Chapter 2
Children Are Children: Gender Doesn't Matter?

> I tend to treat *children as children* and not consciously think that that's a boy. I do think that they need their own roles. A girl is definitely different from a boy and a boy is different from a girl, and they need to be aware of it. But I don't think I've thought very deeply about it (laughing) as affecting anything. [Conversation with Mrs D, *Westridge School*, emphasis added]

Hegemonic teaching discourses, in this chapter, resonate with many other accounts of teachers, gender and primary schooling with childhood innocence a recurring theme in adult teaching discourses (Osgood 2014; Davies 2014; Epstein et al. 2003; Skelton et al. 2009; Browne 2004; Connolly 2004; Renold 2005; Skelton 2001). Beginning with Mrs D in the above quote, the articulation of a hegemonic teaching discourse produces an unknowing, carefree, naïve and vulnerable child requiring adult protection (Jackson and Scott 2010; Wyn and Cahill 2015; Renold 2005; Robinson 2013). In enforcing childhood innocence teachers fail to recognise the significance of gender and sexuality in the everyday routines of children's lives whilst reproducing patriarchal relations of power (MacNaughton 2000; Epstein and Johnson 1998; Paechter 2007; Blaise 2005). As MacNaughton (2000) and Thorne (1993) suggest, naturalising the difference between boys and girls, are fundamental to the maintenance of gender power relations between boys and girls and between children and their teachers. In particular, hegemonic teaching discourses are scrutinised in this chapter, not for the 'truth' about common sense knowledge (MacNaughton 1997) but for the power relations it produces which serves to normalise children as innocent of gender and childhood (sexual) innocence.

In the first part of this chapter I identify interlocking discursively produced teaching strategies that seek to maintain childhood as a sexual/gender free political arena whilst naturalising differences between boys and girls and their teachers. These shared teaching patterns coalesce to enforce the normalisation of childhood innocence and children's fixed categorisation along gender lines. These different discourses are not separate and are configured in ways that constantly interact dynamically, are interdependent and mutually constructing, forming an overall strategy that regulates children and childhood. Chapter 3 continues with this

dominant discourse focusing on teachers as mothers but shows how gender is negotiated and challenged by boys and girls. Combined, the discourses identified in Chaps. 2 and 3, are conservative and hegemonic and work against the articulation and practice of gender equality.

Chapters 4 and 5 and the first section of Chap. 6 will examine discourses that are specific to schools. The conservative teaching discourses set the parameters for what is possible in schools but they also open up the contradictions. The shared patterns of discourse across school sites misses the important fact that experiences of early primary schooling in South Africa are also different, contradictory and complex. A complex set of interrelationships exists between race, class and gender in specific socio-economic contexts. Such specificities are important to consider. It is impossible to understand the construction of gender in the early years of primary schooling without giving due consideration to class and race politics that are constitutive of gender and sexuality. The argument made here is that teaching discourses produce, regulate and reinforce childhood (sexual) innocence but always within "concrete social circumstances" (Connell 1995: 86). These circumstances reveal the structural fractures and the steep grades of inequalities that mark South African life. The last section of this chapter shows how teaching discourses are produced in and through social and economic contexts. That specificity makes certain subject positions available and not others. The specific constructed contextualisation of power and meanings impacts on the performances of gender and sexuality in different sites. Race, class and social specifics of teaching discourses influence the range of subject positions inhabited. The specific teaching discourses embody multiple dimensions. In other words, social locations create conditions for relations of power. In identifying specific teaching discourses I show differential access to power, practice of power and effects of power. I argue, that to understand how teaching discourses operate we need to attend to both the shared discourses that construct the asexual/de-gendered child and the social, political and economic structures within which teachers, boys and girls negotiate gender and sexuality. This chapter must thus be read with a dual focus in mind: shared patterns create and reinforce a regime of truth about childhood innocence whilst the wider social ordering of gender and sexuality—especially how race, culture and class coalesce— provide major contradictions to the construction of childhood innocence.

Fixing Boys and Girls as Opposites and Unequal: Categorical Thinking as a Regime of Truth

Children Are Children—Children Are Innocent

As noted in Chap. 1, a regime of truth, following Foucauldian (1982) insights, allows us to understand the disciplinary and regulatory function of knowledge/power and works to produce dominant conceptualisations that make

gender an irrelevant category for young children. Foucault (1982) believed that all social institutions survive and thrive through creating truths about how we should think, act and feel towards ourselves and others. The teaching discourses hang together through the creation and maintenance of certain truths about how we should think about gender and children in primary schooling. Rendering gender invisible in the lives of young children, weaves together to form a regime of truth and governs what are seen to be normal and right ways of being a teacher of primary school children. The discourses discussed in this section are not independent of each other but are circuits connecting with each other, as they create particular configurations in the early years of primary schooling.

