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Author L. Duits
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Chapter 4

Method & Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The first three chapters introduced the subject matter of, and the theoretical backgrounds to, this study. From these three chapters, a central research question and several sub-questions were derived:

RQ: How do girls position themselves in the multicultural society?

1. Which spaces exist at primary school for identity performance?
2. How do schools position girls?
3. What are the differences between primary and secondary school?
4. Which subject-positions do the girls take up?
5. How do girls use appearance and media to perform subject-positions?
6. Which restraints do girls face in their performance practices?
7. Under which influences do the various subject-positions arise?
8. What are the criteria governing girls' performances?

I argued that in order to understand the everyday world of girls, one must become submerged in their daily routines. The performative approach to identity, as discussed in chapter 3, assumes that identities are a collective effort, produced in constant negotiation with others. Hence, it makes sense to study an existing group of individuals as they go about their daily lives. An ethnographic design was therefore the most appropriate.

Ethnographic accounts rarely have the detailed method discussions one finds in quantitative social science journals and books. To some ethnographers, the quality of an ethnography is judged by its ability to generate insight, not by the rigorous depiction of method (Stewart, 1998). However, an explicit discussion of the method and methodology used, "allows for a more informed judgment about which aspects of the study to accept, to reject, and to qualify" (Agar, 1996: 14 in Stewart, 1998: 4). This chapter aims to provide such an insight into how the research was conducted. First I explain the design of this ethnography, and then go on to discuss the different methods used in this study: participant observation, in-depth interviews, additional alternative methods, and focus groups. After elaborating on how the analysis was conducted, I reflect on my role as researcher, on ethics, and on the quality of qualitative research. The chapter ends with a note on writing and representation.

4.2 Design

Ethnography has been defined in different ways and there is no consensus about any definition. To add to the confusion, it has been approached as both a method (a set of procedures for gathering and analyzing data) and a methodology (a theory of how to understand social phenomena). As a method, ethnography refers to research wherein behaviour is studied on a small scale in an everyday, single setting, with observation and/or informal conversations being the main data gathering methods (Hammersley, 1990: 1-2). As a methodology (thus encompassing more than method), ethnography can be defined as

> Iterative-inductive research (that evolves in design through the study), drawing on a family of methods, involving direct and sustained contact with human agents, within the context of their daily lives (and cultures), watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions, and producing a richly written account that respects the irreducibility of human experience, that acknowledges the role of theory, as well as the researcher's own role, and that views humans as part object/part subject (O'Reilly, 2005: 3).

As a methodology, the term is often used interchangeably with qualitative research or interpretative research (Hammersley, 1990: 1; see Van Zoonen, 1994: 131-132 for a discussion). This section elaborates on my use of ethnography as a methodology. The different methods used in this study are described in the subsequent sections. O'Reilly's definition involves the design of an ethnographic study and the epistemo-

logical and ontological considerations underlying this approach[1]. I discuss these in the context of this study.

The *design* of this study is characterised by an iterative-inductive approach. It is inductive because it is aimed at generating theory (about identity and agency) rather than testing hypotheses; iterative because it has been fluid and flexible, constantly moving between reading theory, conducting fieldwork, and rethinking the research questions. Induction means no theory before data, but within qualitative research it is now commonly accepted that no study can be completely inductive (e.g. Kelle, 1997; O'Reilly, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Induction refers to an open mind, and an ethnographic research design should be reflexive at all times (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1993). Induction does not mean a blank mind, however, and the project therefore started with an extensive literature review of studies on girls. I also interviewed four experienced 'school researchers' to get an understanding of what I would face in the classroom: Mieke de Waal, who conducted a similar ethnography amongst girls in the first years of secondary school; Suzanne Kuik, who conducted a school ethnography amongst children aged 10-11 (7th form); Lenie Brouwer, who conducted an ethnography amongst Turkish girls; and Juliette Walma van der Molen, a quantitative researcher who has conducted many surveys in primary schools. Moreover, throughout the project I continuously read theory, which shaped my observations and inspired my own theory building (Gilbert, 2001; Willis & Trondman, 2000). Iteration in this sense is best understood as a spiral (O'Reilly, 2005): although it loops, it is also moving forward. Within ethnography, data gathering and data analysis cannot be strictly separated. Because observations are selective interpretations, analysis and interpretation are already an intrinsic part of the data gathering stage. The iterative-inductive approach materialised concretely in memos in which I elaborated on theoretical inspirations and striking observations.

