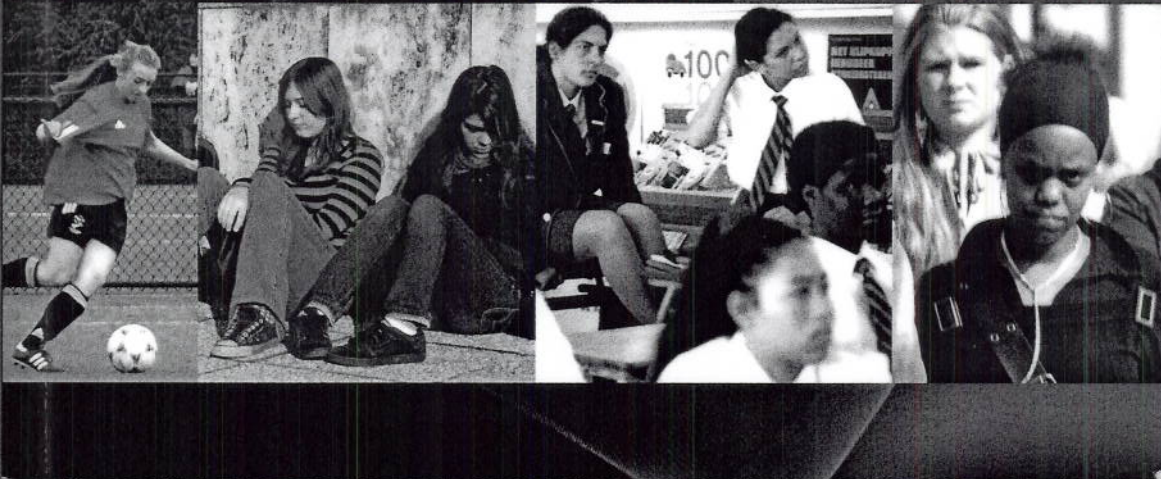EDITED BY
Carolyn Jackson
Carrie Paechter
& Emma Renold

girls and education

3-16

continuing concerns, new agendas

Mixed Sources
Product group from well-managed forests and other controlled sources
www.fsc.org Cert no. TT-COC-002769
© 1996 Forest Stewardship Council
FSC

The **McGraw·Hill** Companies

We

11 Demanding time: balancing school and out-of-school demands

Carolyn Jackson

Introduction

Displays of academic labour are regarded as 'uncool' within many secondary schools. Although government ministers and some researchers (Osler and Vincent 2003; Power et al. 2003; Francis and Skelton 2005) have suggested that the 'uncool to work' discourse applies only to boys, my research suggests that it is also dominant for girls (Jackson 2006). Yet there is a requirement in contemporary society for girls and boys to acquire 'good' academic credentials to enhance their chances in the competition for a 'good' career. This requirement is now well documented, and is a product of the broader 'neoliberal ethos of individualization, competition and marketization' (Ringrose 2007: 484). Given pressures on students to work for good academic credentials, the 'uncool to work' discourse can pose problems for them: how can they be 'cool' and popular, but also academically successful? Although some researchers have explored this and related questions in relation to boys (Frosh et al. 2002; Younger and Warrington 2005), girls have received very little attention in this regard, although there are signs that this is changing (Renold and Allan 2006; Francis this collection). This chapter explores how, given the contradictory 'uncool to work' and credentials discourses, secondary school girls in my research organized key aspects of their in- and out-of-school lives. Most girls attempted to balance academic and social (cool) demands, so I explore how they did this, and which girls were most able to achieve both academic and social 'success'.

I draw upon data from an ESRC funded project[1] that explored 'laddishness' among Year 9 pupils (13–14 years old; see Jackson 2006). The study generated questionnaire data from approximately 800 pupils and interview data from 153 pupils (75 girls) and 30 teachers. Six secondary schools in the north of England were involved: four co-educational (Beechwood, Elmwood, Firtrees, Oakfield), one girls' (Hollydale) and one boys'

(Ashgrove). The schools were selected to ensure a mix of pupils in terms of social class, 'race' and ethnicity, and a mix of schools in terms of examination results, and gender of intake (single-sex and co-educational). This chapter draws mainly upon data from interviews with girls (from the five schools where there were girls), although occasional references are made to questionnaire, and teacher interview, data.