One way in which this was achieved was through the failure to 'see' gender whilst simultaneously normalising biological 'bodily' difference, unequal age relations and expecting particular roles for boys and girls. Making gender escape in the lives of young children is related to dominant discourses that tend to construct children as biological, passive and unprotesting, without agency and without sexuality and gender. Connell (2012) illustrates that categorical gender differences not only involve biology but are connected to sex-role socialisation. Like biologically determined bodies that are created in relation to masculinity and femininity as oppositional, in sex role socialisation the fixed dichotomy between boys and girls is based on different social roles, norms, and expectations demanded of boys and girls. For example, boys' roles are differentiated from girls' roles, with the expectation that boys' and girls' behaviour should follow from conforming to these expected roles.

The scepticism in linking gender and young children developed during the initial stages of the research while I was establishing access and building social relations with teachers and when I discussed my research I was told, 'gender, doesn't matter to young children', 'children are children' and 'just kids, still young'.

In the initial stages of the research teachers suggested that I should research the "higher standards" where the yields around gender would be high. I kept wondering about yielding any dividends since I was talking to teachers who had between nine to twenty-nine years of experience in early childhood teaching.

When children are constructed as children, they are not only regarded as gender innocent but sexual innocence is a key marker of childhood (Jackson and Scott 2010; Robinson 2013; Kane 2013; Egan 2013; Renold et al. 2015; Bhana 2016). Teachers often fail to see the significance of gender because of the dominant discourses that make gender irrelevant. The privileging of children as non-gendered and asexual operates to mask gender power relations. Gender-neutrality means that teachers cannot see the child as sexual/gendered and constructing sexuality and gendering with others, nor can they challenge the continual naturalisation of gender differences and unequal relations of power. These common sense positions are deeply intertwined with the understandings of how to be a teacher of young children.

Connected to childhood innocence and the construction of children are age inequalities:

Mrs A: In grade one the children are too young.

Children are often constructed as adults in the making (Thorne 1993) and the recourse to ages and stages of development positions childhood as a sequence of developmental stages. In other words being too young, illustrates the incomplete gendered version of adults (Danby 1998). A gender development according to Thorne (1993) approach is based on an incremental and linear unfolding and developing of identity within social contexts. Age is thus a significant marker and the young are biologically destined to get older and thus gendered and sexualised. The younger child is considered unprotesting and without agency. This conceptu-alisation about young children is deeply problematic. It mis-recognises the position of children. Absent in the 'just kids' discourse are the gender and sexual dynamics of children and the play of power in children's cultures which I explore in Chap. 7 to Chap. 10. It is also assumed that children are passive recipients of gender/sexual messages. This discourse is a means through which an attempt is made to "anchor children's lives, confirm teachers' power and generate multiple sites of power for adults" (Canella 1997: 44; Chapman 2015).

Hinging on the age relations is the presumption of childhood innocence. Presuming innocence means immunity from sexual (and gendered) knowledge (Epstein and Johnson 1998; Tobin 1997; Yelland 1998). The presumption of innocence imbues the adult teacher with knowledge and power and the need for children to be protected from (sexual) corruption. Teachers tend to avoid sexuality in general and this increases its value on the black market of forbidden discourses (Letts and Sears 1999). As Tobin (1997: 1) suggests putting sexuality and young children is malignant, corrupting, "problematic and even potentially dangerous". Butler's performance theory is useful in explicating this issue. Butler (1990: 33) understands gender as "the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts… that congeal over time to produce the appearance of a substance, of a natural sort of being". The association of sexuality and young children could threaten or disrupt the illusion that makes gender and childhood innocence a powerful discourse, or as Butler observes, a "natural sort of being". Conversely, yoking children with sexual knowledge operates as a theft of innocence and unnatural. Chapters 7–10 will shows that early primary school contexts are not barren, as teachers wish them, but are actively producing gendered (and sexual) cultures. Primary schooling thus produces sexuality by forbidding it. Closeting children by presuming innocence is a "state which some *adults* mistakenly *wish* upon children and which confirms their power" (Epstein and Johnson 1998: 97 [emphasis in original]) while denying children's lived experiences. The discourse of presuming innocence consolidates the idea of teachers as mothers, women as caring and nurturing, and as moral heroines of innocent and ignorant children, which I discuss in Chap. 5. It also helps to understand why the early years of schooling are seen as a woman's domain and explains the broader implications of men's absence in this field.

Gender, Boys, Girls and Nature

Connell (2012) refers to the commonest form of gender categories based on the classification of gender as opposites where masculinity and femininity are normalised for inscribing gender differences based on bodies and biology. This regulation occurs through a shared discourse that positions boys and girls as biologically different, articulated here by Mrs G:

Mrs G: By nature most boys are aggressive. The girls are talkative by nature
Mrs I: In my class they are all the same whether they are boys or girls
Mrs G: I treat them all the same. They are all equal for me. In God's eyes everyone is equal. Do you know what makes them not equal? It's their behaviour. Look at Siyanda. He's so aggressive. By nature most boys are aggressive. The girls are talkative by nature
Mrs L: They are the same. These are just kids. The boys dominate the class. It's the same. The girls are the shy ones …
Mrs F: Boys still follow fathers and girls follow mothers, like boys are interested in cars. Girls will be different with different interests. It's how children are in general
Mrs H: I see all pupils as the same. They are all the same to me.