Like most ethnographic studies (but not all), the underlying *epistemology* of this study is interpretivism. Interpretivism holds that we can only understand the world by investigating the interpretation of that world by its participants (Bryman, 2001: 265), meaning we should investigate the perspectives and experiences of the people being studied. Interpretivism is based on a constructionist ontology. The social world and its categories are not external to us, but are constituted in and through interaction (Bryman, 2001: 18). Social constructions are continually constructed and reconstructed, and there are no 'facts' that we

can know (Deacon, Pickering, Golding, & Murdock, 1999: 7). Interpretivism, then, aims at generating "descriptions, insights, and explanations of events so that the system of interpretations and meaning, and the structuring and organizing processes, are revealed" (Gioia & Pitre, 1990: 588). As well as observing girls, I talked extensively to them, investigating their own experiences and understandings of their performance practices. This is evidenced mainly in chapter 10, where I discuss the repertoires that girls use for making sense of these practices.

Finding the field

Ethnographic researchers use systematic, but non-random strategies to select research cases. The population for this study was selected on the basis of definitional, conceptual and logistical considerations (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999: 112). I started my search with definitional considerations, which refer to which population should be studied and why. As made clear in chapter 1, the intention of the project has been to follow girls in their transition from primary school to secondary school, because I expected this transition to entail a change in the performance of identity. Basing the population on an existing primary school was therefore an obvious choice. This meant that a number of choices regarding the population had already been made: it concerns a topic-orientated ethnography in a single community. In a topic-orientated ethnography, the focus is on one or more aspects of life (Spradley, 1980: 31), in this case, style. Conversely, in a comprehensive ethnography, the researcher sets out to document a community's complete way of life. A classroom is a single social situation (Spradley, 1980: 30), and this ethnography does not cover other social situations in the lives of girls, such as after-school activities, or the home (although I do, at times, refer to such other social situations).

Second, I formulated conceptual considerations regarding saturation: does the proposed population include enough cases with the characteristics in which I am interested? Cases can be selected to either determine patterns of difference between members of a population, or to further clarify research questions (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999: 113). I originally intended to select typical cases, meaning I wanted to find an average school in an average municipality. After contacting the Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten [Association of Netherlands Municipalities], I discovered that finding an average municipality is a hopeless task. The obvious question is: average in what? In political

preferences, in number of inhabitants? The central concept of this study is identity, with a specific focus on the multicultural society. As stated in appendix I, about fifteen per cent of Dutch girls between 11-13 years old, qualify as non-Western allochthonous. Many Dutch municipalities meet this condition, including Amsterdam.

Logistical considerations then further narrowed my search for a population. A population in Groningen would be unnecessarily time and money consuming. In my search for a mixed-population primary school in Amsterdam, I discovered two problems. First, Dutch schools are becoming increasingly ethnically segregated (Karsten, Ledoux, Roeleveld, Felix, & Elshof, 2003), and mixed schools are becoming rare in Amsterdam. Gaining access turned out to be a second problem. Often, a school was already accommodating several researchers and student teachers. Moreover, my proposal (attending class two days a week) was quite invasive. The principals I approached feared that I would evaluate their teachers, even though I emphasised that my interest lay only with the pupils. Gaining access is a practical and well-acknowledged problem, which can be facilitated by a sponsor: someone who knows the field and can introduce the researcher (Walsh, 2000). Enquiries within my network led to two possible sponsors: an 8th form teacher who agreed to have me in his class, and a teacher who volunteered her 8th form colleague. Neither school, however, was mixed, but qualified as 'black' and 'white' respectively[2]. I then decided to move from typical case selection to comparable case selection (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999), and from a single-sited ethnography to a multi-sited ethnography.

Multi-sited ethnography

Anthropological ethnographies conventionally take place in a single site. Sociological ethnographies have never been restricted to such a "single tribe approach" (Nadai & Maeder, 2005), but multi-sited ethnographies arose particularly in such interdisciplinary fields as media studies, feminist studies, and cultural studies. Multi-sited ethnography refers to parallel fieldwork, for instance in a distant, exotic field and in a nearby, familiar field, or in different social situations. One advantage of multi-sited ethnography is its ability to overcome the "dominant conception of ethnography as a heroic exploration of otherness" (Wacquant, 2004: 387). Second, as Nadai and Maeder (2005) argue, the addition of one or more sites to an ethnography provides additional empirical grounding of the study.