Pupils were interviewed individually in spring–summer 2004, during the school day, in school, for approximately 30 minutes. Interviews were semi-structured and covered several topics including attitudes and approaches to school work; tests; pressures in school; friends and popularity; out-of-school activities. They were audio-taped and transcribed in full. Transcripts were analysed using the computer package Nud*ist Vivo, in which responses were coded thematically (see Jackson 2006 for more details). Names in this chapter are pseudonyms.

Constructing Popular, Cool Femininities: Negotiating the 'Credentials' and 'Uncool to Work' Discourses

The importance of popularity and friendship in girls' school lives is well recognized and documented (e.g. Hey 1997; Osler and Vincent 2003; Girlguiding UK and the Mental Health Foundation 2008). Not all girls aspire to be 'popular' because, as Paechter (2007) notes, being in the popular group often indicates more about how much social power a girl has rather than how much she is liked or respected. However, few, if any, girls want to be at the unpopular end of the 'popularity continuum' because of the negative consequences that ensue from being unpopular and not 'fitting in' (Hey 1997; Paechter 1998; Kehily 2001; Renold 2005).

Most of the girls I interviewed identified, without difficulty, features of popular femininity within their schools. They also recognized that popular girls had the most social power and were most able to influence and police 'acceptable' ways of 'doing girl' within their (heteronormative) school communities. Popular girls were usually regarded as (a) pretty, which involved being thin; (b) fashionable – they wore trendy clothes, make-up and had the latest mobile phones; and (c) sociable – they 'hung out' with friends inside and outside school, and were 'interested in', and attractive to, popular boys. In addition, and importantly, a recurring theme was that to be popular (or at least to avoid being unpopular) girls, like their male counterparts, generally had to avoid overt hard work and exhibit an air of indifference about academic endeavours. This finding challenges other work that suggests working hard is acceptable for girls, but uncool and unacceptable for boys (Osler and Vincent 2003; Power et al. 2003;

Francis a
loud, and
illustrate

Sarah
So wh
…it'
work
and I

Nassi
What
…W
shoes
make
most.

Clara
They
and s
all th
them

Jenny
Most
and t
straig
skinn
them

Gail (
I wou
say it'
becau

As flagg
constructi
the domin
– to gain
views, and
For examp
work hard
a bleak fu
taken this
of pupils (
true' in re
order to g

f pupils in terms
1 terms of exam-
lucational). This
ls (from the five
rences are made

ıer 2004, during
Interviews were
ttitudes and ap-
ds and popular-
ınscribed in full.
Nud*ist Vivo, in
)06 for more de-

|

ool lives is well
cent 2003; Girl-
t all girls aspire
in the popular
a girl has rather
any, girls want
because of the
ınd not 'fitting

ılty, features of
zed that popu-
luence and po-
mative) school
etty, which in-
thes, make-up
ıung out' with
and attractive
ng theme was
girls, like their
k and exhibit
ing challenges
ls, but uncool
er et al. 2003;

Francis and Skelton 2005). Popular girls were also commonly portrayed as loud, and sometimes as smokers and/or drinkers. The following examples illustrate how girls depicted popular femininity:

Sarah (Firtrees)
So what makes them [group of girls] popular?
…it's like the clothes they wear and the way they never do any work…smoking and drinking on Friday nights and everything, and like shouting at teachers and not doing as they [teachers] say.

Nassima (Oakfield)
What sorts of things make girls popular in school, do you think?
…Well now, it's who's got the best shoes I think, the best pointy shoes. And the best hairdos, best coats, bags, shoes, everything, make-up, best looks, who's with the best guy or who can pull the most.

Clara (Hollydale)
They [popular girls] go out with the popular boys and get drunk and stuff…They just dress like in all the latest stuff and they like all the latest phones and stuff. So everyone wants to be seen with them.

Jenny (Firtrees)
Most of the popular girls you see walking in groups together and they've all got the same hairstyle and their hair is perfectly straight. Like [they've got] the same coats and they're all dead skinny and there's all these little chubby girls walking behind them going 'oh I want to be like that'.