Mrs F adopts a gender-neutral position by suggesting that boys and girls have different interests but that's "how children are in general" imputing biology, sex role socialisation and gender inequalities. The children are constructed as non-gendered precisely because their differences are assumed to be fixed and biological. Gender-fixing also happens through recourse to God and religion: everyone is equal in God's eyes so why should gender matter? The gravity of biology and religion are based on naturalising human beings as fixed and immutable. Getting gender right involves the coherence of the self. The dominance of this discourse means that particular practices "escape" early schooling contexts. This was articulated by Mrs B: "I don't think I've thought very deeply about it [gender] (laughing) as affecting anything".

The "children are children" discourse naturalises human behaviour. For example, Mrs G claims that "most boys are aggressive", while Mrs L notes that the boys dominate the classroom. Aggression and domination in the classroom is the naturalisation of masculine power. Naturalisation works to create and sustain masculine power that benefits males and this has specific consequences for girls. Girls are constructed as the "shy ones". Power is a central dynamic in children's relations, boys are constructed as aggressive and dominating, but power is naturalised within a dominating discourse that frames children as children and assumes the naturalness of girls and boys' behaviour.

Making difference biological is a primary means through which teaching discourses execute and regulate gender identities. The overarching view that boys, for

example, are naturally prone to aggressiveness is traditional and limiting. If it is true that boys are naturally violent and girls are genetically coded to do the "talking", then little can be done to change this. Making difference biological helps to reproduce a natural masculinity and a natural femininity. Following Foucault (1980: 131) the early years of primary schooling has its own general politics of what constitutes truth and in making difference biological has become a discursive strategy to function as true and valued which has implications for teaching pedagogies:

Mrs E: You saw the maths lesson. It's the boys who are better both orally and in written work. The boys gave the answers and they are quicker. On the whole the girls are better in reading. I don't have any clue why that's so. Maybe it's the way we use our brain. Do you know that there are different ways we use the left and right hand side of the brain?

Making difference biological obliges one to "achieve the ways of being that appear to be implicated in a particular set of genitals they happen to have" (Davies 1989: 237) as Mrs E illustrates. Achieving mathematical prowess, for example, is associated with the kind of brains that boys have. The outcome is the same by making biological difference reside in the structure and function of the brain (Jordan-Young 2011; Schmitz 2010). Mrs E suggests that male and female brains are structured differently and so the tasks that are executed are different. Since the processing of tasks is different, different outcomes are achieved. Mathematics becomes suited to boys' brain structure and reading to girls. This dichotomous position can be explained in terms of man/woman; reason/emotion; math/reading; left/right use of the brain (Walkerdine 1989). Mrs E felt that young children might be born with a set of essentially female or male behaviours associated with the left and right hemispheres of the brain. She claims that the left and right brain dichotomy provides a basis through which she can differentiate between the strengths and capacities of boys and girls, therefore it describes what boys, and girls can do. This is not an unfamiliar discourse parading as legitimate, as Alloway (1995: 14) suggests with the "left-right brain hemispheres." The left-right structuring of the brain is used as biologically different processing structures with different outcomes for males and females (Jordan-Young 2011). The adoption of this discourse makes pedagogical sense to Mrs E when she explains that boys "are better and quicker in maths" orally and in written work. Girls, she says, are good at reading. A particular set of genitals obliged a particular kind of brain structuring to achieve a particular way of being. The idea of the left and right hand brain differentiation contributes to the binary biological ordering of the sexes connecting itself to the construction of gendered identities. In other words, her truth about left and right brain structuring translated into explanations for girls' ability in reading and boys' advantage in mathematics. Boys and girls become genetically and dualistically predisposed to perform or not in mathematics and reading.

Sex-Role Socialisation

Fixing boys and girls as biologically opposite overlapped with sex-role socialisation theory:

> I ask Mrs B how she perceives difference in boys and girls. Mrs B says, "Boys and girls are different, physically they know that they are different". Mrs B asks me: "Have you ever seen how boys and girls play with a ball?" I had never really thought about it, even though I had spent several years observing my older son play cricket and rugby. Mrs B says "boys dribble and kick the balls whilst girls roll the balls"… Mrs B talks about a recent outing with the children to a park. She says, "I wish you were there to see what I'm talking about. The girls went out to collect pretty little things whilst the boys jumped and crossed over the river".

