Please name 2 of your favourite places in your town/village outside of your home, putting the best place first. Please tell me exactly where they are and the reason you like them.**

Place 1 .....

Reason .....

Place 2 .....

Reason .....

- 34 Where do you most often hang out with friends after school? Please tell me exactly where this place is.**

.....

- 35 How do you get to this place? You may tick more than one box.**

Walk alone ☐ Walk with friend ☐ Walk with adult ☐ Bicycle ☐

Bus ☐ Parent's Car ☐ Friend's Car ☐ Other .....

- 36 Why do you meet at this place?**

.....

- 37 What do you do there?**

.....

- 38 Where do you most often hang out with friends at weekends? Please tell me exactly where this place is.**

.....

- 39 How do you get to this place? You may tick more than one box.**

Walk alone ☐ Walk with friend ☐ Walk with adult ☐ Bicycle ☐

Bus ☐ Parent's Car ☐ Friend's Car ☐ Other .....

- 40 Why do you meet at this place?**

.....

- 41 What do you do there?**

.....

**42 Please tell me about the friends you usually hang out with.**

(a)	age	.....	male	<input type="checkbox"/>	female	<input type="checkbox"/>
(b)	age	.....	male	<input type="checkbox"/>	female	<input type="checkbox"/>
(c)	age	.....	male	<input type="checkbox"/>	female	<input type="checkbox"/>
(d)	age	.....	male	<input type="checkbox"/>	female	<input type="checkbox"/>
(e)	age	.....	male	<input type="checkbox"/>	female	<input type="checkbox"/>

**43 Please name 2 places in your town/village which you feel are unsafe.  
Please tell me exactly where they are and the reason you feel they are unsafe.**

Place 1	.....	Reason	.....
Place 2	.....	Reason	.....

**44 Are there any places in your town/village which are 'out of bounds'?**

Yes ☐ please go to question 45)      No ☐ (please go to question 46)

**45 Please tell me exactly where these places are and why they are 'out of bounds'.**

Place 1	.....	Reason	.....
Place 2	.....	Reason	.....

**46 Without asking permission, where is the furthest local place you can go  
by yourself?**

.....

**47 With permission, where is the furthest local place you can go by yourself?**

.....

**48 Without asking permission, where is the furthest local place you can go  
with friends?**

.....

**49 With permission, where is the furthest local place you can go with friends?**

.....

**E FREE TIME - INDOORS**

**50 Do you have your own bedroom or do you share a room?**

Own room ☐ Share a room ☐

**51 How much of your free time do you spend indoors?**

..... hours a day

**52 How much of your free time do you spend alone in your room (when not asleep)?**

..... hours a day

**53 What do you do? You can tick more than one box.**

listen to music ☐ use computer ☐ read ☐ homework ☐  
watch TV/videos ☐ other .....

**54 How often are you with friends inside your home? Use these categories:**

**1 = more than once a week; 2 = once a week; 3 = once a fortnight;  
4 = once a month; 5 = occasionally; 6 = never.**

After school in summer ..... At weekends in summer .....

After school in winter ..... At weekends in winter .....

**55 When you are with friends inside your home, which room do you spend most time in?**

Bedroom ☐ Family room ☐ Dining room ☐  
Kitchen ☐ Lounge ☐ Other .....

**56 What do you do? You can tick more than one box.**

talk/just hang out ☐ listen to music ☐ use computer ☐  
play board games ☐ watch TV/videos ☐ homework ☐  
other .....

**57 When friends come to your house, how long do you generally spend indoors with them? Please say in hours/minutes per day.**

After school in summer ..... At weekends in summer .....

After school in winter ..... At weekends in winter .....

## F GANGS

**58 Are you a member of a local gang?**

Yes ☐ (please go to question 59)      No ☐ (please go to question 63)

**59 What is the name of your gang?**

.....

**60 Please tell me about the people in your gang.**

(a)	age	.....	male	<input type="checkbox"/>	female	<input type="checkbox"/>
(b)	age	.....	male	<input type="checkbox"/>	female	<input type="checkbox"/>
(c)	age	.....	male	<input type="checkbox"/>	female	<input type="checkbox"/>
(d)	age	.....	male	<input type="checkbox"/>	female	<input type="checkbox"/>
(e)	age	.....	male	<input type="checkbox"/>	female	<input type="checkbox"/>

**61 Why do you like to belong to this gang?**

.....

**62 Please name up to 2 places where your gang hangs out, and tell me exactly where these are.**

Place 1 .....

Place 2 .....

**63 Do you know of any other local gangs?**

Yes ☐ (please go to question 64)      No ☐ (please go to question 65)

**64 Please tell me the names of 2 of these gangs and exactly where they usually hang out.**

Gang 1 ..... where hang out .....

Gang 2 ..... where hang out .....