Gail (Elmwood)
I wouldn't say they're popular because they're hard workers, I'd say it's maybe more of the opposite: some people might say it's because they're not [hard workers].

As flagged earlier, the centrality of the 'uncool to work' discourse in the construction of popular femininity created problems for girls because of the dominance of the counter, 'credentials' discourse. Pressures to succeed – to gain credentials – were reported regularly by schoolgirls in the interviews, and these were frequently transmuted into pressures not to fail. For example, girls spoke of teachers and parents emphasizing the need to work hard and succeed in school in order to avoid 'dead-end' jobs and a bleak future (see also Reay and Wiliam 1999). Almost all students had taken this message on board. For example, on a questionnaire 72 per cent of pupils (girls and boys) chose 'very true' and 18 per cent chose 'mostly true' in response to the statement 'doing well in school is important in order to get a good job in later life' (points 5 and 4 on a 5-point scale).

The credentials discourse is dominant in schools. However, the 'uncool to work' pupil discourse is an equally dominant, yet contradictory, discourse. Given this, how do students navigate these discourses?

All interviewees spoke of the value of academic credentials, and none rejected academic work completely. However, some suggested that they prioritized social rather than academic goals because it was uncool to work. Sandy (Hollydale), for example, suggested she did not work hard because it was not cool to do so:

> *If it was really cool to work hard in school and you got status from working hard, would you work hard?*
> Yes I would, I would if it was [cool]. But because at the moment it's not, I just don't [work hard]. I don't try and I don't intend to.

By contrast, a minority rejected the 'uncool to work' discourse and instead subscribed to the credentials one. Within their groups these girls attempted to redefine school work as cool. This attempted redefinition was not, though, accepted by the majority. Generally, the price girls paid for overtly prioritizing school work over 'cool work' was being labelled as unpopular and mocked by their 'popular' peers.

While the 'uncool to work' pupil discourse was accepted by a small minority, and challenged by a small minority, the majority attempted to balance school work and 'cool work'. Frosh et al. (2002) reported similar findings from their study of 11–14-year-old boys. They argued that most boys attempted to negotiate what Frosh et al. call a 'middle way'. In other words, they tried to undertake school work in ways that avoided attracting the label 'swot'. For most girls in my research the tension between wanting to appear relatively 'cool' and popular in school, and also wanting to do well academically and attain good exam results, was difficult to manage. Not surprisingly, some were more adept at managing this than others. The next sections explore how some girls managed both academic and social 'success', and which girls were most likely to accomplish these.

Strategies for Balancing Social and Academic Demands

Whether or not a girl was successful at balancing academic and social demands depended, to a large extent, on the strategies she adopted and the resources at her disposal.[2] Strategies for 'getting away with' undertaking academic work without being cast as uncool operated on two levels, which I term 'direct' and 'indirect'. Time was central to both.

Direct strategies were those that girls employed deliberately to *hide* their work and effort. Girls hid or downplayed their effort because although

wever, the 'uncool to

tradictory, discourse.

es?

redentials, and none

suggested that they

t was uncool to work.

ot work hard because

u got status from

e at the moment

don't intend to.

rk' discourse and in-

eir groups these girls

tempted redefinition

y, the price girls paid

was being labelled as

accepted by a small

iajority attempted to

002) reported similar

iey argued that most

niddle way'. In other

iat avoided attracting

ion between wanting

d also wanting to do

s difficult to manage.

this than others. The

academic and social

plish these.

academic and social

s she adopted and the

ay with' undertaking

on two levels, which

h.

iberately to *hide* their

ort because although

academic achievement *per se* is not uncool, working hard to achieve is.[3] Such strategies included, for example, girls pretending they were not listening in class when they were, and working at home but hiding it. The latter frequently involved girls claiming to their peers that they had spent much less effort and time on their work than they actually had (see Jackson 2006 for more detail).