According to Mrs B, a simple cause and effect relationship exists between girls rolling the ball and "pretty little things" and boys who "jumped and crossed the river," and kick and dribble balls. A long-standing argument has been made against biologically based sex-role theories (Connell 1987, 1995; Davies 1989; Ghaill 1994; Weedon 1997; Epstein and Johnson 1998; Gilbert and Gilbert 1998; Yelland 1998; Cannella 1997; Grieshaber and Cannella 2001). Schmitz (2010) suggests that biological determinism in understanding gender differences is not conclusive and points to the challenges that the social construction of gender offers to the debate. Yet a regime of truth operates in the schools through which the sexes are ordered in the schools and through which unequal power relations are perpetuated.

The perception of children as non-gendered, and therefore as unprotesting young minds without the ability to make choices about how to be, is a dominant teaching discourse. The dominant teaching discourses are different but they overlap as mutually supportive and interconnected grids as the example of children's gendered socialisation is explained below:

Mrs B: So the problem with gender is that there are different home values brought to school. If there is a certain idea at home, you can sow seeds in the classroom, but you can't change. Besides, if certain people think that way about gender, it is not our right to change it.

Mrs B's perspective is inextricably linked to the conceptualisation of power as finite. Mrs B articulates a position through which power is constructed as a linear model. Power is constructed as one-sided and oppressive—power is possessed by adults. Mrs B constructs power negatively. She does not have the power to interfere. Power is seen as the imposition of one's values on another. This meant that she believed that she could not change the conditions in her classroom. She could not control the conditions in her classroom because power resided somewhere else: with parents as more influential adults. The idea that there is a simple relationship in how children become gendered is based on socialisation and power as oppressive. Exercising power may be at odds with her idea that it is not right to interfere with what children learn at home, so that schooling as an arena of social change is made less promising. This is not convincing because teachers are very powerful agents in

school and the children often idolise and adore them. The dominant teaching discourse, however, is a strategic tactic to produce the logic of passivity in children.

Mrs F expressed "how children learn to be gendered":

Mrs F: You know how important the parents are in bringing up their children. The children will naturally carry what their parents have expected. I think we need to be equal, but you automatically fall back on what your parents have taught you. What I follow is what my mother taught me and so that's how I carry on …

Mrs F, similar to Mrs B's common sense approach, constructs the home and the parents as one of the central foundations of learning. The family is a key to understanding how gender is mediated and negotiated but gendering occurs in many sites, and the school is one of them. This is a powerful discourse and children are assumed to get their gender right in terms of socialisation. Sex-role stereotyping tends to reinforce biological understandings of being female and being male. In Mrs F's terms "parents are the models"—children are born as boys or girls and are socialised by their parents to be that way. It assumes that parents model and reinforce in the child those behaviours that are considered to be sex-role appropriate. Sex role socialisation is based on an ordered and consistent relation between the social institutions and some causal mechanism.

In another interview, Mrs F illustrates the point further:

"Parents are the models". Boys will imitate their fathers and girls imitate their mothers. It's already set there. Boys are good with their hands. Girls are sharper with reading and they are more obedient.

Boys become boys in the ways that they do because of a simple cause and effect relationship. Here it is assumed that sexist gender differences are created and maintained through socialisation. In this process, it is assumed that children as unthinking beings automatically absorb how to develop. Hence, boys and girls for Mrs F become gendered through imitation and modelling (Martino and Rezai-Rashti 2012). For Mrs F, boys and girls become traditionally gendered because they have absorbed the sexist gender messages from their parents.

The logic of this conservative discourse is the passivity of children. The child is produced in this discourse without legitimate agency. In a world of two sexes, distinct and complementary ways of being are translated into explanations that girls might be dainty, and boys rough. The effect of these discourses is to determine in advance what constitutes normal femininity and masculinity. Normalising identity means rewarding some, attacking others and creating judgments about what constitutes a "normal" identity. This sets the limits of what is possible and permissible in schools and hides the unequal power relations that exist across either ends of the dichotomy. Moreover, the power plays that exist in everyday life lose their significance through the finite construction of the self as static and fixed (Francis 1998).

Boys Will Be Boys

An overarching effect of making difference biological is the "boys will be boys" as discussed and assumes biological determination. My observations and interviews were suggestive of this:

Mrs D: The boys like to get up to some mischief at the back of the classroom
          Mrs D asks the class to be quiet. Most of the children put their pointer
          fingers to their lips
Mrs D: Thank you children for sitting so politely. Just those boys playing swords
          spoilt it
Mrs A: They're [Boys] real causers, hey! In my class, they just want to have their
          way. It's in their personality
Mrs F: Look at the class now, the girls are carrying on, on their own and the boys
          … look. They are the main culprits. They have to be given more attention.
          But some boys are sweet and obedient. With the girls, you tell them one
          thing and they listen. See how the girls work. You can see for yourself …
          like the naughty boys you have to keep talking to them
Mrs L: The boys are the naughty ones
Mrs G: By nature most boys are aggressive … They [Boys] are always naughty,
          just like boys' behaviour … Boys will remain boys. They are just like that
          … Boys are always rough. They do kick and throw things down … If
          work is demanded the girls give it on time because they know they will be
          punished. The boys are not afraid because they repeat the mistake and
          they don't do the work
Mrs G: Everybody is free now with the ANC [African National Congress]. But
          the boys are more free. They are always naughty, just like boys' behaviour
          because boys speak out. The girls are shy.