The role of comparison in a multi-sited ethnography is not to claim representative differences between populations or situations. Instead, comparison occurs "in the form of juxtapositions of phenomena that conventionally have appeared to be (or conceptually have been kept) 'worlds apart'" (Marcus, 1995). Muslim girls are 'Othered' in societal debates about their choices (Duits & Van Zoonen, 2007). A multi-sited ethnography allowed me to approach autochthonous and allochthonous girls not as distant others, but as equal parts of a subculture of girls (see chapter 1). My aim was thus to get a finely-grained picture of similar processes in different places. I decided to start in the setting that was the least familiar to me.

4.3 The two main fields

I now, chronologically, discuss the different methods of data gathering used in this project. Participant observation is the most common method of ethnographic research, and was the main method of data gathering for this study. The observations took place at two schools, the 'black' Gunningschool and the 'white' Kantlijn. The observations at the Gunningschool started in November 2005 and lasted for eight months. The observations at the Kantlijn started in February 2006 and lasted for six months. At each school, I spent two days a week in class. In the first three months, I attended the Gunningschool on Mondays and Tuesdays. To sample days and events (O'Reilly, 2005), I changed days when I started at the Kantlijn, attending Mondays and Tuesdays there, and Thursdays and Fridays at the Gunningschool. The observations lasted until the end of the school year, 13 July, 2006. In May, I was absent for a month of travelling, providing a natural break between the more intense participant observation period, and the interview period. I participated in and observed all class activities during the day, including gym classes and museum fieldtrips. I also attended several after-school activities: school football matches; an information evening for parents and pupils; a birthday party; and the graduation ceremonies at the end of the school year. The following sub-sections introduce the two primary schools.

The Gunningschool

Neighbourhood

The school was located in one of Amsterdam's so-called western garden cities, in a neighbourhood known as a disadvantaged area. The western garden cities were built in the 1950s and '60s to counter post-war housing

shortages. They were built in the New Pragmatism style, with green areas and low-rise buildings. In the 1970s and 80s, many of the original inhabitants moved away and immigrant new-comers took their place, changing the population considerably (Mak, 1999: 286, 308). In 2006, the population of the neighbourhood consisted of a little over 41.000 inhabitants, of whom 56 per cent were non-western allochthonous (O+S, 2006). This distribution varied across areas, but the overall percentage of autochthonous inhabitants in the neighbourhood is decreasing every year. The largest groups of immigrants were Moroccans (22%) and Turks (15%) (Van Zee & Hylkema, 2005). This neighbourhood had the highest unemployment rate in the city (13.5% in 2005). Large-scale urban renewal was planned for the coming years.

General

The Gunningschool was a Christian primary school with about 225 pupils divided between eleven classes. Classes were small in the earlier years, during which the pyramid-method[3] was used. In the senior years, classes were large, but so-called *remedial teachers* occasionally took small groups of pupils out of class. The changing composition of the neighbourhood corresponded with a changing population of the school. The school's recent motto, 'colourful with an eye for difference' was meant to refer to the ethnic diversity of the school. However, the majority of the pupils were of Turkish or Moroccan descent, thus making the school population relatively homogenous. Although the school did not provide information about the exact composition of its population, parents and teachers referred to it as a black school. The school strongly adhered to its Christian legacy, mainly because of the principal, who had a strong presence there. The Gunningschool was strict and authoritarian (see chapter 5). Formality manifested itself, amongst others, in language use. Pupils had to address staff members with 'juf' [miss] or 'meester' [±mister], and use the formal 'you'[4]. Staff members regularly complained about a lack of parental involvement and about the difficulties they faced in enforcing the rules. They ascribed this to the ethnic backgrounds of pupils and parents. They claimed that strictness and rigidity were necessary because the school was black.