Indirect strategies were those that enabled students to *offset* the negative implications of school work, to negotiate more time and/or space for academic work without becoming unpopular. After-school socializing was one such indirect strategy; by ensuring they were sufficiently sociable outside of lessons and school, girls could 'get away with' some work. For example, Jane (Firtrees) explained how girls can work hard and still be popular if they balance their time:

> *Could a girl who worked hard and did really well be popular?*
> Yes
>
> *How would she manage that?*
> 'Cause you do your work and you try hard but you still have time for your friends. You don't just ignore your friends and [you] hang about with them as well as revising. Like you do your revising three days a week and go out with your friends the other three, or leave your work all the week and then do it at weekends.

Jane stressed the importance of making time for friends. Time was a big issue for most girls, and it arose in almost all of the interviews. Time is central to our lives, yet is often an invisible and taken-for-granted aspect. But lessons about time are an important part of the school's 'hidden curriculum'. Hughes (2002: 135) argues that

> Schooling is a key site where time discipline is instilled. . . . The organization of schooling is fixed according to age and calendar. The days are divided into periods and lesson activities are also planned to linear time. The length of examinations is set to specific hours and minutes. Teaching time of lessons is set aside from play time and home time. Children learn that if they have not finished their work they are taking too long or if they finish early they have not done enough. Accurately gauging the appropriate level of input in relation to the time available is a key skill.

The school system is premised on the assumption that pupils invest a lot of time and effort outside of school on their school work in order to be academically successful (see also Frosh et al. 2002). Yet, as we have seen, this is not straightforward for girls. Furthermore, in addition to the time demands of homework and socializing with friends, some girls reported

having to perform domestic duties such as looking after family members or undertaking household chores (which no boys reported having to do) (see also O'Brien 2003). Overall, the ways in which time is used, presented and negotiated by students is central to their academic lives *and* the activities that enable them to acquire 'popular' status, or at least avoid being 'unpopular'.

Strategies for hiding work and effort and balancing social and academic demands depended on pupils having the wherewithal to be able to pull them off. The remainder of this chapter explores how access to resources shaped the ways in which girls were able to balance the social and academic demands of schooling.

Resources for Balancing Social and Academic Demands

In his study of 10–11-year-old boys, Swain (2004: 171) argues that the boys' 'position in the peer group is determined by the array of social, cultural, physical, intellectual and economic resources that each boy is able to draw on and accumulate'. This applies to secondary school girls too. Furthermore, not only does access to these resources shape the pupils' position in their peer group, but crucially, it shapes how well they are able to *balance* the different demands of their lives.

Resources are inextricably linked to time. As O'Brien (2003: 265) argues, 'as the demand for more time on school work done at home increases through second level [schooling], working-class girls may not have the resources to meet this demand'. When the demands on time are viewed not only in terms of academic ones, but also in terms of social ones, access to resources becomes even more salient. In my research, access to resources that facilitated quick and effective home study practices left girls with more time to socialize with friends and undertake activities that could earn them peer approval. For example, some girls said that having a computer at home helped them to organize their school work and to work efficiently (see also Valentine et al. 2005). Computer technology also enabled some girls to undertake social activities without them leaving their homes, and to socialize while also (privately) doing their homework. For example, Steph (Hollydale) who attained scores of 6, 7, 6 in her SATs[4] spoke about how, using the internet, she did her homework and socialized with friends simultaneously:

> I always make sure that I've done my work because that's one of the most important things. But I like, when I've done it, I always try and do it quickly so then I have time to 'talk' [on the internet]. Or you can 'talk' to your friends when you're doing it or something. And then it's like, if I'm on the internet at home doing my

research I
both thing

It was clear fro
rupted interne
have internet
occurred onlin
works did not
weekends), it r
with relatively
who do not ha
physically to s
the opportunit
while socializi
homework in t

While acces
merous advant
technology tha
ample, who go
at home than a

> When you
> an art box,
> sequins an
> your work
> to do it on
> more my
> careless. So
> got at scho

Girls' access
more facilities a
for some stude
(Beechwood), v
me, 'I have like
we don't have a

Overall, whil
ficulties of fittin
some had the re

'They've Got It

So far I have di
ables pupils to
thus providing

ing after family members
ys reported having to do)
ch time is used, presented
idemic lives *and* the activ-
is, or at least avoid being

icing social and academic
ewithal to be able to pull
:s how access to resources
lance the social and aca-