## G CLUBS AND LEISURE

**65 Are you a member of any clubs, societies or youth groups?**

Yes ☐ (please go to question 66)      No ☐ (please go to question 67)



**For Questions 66 and 68 please use the following categories:**

how often	
more than once a week	1
once a week	2
once a fortnight	3
once a month	4
occasionally	5

how get there			
walk alone	a	bus	e
walk with friend	b	parent's car	f
walk with adult	c	friend's car	g
bicycle	d	other	h

**66 Please name the club/societies/youth groups, say how you usually get there, who you go with, and how often you go.**

- (a) Name ..... how get there .....  
       who with ..... how often .....
- (b) Name ..... how get there .....  
       who with ..... how often .....
- (c) Name ..... how get there .....  
       who with ..... how often .....

(please go to question 68)

**67 Why don't you belong to any clubs/societies/youth groups?**

.....

**68 Do you visit any of the following leisure facilities? Where do you go?  
How do you usually get there? Who do you go with? How often do you go?**

cinemas	where go .....	how get there .....
	who with .....	how often .....
leisure centres	where go .....	how get there .....
	who with .....	how often .....
shopping centres	where go .....	how get there .....
	who with .....	how often .....
10 pin bowling	where go .....	how get there .....
	who with .....	how often .....
laser combat game	where go .....	how get there .....
	who with .....	how often .....
pubs/nightclubs	where go .....	how get there .....
	who with .....	how often .....
fast food shops	where go .....	how get there .....
	who with .....	how often .....
roller/ice skating	where go .....	how get there .....
	who with .....	how often .....
horse riding	where go .....	how get there .....
	who with .....	how often .....
other	where go .....	how get there .....
	who with .....	how often .....

## H SOCIAL DETAILS

**69 Who lives with you (e.g. mum, brother, cousin etc.)? Please tell me their ages.**

(a)	.....	age	.....	male	<input type="checkbox"/>	female	<input type="checkbox"/>
(b)	.....	age	.....	male	<input type="checkbox"/>	female	<input type="checkbox"/>
(c)	.....	age	.....	male	<input type="checkbox"/>	female	<input type="checkbox"/>
(d)	.....	age	.....	male	<input type="checkbox"/>	female	<input type="checkbox"/>
(e)	.....	age	.....	male	<input type="checkbox"/>	female	<input type="checkbox"/>

**70 Which group best describes you?**

White	<input type="checkbox"/>	Indian	<input type="checkbox"/>	Pakistani	<input type="checkbox"/>	Bangladeshi	<input type="checkbox"/>
Caribbean	<input type="checkbox"/>	African	<input type="checkbox"/>	Chinese	<input type="checkbox"/>	Black Other	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	.....						

**Thank you very much indeed for completing this questionnaire.**

**All information will remain strictly confidential.**

## **Appendix B**

Sample of the 45 photo posters created by the 27 girls who participated in the in-depth discussion groups. The following pages are portable representations of A2 posters prepared by the girls to display the various photographs they had taken. These pages seek to faithfully replicate the posters on which they are based with regard to layout, colour etc.

Photo poster prepared by Shannon, 10, Greens Norton.

Photo poster prepared by Chloe, 11, Litchborough.

Photo poster prepared by Hope, 13, Towcester

Photo poster prepared by Claire, 15, Silverstone.

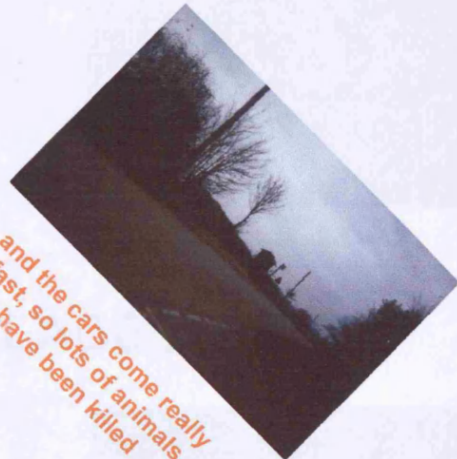
**The wording, grammar and spelling is, in each sample,  
the girl's own.**



## Places that are dangerous



This road is dangerous because  
you can't see round the  
corner (see star)



and the cars come really  
fast, so lots of animals  
have been killed

## Places that are useful



The pub is usefull for the adults  
who like to drink!! Because  
they don't have to go  
into Towcester.



The butchers shop is usefull  
because you don't have  
to go to Towcester for  
fresh meat either!!



I think this is A boy's place because boys' like climbing trees

## BOY'S PLACES



Boy's like to cut trees and also strip the trees.

Boy's like to mess about on the trees.



I think this is a boy's place because they like to gang up



## Dislike/Like/Dangerous



**Dislike**  
(playground)  
People smoke  
and wrec  
the place



**Dislike (alleyways)**  
People spit on  
walls and it is  
**Dangerous** 'cos  
there is not  
any lights



**like (Friends houses)**  
Great places to hang  
out and gossip!



**like (Friends houses)**  
near everyones  
house and  
nice curtains!



**Dangerous -**  
next to the  
busy roads and  
traffic lights don't  
go off very often



**Dangerous -**  
People smoke  
their and rubbish  
is everywhere



**Dangerous**  
People at the  
front and shout  
things at you



**Dangerous -**  
tools are  
**Dangerous**  
and you could  
get hurt





I spend most of my time walking here during the daytime both with friends, on my own and with my family.



This is a friends house near to my own house. I often come here in the evenings as I feel it is safe.