Faculty

The faculty did not reflect the composition of either the school or the neighbourhood. The team consisted of about 35 people, amongst whom were a Hindustani janitor, a Turkish kindergarten teacher, a Moroccan teaching assistant and a Surinamese teaching assistant. The school had

a large turnover of staff. The monthly newsletter was filled with notices about sick teachers. Most teachers either left for a new school after a few years, or ended up on sick leave. The principal, Peer Wouda, who fitted the stereotype of an old-fashioned schoolmaster, safeguarded the school's continuity. Wouda was 66 years old at the time of research, and had been principal of this school for 32 years. At the end of the research, in the summer of 2006, the coordinating school board forced him to retire, a decision to which he strongly objected. Wouda had been inextricably bound up with the school, and in all probability the new principal will bring about many changes[5]. As is mandatory these days, a different teacher taught physical education. The teacher of the 8th form, Thomas, was a *returner* who used to work in insurance but changed to teaching later in life.

The class

Year 8 consisted of 27 students; one girl joined the class in October. Most pupils had only ever attended the Gunningschool. Thomas, the teacher, had also taught this group in the 7th form. The class consisted of thirteen boys and fourteen girls. Lessons were mostly taught to the whole class [klassikaal onderwijs] and the level of the pupils' ability was low. The average CITO-score[6] was 528, whereas the national average in 2006 was 536. This low score corresponded with the neighbourhood, which was Amsterdam's lowest scoring neighbourhood with 531.8 (DMO, 2006). Six pupils were exempt from the test, because they had received a special education advice (see chapter 6). The 8th form was a black class. If white is understood as being Caucasian or of European descent, only two pupils qualified. Appendix II shows ethnic descent as reported in the interviews. All the Turkish and Moroccan pupils indicated that they were Muslim, making seventy percent of the class Muslim. Two girls moved abroad in the summer of 2006 and were not included in the second wave of data collection: Chemae moved to Morocco, and Betty moved to England.

The Kantlijn

Neighbourhood

The school was located in one of the old working-class districts of Amsterdam, and was built at the end of the nineteenth century when the city was expanding into the polders around the old centre of canals. Traditionally the neighbourhood has been a mixture of social classes: expensive villas in certain areas and cheap apartments in others. Cheap

housing attracted many students and poorer families. In 1930, the neighbourhood housed 75.000 people. This number has dropped considerably in recent decades, with families moving to other cities for more space. At the same time, the influx of migrants changed the character of the neighbourhood (Mak, 1999). Recently, the neighbourhood has 'whitened'. In the 1990s, it was known as an area with many allochthonous inhabitants, but this percentage now decreases steadily each year. In recent years, many houses have been renovated, replacing cheap rental apartments with more expensive, privately owned houses. In 2006, the inhabitants numbered a little under 32.000, of whom nineteen percent were non-western allochthonous (this is below the Amsterdam average) (O+S, 2006). A large group of foreigners (14%), remarkably, come from Western countries (see appendix I). The unemployment rate in the neighbourhood is under eight percent, which is also below the Amsterdam average.

General

The Kantlijn was a public school [openbare basisschool] with about 290 pupils, spread between twelve classes. Its educational profile focused on the environment and the experiences of the individual child. Its curriculum featured special projects and extracurricular activities, such as museum and theatre visits. The Kantlijn also paid extra attention to creativity and the connection with society at large. It was a black school until ten years ago, and strived to be representative of a colourful neighbourhood. However, the school, like the neighbourhood, has whitened. During the year of research, the school was renovated and all classes temporarily moved to an old school building in the neighbourhood. In June 2006, the school moved back into a completely refurbished and expanded building.

Faculty

Like the Gunningschool, the Kantlijn only had three allochthonous staff members, who again were classroom assistants and lower form teachers. The educational faculty consisted of about thirty people, most of whom had worked at the Kantlijn for years and were very committed to the school. Classes were small, as years were combined (e.g. forms 5/6 together). This year, the 8th form was an exception. Different teachers taught craftsmanship, English and physical education. School management rested with two individuals, a man and a woman, who both also taught. The teacher of the 8th form, Luck, had been a teacher his entire life, although he had originally worked at Montessori-schools.

The class

The Kantlijn's 8th form had 28 pupils, made up of eleven boys and seventeen girls. Here too, most pupils had attended the school since 1st form, and their brothers and sisters were also pupils. In class, the students mainly worked independently or in small groups. It struck me that the teacher often left the class unattended. The ability level in the class was substantially higher than at the Gunningschool. The average CITO-score was 539 and all pupils took the test. The Kantlijn had scored the average or above each year, but this year's score was particularly high. The average CITO-score in the neighbourhood was also consistently higher than the national average. The 8th form was whiter than the rest of the school, again, see appendix II for the ethnic composition. One girl, Priscilla, had problems at home and hardly ever attended in the final two months. I lost contact with her and she was not included in the second round. Later, one of the girls informed me that she had moved to Portugal.