)04: 171) argues that the
d by the array of social,
esources that each boy is
to secondary school girls
esources shape the pupils'
es how well they are able

'Brien (2003: 265) argues,
done at home increases
s girls may not have the
iands on time are viewed
erms of social ones, access
search, access to resources
/ practices left girls with
e activities that could earn
d that having a computer
irk and to work efficiently
iology also enabled some
leaving their homes, and
iomework. For example,
in her SATs[4] spoke about
nd socialized with friends

because that's one of
I've done it, I always
alk' [on the internet].
're doing it or some-
et at home doing my

research I can 'talk' to my friends at the same time, so I can get both things done at the same time.

It was clear from Steph's comments that she had long periods of uninter-rupted internet access at home. It was also clear that girls who did not have internet access would be excluded from the regular socializing that occurred online between Steph and her friends. While online social net-works did not replace face-to-face ones (Steph went out with friends at weekends), it meant that she could balance social and academic demands with relatively little effort (see also Gannon 2008). Contrast that with girls who do not have access to online social lives, and who have to meet up physically to socialize, the time demands are markedly different. So are the opportunities for combining work and social time. Steph could work while socializing and hide her work and effort; it is much harder to do homework in the park without being noticed.

While access to computers seemed to offer those who had them nu-merous advantages over those who did not, it was not only in terms of technology that resource differences were apparent. Zoe (Elmwood) for ex-ample, who got 7, 7, 6 in her SATs spoke proudly of having more resources at home than at school:

> When you're doing projects and things, at home you've got like an art box, and you've got all erm, like lollypop sticks and erm, sequins and cards and buttons and things. So when you're doing your work you can tend to do like little fancy borders. And I tend to do it on the computer because I think the more I write, the more my handwriting gets scruffier and my spelling gets a bit careless. So I think that's the facilities I've got there and I've not got at school.

Girls' access to resources differed markedly; while Zoe boasted of having more facilities at home than at school, finding space to study was an issue for some students (see O'Brien 2003; Ridge 2005). For example, Helen (Beechwood), who got 3, 3 and a score below test level in her SATs told me, 'I have like a cabin bed upstairs with't table and that underneath, and we don't have a table or owt downstairs, we just have a like, a breakfast bar'.

Overall, while many students talked about pressures of time and the dif-ficulties of fitting in the demands of school and of being cool and popular, some had the resources to make this balancing act easier.

'They've Got It All': Image and Class in the Balance

So far I have discussed the ways in which access to certain resources en-ables pupils to undertake school work relatively quickly (and privately) thus providing them with more time for the requisite 'cool work' (direct

strategies). Resources also help in a second way: certain resources help to offset the negative implications of school work. In other words, pupils were more likely to 'get away with' working if they were cool in other ways (indirect strategies) and, to an extent, cool could be purchased. It was easier for girls to be cool and popular if they wore the 'right sorts' of clothes and had the 'right sorts' of fashion accessories. Although there were some differences between the schools regarding fashion, the 'right sorts' of clothes and accessories were almost always very expensive (see also Swain 2002):

> Aisha (Oakfield)
> *So what are the cool things to wear?*
> ...right now for girls it's pointy shoes, and cropped jeans...I mean, the more expensive you look, the more cool you look.

> Ruth (Elmwood)
> *So who defines what's cool? I mean how do you decide what's cool and what's not cool?*
> It's probably clothes or something. Or the way you look....I think it's more makes than anything...They have to wear make [branded] clothes or you look like a scruff or summat.
> *So the scruffy ones aren't cool?*
> No. I think they're sectioned into three, you know, there's swots, cool and scrubbers, as they call them.

> Alice (Hollydale)
> We like to wear nice clothes and everything. Some people just look like tramps and everything but most of my friends and everything have nice clothes because we don't really want to be seen walking around with somebody who looks a tramp. But most people, it's not because of the clothes that they wear that we're not friends with them, it's just we don't really get on with them if you know what I mean.