The 'boys will be boys' cliché is based on biological assumptions and homogenises the boys in ways that suggest their less-than-satisfactory behaviour: culprits, causers, mischievous, want their way, naughty, aggressive, fearless and rough. The impact of their visibility in the above observation does not work in their favour. This tendency to homogenise boys is to locate the problem with boys, blaming the boys for discipline problems. Girls are the models through which boys' behaviour is constructed. It also encourages and rewards a passive and gentle femininity. The boy's behaviour demands more teacher attention. Mrs F says that she needs to "keep talking" to the naughty boys resonating with dominant conceptualisation of the boys' problem (Martino and Meyenn 2001; Ghaill and Haywood 2011). However, boys' visibility does not always work to their advantage, as the observation above shows (Epstein and Johnson 1998).

The visibility of boys as problems is tied intimately to teacher constructions of masculinity that is biological. It is assumed that there is a core personality and character defining masculinity that all boys actually or potentially share (Gilbert and Gilbert 1998). Boys are constructed as naturally equipped to be, for instance,

"causers" as Mrs A suggests. These essentialist arguments work to constrain teachers in exercising power and ensuring a more harmonious classroom that benefits all. If boys and roughness are naturalised as unchangeable, hard-wired and violent, then the possibility for change in boys (and men) is erased. The 'boys will be boys' pathology is intimately connected to and shaped by the discourse that makes difference biological and is intrinsic to the formation of gendered identities. As Connell (2009: 11) notes, gender is, "the structure of social relations that centres on the reproductive arena, and the set of practices that bring reproductive distinction between bodies into social processes". Following this logic, Mrs G says that boys do not give work in on time. They are "not afraid because they repeat the mistake and they don't do the work". This is a clear example of the ways in which boys (re)create systems of masculine power. In this way, the production of identity is linked with the production of particular discourses, such as biological determinism that serve to legitimate masculine power. The 'boys will be boys' discourse thus makes "boyhood … the entitlement to and the anticipation of power" (Foster et al. 2001: 16).

Boys are not all the same, opening up contradictions in the naturalisation of masculinity. For example, some boys according to Mrs F are "sweet and obedient". Mrs G explains that some boys kick and throw things down—a violent masculinity. This suggests the existence of masculinities and points to the complex ways through which boys try to get their gender right. Clearly, biological definitions of the self, limit the work towards gender equality, and when discourses lump boys as 'boys will be boys', they serve to work against the varied forms of masculinity. They also work against the idea that masculinities are in fact forged in and through social circumstances. In particular, they work to (re)produce unequal power relations, which privilege boys. In Chap. 3, the 'boys will be boys' discourse as it plays out at *Westridge* is examined whilst Chap. 4 provides cultural markers through which gender is understood at *Umbumbulu.*

So far, this chapter has identified the interlocking discourses through which gender is erased and childhood innocence is enforced. The next chapter will focus on another major discursive construction, teachers as mothers, which sits uncomfortably with boys' and girls' own construction of gender. Indeed, as will be shown, gendering is an integral part of the routines of everyday life, "not an escape from it" (Connell 1995: 3). By focusing on teachers, boys and girls, the book exposes the major paradoxical space between teaching discourses that operate to maintain childhood innocence and the vital importance of addressing boys and girls as active gendered and sexual agents. As stated earlier in this chapter my intent is not simply to show how teaching discourses do the work of making gender invisible whilst naturalising gender differences in the early years of primary schooling as global patterns suggests (Skelton 2001; MacNaughton 2000; Paechter 2007), but to show how gender is discursively produced in relation to the surrounding social, cultural and economic contexts where race, class, gender and sexuality are intimately intertwined.

Teaching discourses are not only shaped by dominant ideologies of gender and childhood innocence but also by material structures of power. Whilst the teaching discourses described so far resonate with and appear similar to global constructs of

teachers, teaching and gender in the early years of primary schooling, these discourses are produced by specific economic, social and cultural changes which could promote childhood innocence or break down the mythical assumptions based on the highly variable experiences around race, age, class and culture. Thus, in addition to illustrating the shared patterns of teaching discourses across the school contexts in producing a regime of truth around the innocent and asexual child, I locate these ideologies within varied race and class permutations in schools, looking at the ways in which teaching discourses are held up and broken down as well as the strategic ways in which gender relations of power operates within local contexts. Keeping this dual focus in mind, the next section of this chapter addresses local variables. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 will also illustrate the significance of gender, race, class, sexuality and age in the development of the major argument in this book.