This is both a place that I dislike and a 'boy place'. Large gangs of boys come here to smoke and drink.



This place is in the countryside. I like to come here with my dog both on my own or with friends/family. I think that it is safe here and come here often.



This is my friends house. I often come here with other girlfriends. This is a place that I think is safe and I like it here.



This is a place that I dislike because there are always large gangs hanging around at the bus stop. It is quite dangerous here and I try to avoid coming here.



This is a place where I like to be alone. I often walk my dog here during the day. I like it here but I only come during the day.



This is a place that I think is dangerous. I think this because there are no crossings and there is always heavy traffic.



## **Appendix C**

**Sample of the schedule used in the semi-structured interviews held with  
12 mothers of young girls.**

I'd like to ask you a few questions about *[location]* and what you think the area is like for young people. I would like to tape record what we say – it makes it easier for me as rather than writing everything down I can listen properly to what you are saying. I will start by filling in some details on this questionnaire. I will then use the questionnaire to guide our discussion.

The survey is confidential and I will change all the names to guarantee anonymity. I will type out what we've said and then send you a copy – you can then check through it and if there is anything that you've said that you decide you don't want me to use, then you can let me know and I will delete it from all my records. You can withdraw from the project at any time and you are not required to give any reason for so doing. And finally, as I stated in my letter, I will not be able to tell you anything that your child said to me when we chatted a few months ago, and I obviously won't be telling them anything you say to me now.

Interview No.

## A PERSONAL DETAILS

1 Name: .....

2 Location: .....

3 Age/sex of children:

.....	Age: ..... years	Sex: M/F
.....	Age: ..... years	Sex: M/F
.....	Age: ..... years	Sex: M/F
.....	Age: ..... years	Sex: M/F
.....	Age: ..... years	Sex: M/F

## B FAMILY MIGRATION HISTORY

4 As a child (under 16) where did you live?

.....

5 Is that a city, large town (e.g. Northampton), market town (e.g. Towcester), accessible rural (e.g. Silverstone) or remote rural (e.g. Scottish highlands)?

city      large town      market town      accessible rural      remote rural

6 As a family, how long have you lived in *[location]*?

..... years

**7 As a family, where did you live before moving here?**

[location] ..... [duration] ..... [urban/rural] .....

**8 Why did you move to [location]?**

job/employment                      to be near relatives                      family circumstances

housing                                  physical environment                      social environment

quality of life                          other

.....

**C PERCEPTIONS OF COUNTRY CHILDHOODS**

**9 What would you say are the advantages of living in the countryside for your child/children?**

.....  
.....

**10 What would you say are the disadvantages of living in the countryside for your child/children?**

.....  
.....

**11 How do the advantages of living in [location] compare with those of living in a large town like Northampton?**

.....  
.....

**12 Do you think that there are enough things for young people to do in their leisure time in [location]? Please explain.**

.....  
.....

**13 What do you think could be done to improve [location] for children and young people?**

.....  
.....

## D RISK AND SAFETY

- 14** I have here a list of potential threats/hazards [*show list*]. Could you please rank these, starting with the threat/hazard you think is of greatest concern living in this area, and finishing with the threat/hazard which worries you the least? Please explain.

farm machinery	busy roads
rivers/ponds	drugs/alcohol misuse
bullying	woods
quarries	stranger-danger
gangs	narrow roads/lack of pavements
lack of street lighting	older children

- 15** If you lived in a large town like Northampton, what order would you rank these? Please explain.

farm machinery	busy roads
rivers/ponds	drugs/alcohol misuse
bullying	woods
quarries	stranger-danger
gangs	narrow roads/lack of pavements
lack of street lighting	older children

- 16** On a scale of 1 to 5, would you say that [*location*] is a safe place for children and young people? Please explain.

1 = very safe    2 = safe    3 = reasonably safe    4 = unsafe    5 = very unsafe

.....  
 .....

- 17** Are there any places in [*location*] which you do not allow your child/children to go to? Why don't you want your child/children to go there?

Place	.....	Reason	.....
Place	.....	Reason	.....
Place	.....	Reason	.....

[*types of place and distance*]

**18 Where is/are your child/children allowed to go? Why is/are she/they allowed there**

Place ..... Reason .....

Place ..... Reason .....

Place ..... Reason .....

*[types of place and distance]*

**E YOUNG PEOPLE'S USE OF SPACE**

**19 Where in *[location]* do children and young people tend to hang out?**

.....  
.....

**20 Do you think that groups of children and young people hanging out in these places are a problem? Why?**

.....  
.....

**21 Have such groups of children and young people ever caused any problems for you?**

.....  
.....

**22 Are there any places in *[location]* where just girls or just boys hang out?**

Girls .....

.....

Boys .....

.....

---

Thank you very much for your time. Your answers have been very helpful.

## **INTERVIEW CARD - POTENTIAL THREATS/HAZARDS**

**farm machinery**

**rivers/ponds**

**bullying**

**quarries**

**gangs**

**lack of street lighting**

**busy roads**

**drugs/alcohol misuse**

**woods**

**stranger-danger**

**narrow roads/lack of pavements**

**older children**

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