Ruth and Alice's comments both convey downward social comparisons in terms of class. They talk about 'scruffs', 'scrubbers' or 'tramps' and both reveal the negative values attached to such labels. Alice's comment that 'it's not because of the clothes that they wear that we're not friends with them, it's just we don't really get on with them', conveys that it's not only clothes that make them 'Other' but also their ways of being. 'Swots' too were placed as 'Other': while they were not 'scrubbers', neither were they cool. This was partly because 'swots' did not wear 'fashionable' versions of school uniform and, crucially, they wore their uniform in an uncool way, which usually meant they wore it in accordance with school rules. For example, at Beechwood students who wore their ties in line with school

certain resources help to
... In other words, pupils
they were cool in other
... could be purchased. It
...ey wore the 'right sorts'
...cessories. Although there
...rding fashion, the 'right
...ways very expensive (see

d cropped jeans...I
...re cool you look.

decide what's cool and

... way you look....I
... have to wear make
summat.

know, there's swots,

ome people just look
ends and everything
...t to be seen walking
But most people, it's
...at we're not friends
...h them if you know

rd social comparisons in
...rs' or 'tramps' and both
...s. Alice's comment that
...t we're not friends with
onveys that it's not only
...ys of being. 'Swots' too
...bers', neither were they
'fashionable' versions of
iform in an uncool way,
... with school rules. For
ties in line with school

rules were called 'swotknots'. Undoubtedly, wearing the 'right sorts' of clothes in the 'right sorts of ways' and having appropriate accessories (for example, the latest mobile phones) enabled students to jump several rungs up the 'cool ladder' as it contributed to a cool image. Swain's (2002: 66) work in junior schools demonstrated how clothes act as 'a powerful signifier of the pupils' worth as people, and were an essential ingredient of social acceptability (or rejection) within their specific peer group culture'. In addition to the ways students dressed and adorned their bodies to portray an air of coolness, the body itself was central to the performance. Here again, some were given a head start. It was reported time and again during the interviews with pupils and teachers that girls could 'get away with' spending time working academically if they were heterosexually attractive. Many girls invested a lot of time in their appearance; this was conveyed by Ms Walters (Hollydale):

> I quietly laugh at my Year 9 because they have a little contingent that we refer to as 'the Barbies', which is a lovely expression.
> *It's one that the girls used as well.*
> Did they? Well we [teachers] refer to them as that and it's no reflection of their ability because some of them are the most able girls. And they're very nice natured girls and also very pretty girls and they've got everything going for them. But they do spend a tremendously long time grooming themselves and it's that sort of, you know, everything has to be just so and it's as though you can't start the day until everything is in order and in place.

According to Ms Walters this group of popular Year 9 girls have 'got it all. They're talented, they've got the looks, they've got the personality and I look at one or two of these charming young women and I think well, you're a hard act to follow love'. According to teachers and students at Hollydale these girls balanced academic and social demands very well: 'they're quite clever even though they're still always going out. They're really clever' (Iram). Appearance was central to the image of this group, an image that reflected traditional models of white, heterosexual femininity. Like Ms Walters, some pupils described them as having 'everything': 'They always like, they've always got the lip-gloss and the pink shoes and they're quite rich. They always get designer clothes and [are] the ones with everything. Like, most of them have got long blonde hair and blue eyes and [are] like tall and they're all slim and they all get all the lads from [the local boys' school] and everything' (Faya).

Without a doubt the social class position of these girls underpins and is central to their image of 'got it all'. It is their class position that facilitates their balancing of social and academic realms. The admiration of their

teacher about their ability to balance academic and social demands in an apparently effortless way, and their lifestyles in general, was clear:

> They're quite cool because they've got it all. They can do it but they're not the ones that are constantly, you know, the teacher's pet...They can be told off for inappropriate comments in the same way as somebody sitting on the front row deliberately chatting or somebody who isn't interested. That's what makes them cool, is that they're not really the swotty type. They can do it, they've got the ability, they're interested, they're well motivated, they're clever girls but they don't appear to be overly zealous when it comes to their work. Everything is done, they just quietly get on with it. They're the ones that finish their science in the double lesson, they're the ones whose books are always on the shelf on a Monday morning because they've done their homework. But they can balance it.
>
> (Ms Walters, Hollydale)

But strip away their expensive clothes and their charm, remould their tall, slim bodies, long blond hair and blue eyes, and they would have a much harder time maintaining their popularity without being regarded as swotty. Their bodies and their expensive feminine accoutrements are key to enabling them to create the time and space to undertake academic endeavours without rebuke.