Changing Gender: Race, Class and Culture

In this section, I argue that beyond fixing children to essentialist ideologies, sex-role socialisation, and developmental outcomes, teachers express knowledge of children through a complex well of inequalities that reflects South Africa's larger scale social forces. These forces include poverty, gender inequalities, gender-related violence, and the legacies of apartheid as well as cultural norms that provide variations to teachers' understanding of boys and girls. Through these social forces the section draws attention to the dynamic and contradictory discourses that are shaped as teachers shape boys and girls in their social context. The section illustrates this complexity by drawing attention to examples of teachers' and, in particular, how such positionings contest the fixing of boys and girls. Against the homogenising tendencies reported in the previous section, the rest of the chapter shows how teaching discourses are generated in ways that raise significant issues of race, class, culture in the formation of gendered identities disrupting the privileged position that informs the degendering/desexualisation of the early years of primary schooling.

Westridge School

Looking Indian, Seeing Muslim

Various assumptions exist about the existence of separate racial and ethnic groups in KwaZulu-Natal. Apartheid has historically allowed the unproblematic use of racial categories suggesting racial and cultural similarity and thus a coherent identity. Chapter 1 provided an understanding of racialised identities in South Africa. Many Indians arrived in this province to work in the sugar plantations in

1860 while many others arrived here as merchants. They included Muslims and Christians, but predominantly Hindus. As an ethnographer, I was aware of many Muslim parents—and women in particular—who came to school to pick up their children clad in traditional dress or "burkah". The dress usually entails the wearing of a head-covering scarf and a long dress and pants. In contrast Hindu Indian woman sometimes wear "punjabis"—a long dress, pants and scarves. At *Westridge*, the broader discourses on religion and race have been re-worked and impact upon the nature of social relations in the school (Skelton 2001). These discourses include assumptions of a coherent and fixed racial identity and are further intersected by gender.

In the following example, in order to explore the regulation of gender identity, I sketch the construction of masculinity with reference to Mrs D's notion of Samit:

DB: Samit says "girls don't exist"
Mrs D: Oh yes. Samit is very anti-girl. He does sometimes come in with culture because he is Muslim. So, it is possible that the culture comes in clearly here and because there's definitely those differences in culture where the girls are valued lesser. I don't know whether that is the reason but that's possible.

Samit is a nine-year-old Indian boy from a wealthy family. I draw from my data to introduce Samit.

I chat to Samit who in a previous visit had proudly showed me a framed photograph of his home that won the best architectural design in Durban the previous year.

Mrs D constructs Samit as anti-girl and Muslim. Through my own material positioning, I knew that Samit is not Muslim but Hindu. Mrs D attempted to explain Samit's alleged misogyny in terms of his culture and religion. Samit's comments that "girls don't exist" are described as specific to him as Muslim is specific to a particular culture. In the same way, Samit is distanced from her, as a white English Christian teacher, other children and the hegemonic Christian culture of the school. Samit's culture and his religion are constructed as 'other', valued differently and constructed as anti-feminist. Misogyny and anti-girl comments are then given to reside in Muslim boys and men. In other words, Mrs D assumes that all Muslims share a common devaluation of gender. In this way, culture becomes static and unchanging homogenising Muslim boys' experiences. Misogyny becomes a problem residing elsewhere such as in Samit who is assumed to be a Muslim who is anti-girl (Archer 2001). Chapter 4 focuses on *Westridge* and the ways in which rugger bugger masculinity is endorsed and supported by teachers at the school, which is deeply connected to an anti-girl culture. Therefore, teaching discourses inscribed in specific schools must be recognised so as to develop strategies relevant to their particular situation. Mrs D homogenises Indian people and assumes Samit's culture and religion based on his race. That Samit is not Muslim reveals the fragility of reductionist arguments based on culture and religion. It also suggests the othering of Muslims as 'folk devils' with accompanying negative categorisation

(Ghaill 1994). In this example gender is not only intimately linked to race and religion, but also to wider demonisation of Muslims as regressive in terms of gender equality. Samit who is not even a Muslim is positioned as more sexist and as Phoenix (1998) argues the 'ultimate others'. Specific teaching discourses work to create the conditions for relations of power. "Looking Indian and seeing Muslim" can be read as a cultural index through which certain positions are made inaccessible and others rejected. The cultural index is used to police the boundaries of acceptable masculinity.

Umhlatuzana School

African Boys Don't Perform

This section explores teaching discourses where African boys are positioned as academically poor achievers. The focus of this section is to highlight the racialising discourses that regulate the gender identity of black boys. Racialised discourses did not uniformly take place in all situations as the previous example has illustrated. At times when children performed poorly, teachers drew upon deficit theories that had become part of their teaching discourse including those about African boys. Thus, at a very general level I draw on observations and interviews from Mrs E's classroom to demonstrate the interconnections between race, class and gender. There were four African boys in her class who lived in the nearby working class township of KwaMashu although some lived with their mothers who work as domestic workers in their place of employment:

Mrs E: The African boys don't respond in class. They're not yet confident. Abongile lives here and the others come from KwaMashu …You know how it is there, poverty and so neglected. When you ask for something to be done, they don't do it. When I talk in class there's no confidence and it's very hard to get it. So they're very withdrawn and shy and it takes a long time to improve confidence … With such a big class I have no time to worry about individuals … The environment that they come from makes a big difference. If you put them in a different environment, then you would get a different reaction … They're very embarrassed about their home language. Samke speaks well and is confident and she helps …

Despite the earlier position to fix and homogenise children, African boys' visibility was achieved through complex race, class, gender, and language connections. By reference to poverty, lack of parental care and general neglect in KwaMashu, Mrs E constructs a masculinity based on deficit and therefore shy, lacking in confidence and withdrawn. African boys who don't speak English are constructed as withdrawn and interwoven with economic disadvantage and poor academic performance to (re)produce stereotypes. Once African boys have been

aligned with poor language skills, poor achievement and withdrawal, a context allows reproduction and regulation of a racialised and marginalised masculinity. African boys' visibility is not premised upon overtly disruptive behaviour (Martino and Rezai-Rashti 2012) but rather their academic lack complexly intertwined with class disparities and distance from English hegemony, which works to engender inequalities. However, when it came to the discussion on David, Mrs F reproduced the disruption or the potential disruptive factor in African boys:

Mrs F: David can be very good but sometimes he gets so wild that I have to remind him where he is …

   David is contradictorily constructed as good and as wild. Mrs F's comments of "where he is", provides the context which serves to foreground difference based on the logic of the other—race and class are imputed in the social construction of masculinity. Mrs F's reminder to David about where he is (a predominantly Indian school) highlights where he is not, that is the context of the township. Overall, the example shows how the complex processes of academic lack, actual and potential disruptive behaviour of African boys reinforce marginalised masculinity. At the same time the difference is constructed against the broader context at Umhlatuzana where Mrs F reinforces dominant images of working class African boys as more aggressive, lacking the academic prowess of the Indian middle-class boys. Disruptive behaviour is associated with class, race and violence, which serves to maintain relations of power.

KwaDabeka School

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 provide detail analysis of the ways in which the social context shapes as children shape gender, violence and sexuality. In this section I provide a different format from the preceding schools. While the focus here is on specific teacher-generated discourse I give this school a special status as it was one most punctuated by violence and the least friendly in gender terms.

Black Girls and Culture: We Must not Look into the Eyes of a Male

At *KwaDabeka Primary School* gender power relations are culturally manifested.

Mrs G: No, there is no difference to gender because boys still dominate. Look at the boys they just go there and sit on the floor and write. Girls won't do that. Boys are not afraid of the teacher but girls will never do this … in our school there a very few male teachers. The male teachers lack power

because the female teachers dominate but they try all the time to
undermine the principal

DB: Why?

Mrs G: Because she is a female. They do not want to take instructions from a
         female. At home the father is the head of the family, it's not the same in
         this school. In our culture we must respect them [males] but because we
         are educated we challenge them

DB: What kind of culture is this?

Mrs G: *In our culture we must not look into the eyes of a male.* You must look
         down at the floor especially if you are an older man. In my grade the kids
         are influenced by all of this and so the girls don't speak to the boys
         (emphasis added).

Culture and gendered norms interact in ways that hold culture and the school in
tension with each other. Mrs G has a high level of alertness to notions of power
although these are reduced to static cultural constructions. For example she
understands the domination of the classroom space by boys (Paechter 2007) and the
differential gendered processes where girls are regarded as more sensible and
obedient (Renold et al. 2015) whilst boys are seen as contesting the teacher's power
and authority (Martino and Rezai-Rashti 2012). Mrs G recognises the patriarchal
and cultural norms through which gender relations are negotiated in her classroom.
Discourses on "culture" and particular practices are appropriated and re-worked to
impact on the nature of social relations in the classroom. The central issue here is
how boys, girls and teachers engage with specific cultural forms that contribute to
the asymmetrical power relations. Mrs G points to connections between cultural
definitions, male power and girls' disadvantage. Mrs G constructs the culture as
unchanging and static. Here it is assumed that boys or girls do not have the power to
change their positions in society because of cultural discourses and practices. Thus,
Mrs G understands power dynamics in favour of boys and men. She notes the
invasion of space, "boys just go there and sit on the floor and write". As a teacher
she lives through the battle of the sexes as the few male teachers in the school try to
undermine the female principal. Mrs G accounts for this through culture, "in our
culture we must respect them". However, Mrs G invests in her ability to resist
cultural definitions that are placed on her as adult woman but her resistance is
enabled because she is "educated". She is able to challenge the men in her school.
In this way she claims and confirms power for herself with the ability to challenge
and contest. The cultural patterns that work against girls are not static but dynamic
and open to change. However, the girls (as children) who "don't speak to the boys"
are rendered as passive, unprotesting victims of culture and thus powerless. The
interconnectedness of power with cultural constructions of maleness is important in
the construction of hegemonic masculinities. Mrs G points to the particular prac-
tices that inscribe unequal power relations "in our culture we must not look into the
eyes of a male … In my grade the kids are influenced by all of this". Thus particular
positions are inhabited based on the cultural practice that marginalises others and is
damaging to girls. Boys are able to occupy positions that reinforce maleness and