4.4 Participating and observing

The position of the researcher in the field is important, because the researcher is, in a way, the 'measurement' tool. The role of the researcher affects how respondents regard and approach him/her. Generally, four possible roles are distinguished, based on more or less covert observations (Junker, 1960 in Walsh, 2000: 222). A *complete participant* does his study covertly, similar to an undercover agent, thus creating ethical problems. The *complete observer* can be compared to the fly on the wall: the researcher observes and avoids any form of social contact, often using a one-way mirror. This role risks ethnocentrism: "the observer, by not interacting with the people under study, cannot get at their meanings and so imposes an alien framework of understanding on the situation" (Walsh, 2000: 222). The *participant as observer* role emphasises participation as a means of building a relationship of trust. This involves the possible risk of over-identification with the subjects. The *observer as participant* observes more than participates, which might cause superficiality of the observations. I, like most ethnographers, moved between the latter two positions, as the extent of observation versus participation changed during the research.

Researching children adds another dimension to the role of the observer. Mandell (1988) argues that the researcher's epistemological assumptions about children as social members determine which role an

adult ethnographer can take up in observing them. When children are conceptualised as intellectually immature and culturally ignorant, and the researcher views him/herself as developmentally complete, the adult can only study children from an *objective, detached position*. When the researcher focuses on similarities between adults and children, the role can be semi-participatory, as a non-authoritative, helpful *adult-as-friend* (Mandell, 1988: 434). Epistemologically this role still views children as inferior by age, cognitive skills and physique. When this epistemological position is completely abandoned, and differences between children and adults are thought to be ideological, the researcher can equate himself with the child and take on a position as *least-adult* (Mandell, 1988: 435), where only physique sets the researcher apart from his subjects. Although I concur with Mandell that children need to be taken seriously in order to fully grasp their life world, it seemed to me impossible to leave all my cultural baggage outside the field.

Informed by this distinction and the advice of the ethnographers I interviewed when preparing my fieldwork, I decided to position myself as a helpful and friendly 'grown-up girl': not exactly one of them, but not a teacher either. The practices at the Gunningschool hindered my embodiment of this position. Thomas told the pupils to address me as 'juf Linda' [Miss Linda], in line with the rules of the school. This form of address is meant to create distance, which I, in following the goals of ethnography, obviously wanted to avoid. Nonetheless, I grew friendly with all the pupils. At the Kantlijn, I experienced fewer problems in my positioning as a girl, instead, at times, having problems embodying the 'grown-up' aspect. On some occasions I needed to exercise adult authority over the pupils, for instance whilst crossing the street at lunch breaks or during museum visits. During the latter, the pupils, at times, rejected my authority, reminding me of my own claims of not being a teacher. I tailored my impression management (Goffman, 1958) to the role of grown-up girl as well. I avoided hip or too feminine clothes and make-up. My favourite observation outfit was Nike trainers, jeans and a plain sweater. My usual use of language is never very formal, but I did pay attention to my vocabulary. I further reflect on my role as researcher in section 4.12.

The Gunningschool

The participant observation at the Gunningschool started in November 2005. My arrival was announced beforehand and the teacher, Thomas, informed me the pupils were excited about a new person in class. I was

introduced on a Monday morning and the pupils had few questions other than about what I would do if I spotted secret or forbidden behaviour (see §4.10). The class was set up in a classical classroom style of three rows of two tables each. At the back of the classroom, there stood a large, vacant table, which became mine. By sitting at the back of the class, my role was mostly one of observer. I was astonished by how quickly the pupils accepted me. In the first few days I got curious looks, but I felt that the class was comfortable with my presence. Pupils at primary schools often see student teachers and I think that they considered me as they would one of them. Thomas agreed to my presence, mainly because he benefitted from having an extra pair of hands in class. As a kind of a classroom assistant, I would take pupils aside to give extra arithmetic explanations or to help with handicrafts. Later in the research, I made websites with the pupils (see §4.6). I used this time to gain their trust, away from the teacher. Moreover, it gave me a chance to get to know the kids one-on-one. I participated during recess. At snack time, I always picked a group and sat with them. During the breaks outside, I skipped and talked to the girls. At lunchtime, most pupils went home to eat. Only two of the 8th form pupils stayed at school for lunch, so I decided to spend my lunch breaks in the teacher's lounge. This allowed me to listen in on teachers' conversations and impressions of the pupils.