Conclusion

Girls who were apparently effortlessly successful in academic and social realms were generally regarded as 'having it all'. These girls were able to acquire the necessary academic credentials while also being cool and popular. The apparent effortlessness of their academic success was very important: the dominance of the 'uncool to work' discourse in these schools meant that while academic success was accepted (and admired), overtly working hard to attain academic success was uncool.

Of course, very few girls are 'effortless achievers', but some are more adept than others at creating the impression that they are. Effort and time are inextricably linked. To be effortlessly successful academically means getting good results without (apparently) spending much time on school work. To be successful socially depends on spending time with friends. Therein lays the problem for many girls: how can they spend enough time (without showing it) on school work to succeed academically, and also spend enough time with friends to be popular?

In this cha[
to balance aca
spheres. I hav[
this success. [
class girls are [
to balance th[
That is not to [
class girls; oth[
middle-class g[
in all domain[
2006). We nee[
agenda, and qu[

Notes

1. RES-000-27[
2. I adopt Sw[
   168): 'resou[
   'strategies' [
3. Pretending [
   does it earn[
   as failure wi[
   thermore, s[
   the ideal in [
   this).
4. SATs are na[
   troduced fo[
   these are o[
   14, but in [
   he was end[
   14-year-olds[
   DisplayPN.c[
   pected' or 't[
   mum levels [

References

Francis, B. and [
  tioning Con[
Frosh, S., Phoe[
  standing Bo[

ıd social demands in an
ɔneral, was clear:

They can do it but
know, the teacher's
ɔ comments in the
w deliberately chat-
; what makes them
ɔe. They can do it,
're well motivated,
ɪverly zealous when
ley just quietly get
ience in the double
ıys on the shelf on
ɔir homework. But

Walters, Hollydale)

charm, remould their
ɪd they would have a
ithout being regarded
ine accoutrements are
to undertake academic

ı academic and social
ɪese girls were able to
ɔ being cool and pop-
success was very im-
ourse in these schools
ɪnd admired), overtly
l.

', but some are more
ɔy are. Effort and time
 academically means
much time on school
ıg time with friends.
 they spend enough
ed academically, and

In this chapter I have outlined some of the ways in which girls attempt to balance academic and social demands in order to be successful in both spheres. I have argued that resources play an important role in facilitating this success. Furthermore, by virtue of their range of resources, middle-class girls are more likely than their working-class counterparts to be able to balance the demands of being popular and academically successful. That is not to say that the balancing act does not take its toll on middle-class girls; other research has revealed the high emotional costs for some middle-class girls of striving to meet neo-liberal demands to be 'successful' in all domains (for example, Walkerdine et al. 2001; Renold and Allan 2006). We need to keep the demands faced by girls firmly on the research agenda, and question and challenge the popular rhetoric that girls are fine.

Notes

1. RES-000-27-0041.
2. I adopt Swain's distinction between 'strategy' and 'resource' (2004: 168): 'resources' are the capital or stock that people draw upon and 'strategies' are the processes they use to apply them.
3. Pretending not to work hard has numerous potential benefits. Not only does it earn girls 'cool points', but it also protects them if they 'fail', as failure without effort does not automatically imply low ability. Furthermore, success without effort (effortless achievement) is regarded as the ideal in schools (see Jackson 2006 for an extensive discussion about this).
4. SATs are national tests taken by pupils in England. They were introduced for 7-year-old pupils in 1991 and those aged 11 in 1995; these are ongoing. SATs were introduced in 1993 for pupils aged 14, but in October 2008 School Secretary Ed Balls announced that he was ending the requirement for schools to run national tests for 14-year-olds with immediate effect. See: http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn_id=2008_0229. At the time of the research the 'expected' or 'target' level for SATs taken at age 14 was 5, and the maximum levels were 7 for English and science and 8 for maths.

References

Francis, B. and Skelton, C. (2005) *Reassessing Gender and Achievement: Questioning Contemporary Key Debates*. London: Routledge.