contribute to unequal power relations. Mrs G is also aware of boys' ability to blur the boundaries and exercise power. The cultural practices that silence girls' voices also objectify the teacher as woman. The cultural privilege and her objectification is manifest in her claim that boys are not afraid of the teacher and her recognition that boys invade the spaces in the classroom which serve to (re)produce gender identity. Adult teacher-boy and girl relations are thus differentially valued and inscribed with cultural (and racial) definition. Specific cultural practices create the conditions for power and access to power is differential and impacts severely on the positions that are made available to girls and objectify women.

As in earlier sections, I make no claims of representativity, but instead I draw attention to teaching discourses which are culturally specific which position boys' patterns of conduct in ways that engender unequal power relations.

Umbumbulu School

The everyday life of boys and girls at *Umbumbulu Primary School* is defined and differentiated through gender. In this regard, teaching discourses work to produce and reproduce specific inscriptions of gender:

Mrs L: It's hard. The girls see what their mothers do. They are all very poor. Their grannies support them. You see they have no shoes. If the mothers are at home, they plough at home. They work in the sugar cane plantation. Some of them grow *madumbies* [yams] but you see these *madumbies* take six months to grow so they sell them only once a year. These girls they must help at home.

The broader structures of inequality in *Umbumbulu School* are recognised by Mrs L where women and girls' vulnerability in rural KwaZulu-Natal and poverty are clear. Poverty is linked to apartheid legacies where rural areas became a chief source of labour for the mining industry and drew large numbers of African men to wage labour in the cities. Women who were left in rural areas, if they too had not migrated to urban areas to seek low paid work especially as domestic workers, often had to toil the land and eke out a living through agriculture. As Mrs L indicates the particular agricultural context produces particular sets of positions for women and girls. Chapter 5 will continue this specific focus on this rural context. Significantly, social and cultural context is integral to gender relations. Production of gender discourses occurs in/through a material reality that limits the articulation of positions.

Teaching discourses position boys and girls within specific schooling sites and make and regulate gender identity in the early years of primary schooling. These discourses inform, and are informed by, differentiated masculinities and femininities and the power relations that are contained within them. Teaching discourses are

informed by class, race, sexuality, religion, language and culture, all of which contribute to and help shape gendered experiences in schools. This section of the chapter has highlighted the significance of the local in the construction of gender identities. In each school broader cultural discourses have been appropriated and in turn impact upon the nature of social relations in the school. Specific teaching discourses are located within a whole range of complex and interlocking practices that systematically work to reproduce asymmetrical relations of power.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have illustrated how dominant teaching discourses create a regime of truth in the adult desire to maintain childhood innocence. Children are not only regarded as gender innocent but sexual innocence is a key marker of childhood (Jackson and Scott 2010; Robinson 2013; Kane 2013; Egan 2013; Renold et al. 2015; Bhana 2016). I tried to show how teaching discourses privilege particular ways of knowing, thinking and living gender; the power relations that are produced and reproduced and the implications of this for unequal gender power relations which become significant in the production, policing and regulation of childhood innocence. These discourses are hegemonic and constraining. The teaching discourses make children innocent; construct them as unsexed, unprotesting, passive and without agency. It is not surprising that my initial request to do this study at schools was met with "Why children—just kids?" The teaching discourses serve to perpetuate the minor status of the early years in the bigger picture of schooling and leads to a systematic inattention to the dynamic lives of all those who inhabit it. We are expected to think about young children without any persistence and seriousness because of the assumed vulnerability of children who are made to be defenceless and powerless. As the book will go on to show, these discourses open up the paradoxical space in the desire to maintain childhood innocence, boys and girls active agency and the vital importance of addressing gender and sexuality in the early years of primary schooling.

There has been an expansive critique against essentialist ideas that delineate some distinct biological characteristic that accounts for behavioural differences (Connell 2012; Holmes 2007). The social construction of gender or the ways in which bodies are marked by social/cultural processes contradicts the simplistic assumptions that put bodies with biology to assume a particular behaviour pattern (Butler 1990; Connell 2009). Connell (2012) suggests that gender is under constant construction, always in process and shapes as it is shaped by social arrangements and the everyday routine way in which gender is practiced and regulated (Connell 2009). In the second part of this chapter I provided examples of the specific ways in which gender interacts with race, class and culture to show how such social arrangements modulate teaching discourses steeped in relations of power. This section has contested the naturalisation of teaching discourses and drawn attention to how power is deeply connected to race, class, culture and other social differences

and these have effects for the ways in which gender is constructed in the early years of primary schooling. Chapter 3 continues the focus on a dominant teacher-mother discourse whilst showing how children contest and negotiate the question of teachers as mothers.

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