Frosh, S., Phoenix, A. and Pattman, R. (2002) *Young Masculinities: Understanding Boys in Contemporary Society*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Gannon, S. (2008) 'Twenty-four seven on the computers': girls, ICTs and risk, *Gender and Education*, 20(4): 361–73.

Girlguiding UK and the Mental Health Foundation (2008) *A Generation Under Stress?* Available at: http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/?EntryId5=62067 (accessed 15/4/09).

Hey, V. (1997) *The Company She Keeps: An Ethnography of Girls' Friendships.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Hughes, C. (2002) *Key Concepts in Feminist Theory and Research.* London: Sage.

Jackson, C. (2006) *'Lads' and 'Ladettes' in School: Gender and a Fear of Failure.* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Kehily, M.J. (2001) Issues of gender and sexuality in schools, in B. Francis and C. Skelton (eds), *Investigating Gender: Contemporary Perspectives in Education.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

O'Brien, M. (2003) Girls and transition to second-level schooling in Ireland: 'moving on' and 'moving out', *Gender and Education*, 15(3): 249–67.

Osler, A. and Vincent, K. (2003) *Girls and Exclusion: Rethinking the Agenda.* London: RoutlegeFalmer.

Paechter, C. (1998) *Educating the Other: Gender, Power and Schooling.* London: Falmer Press.

Paechter, C. (2007) *Being Boys, Being Girls: Learning Masculinities and Femininities.* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Power, S., Edwards, T., Whitty, G. and Wigfall, V. (2003) *Education and the Middle Class.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Reay, D. and Wiliam, D. (1999) 'I'll be a nothing': structure, agency and the construction of identity through assessment, *British Educational Research Journal*, 25(3): 343–54.

Renold, E. (2005) *Girls, Boys and Junior Sexualities: Exploring Children's Gender and Sexual Relations in the Primary School.* London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Renold, E. and Allan, A. (2006) Bright and beautiful: high achieving girls, ambivalent femininities, and the feminisation of success in the primary school, *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 27(4): 457–73.

Ridge, T. (2005) Feeling under pressure: low-income girls negotiating school life, in G. Lloyd (ed.), *Problem Girls: Understanding and Supporting Troubled and Troublesome Girls and Young Women.* London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Ringrose, J. (2007) Successful girls? Complicating post-feminist, neoliberal discourses of educational achievement and gender equality, *Gender and Education*, 19(4): 471–89.

Swain, J. (2
   in a ju
Swain, J. (2
   to con
   Researc.
Valentine,
   Home t
   at Key S
   uploadi
Walkerdine
   cial Exp
Younger, M
   ondary S
   Univers

nputers': girls, ICTs and

lation (2008) *A Gener-*
w.mentalhealth.org.uk/
/09).

phy of Girls' Friendships.

and Research. London:

der and a Fear of Failure.

n schools, in B. Francis
emporary Perspectives in
s.

-level schooling in Ire-
d Education, 15(3): 249–

: Rethinking the Agenda.

wer and Schooling. Lon-

Masculinities and Fem-

!003) *Education and the*
ess.

structure, agency and
ent, *British Educational*

s: Exploring Children's
l. London: Routledge-

l: high achieving girls,
of success in the pri-
l Politics of Education,

ome girls negotiating
erstanding and Support-
Vomen. London: Rout-

st-feminist, neoliberal
nder equality, *Gender*

Swain, J. (2002) The right stuff: fashioning an identity through clothing in a junior school, *Gender and Education*, 14(1): 53–69.

Swain, J. (2004) The resources and strategies that 10–11-year-old boys use to construct masculinities in the school setting, *British Educational Research Journal*, 30(1): 167–85.

Valentine, G., Marsh, J. and Pattie, C. (2005) *Children and Young People's Home Use of ICT for Educational Purposes: The Impact on Attainment at Key Stages 1–4*. Available at: http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR672.pdf

Walkerdine, V., Lucey, H. and Melody, J. (2001) *Growing Up Girl: Psychosocial Explorations of Gender and Class*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Younger, M. and Warrington, M. (2005) *Raising Boys' Achievement in Secondary Schools: Issues, Dilemmas and Opportunities*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.