The Kantlijn

The research at the Kantlijn started in February 2006, and by then I had some experience in dealing with pupils. The teacher, Luck, had forgotten to announce me, and the pupils were surprised by my presence. I presented myself as I had at the Gunningschool, and encountered the same main questions. Unlike at the Gunningschool, the tables at the Kantlijn were arranged in small groups. Luck encouraged me to find an empty spot or to pull up an extra chair, and thus sit with the pupils. As the rules at this school were less strict, and the teacher often left the class, pupils spent much of their time chatting to one another. I could therefore participate much more in class. I sat with a different group every day, getting to know all the pupils and gaining their trust. During breaks outside, I took on a more detached position as observer, to balance the two roles, and spent my time talking to Luck. Most of the pupils stayed at school for lunch in a special lunchtime programme (see chapter 5), and I therefore continued my participant observation during lunch.

Note taking

Some ethnographers choose to take notes covertly, for instance in the bathroom or by using a dictaphone (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; O'Reilly, 2005: 98). This seemed an impossible task to me, and I favoured the idea that my informants knew what I was writing down about them, providing disclosure about the project (see §4.10). I therefore always took notes overtly and kept my notebook open on the table. I jotted down observations, events and conversations. The pupils frequently wanted to read what I had written, sometimes expressing surprise about why I wanted to know all this. To avoid embarrassment, I noted down certain situations in 'code'. I sometimes scribbled in Spanish or I wrote down a single word or name to trigger my memory of the event (for instance, when a girl farted in class and there was a commotion about it). I elaborated on my field notes on the computer after school hours.

Methodological reflections on ethnography often address issues of writing and representing. Most contemporary ethnographers dismiss naturalistic or empiricist assumptions about the social field, as if it is awaiting "the discovery and exploration of the intrepid explorer" (Atkinson, 1992: 6-7). Instead, it is the ethnographer who, in three ways, constitutes 'the field': it is constructed through the ethnographer's gaze, it is reconstituted by his/her ability to construct a text of the field, and it is reconstructed through the reader's contextualisation. The very term 'ethno-graphy', the writing of culture, already points to the strong dependence it has on language. It is the ethnographer's task to "turn the dense complexity of everyday life into a linear structure" (Atkinson, 1992: 5). As stated in section 4.2, in ethnographic research, analysis and interpretation are already an intrinsic part of the data gathering stage. Observations are selective interpretations that place frameworks and constraints on 'the data' (Emerson et al., 1995: 5; O'Reilly, 2005: 218). By writing field notes, the ethnographer is thus already interpreting and analysing the social situation under study. When I elaborated on my notes, I made connections to theoretical concepts, and I included field note segments in my memos. This iterative approach also allowed me to make more directed observations on the themes that I had signposted early in the research.

4.5 In-depth interviews

Participant observation is the main method in ethnographic research, and some ethnographers only collect data in naturally occurring settings

(Walsh, 2000: 227). Asking informal questions is part of participant observation, but often, more formalised, in-depth interviews are used to gain additional understandings or information. In June and July 2006, I conducted additional in-depth interviews with all the pupils at the two schools. The interviews took place during school hours in a separate room. An average interview lasted thirty minutes. All interviews were audio taped and fully transcribed[7]. My aim was threefold. First, I wanted to get background information and ask all the girls some standardized questions for reasons of systematic comparison. Secondly, I wanted to ask questions about popularity and these are hard to answer in the classroom setting with friends (and non-friends) around. Third, conducting in-depth interviews gave me a chance to sit down with the children, uninterrupted and in a changing role. As I maintain that performance changes per setting and audience, the interview setting allowed me to see different performances to the ones that the pupils had given in class (i.e. an interactionist approach to interviewing, see O'Reilly, 2005: 115). While they sometimes forgot that I was a researcher in the classroom setting, in the interview setting my role was unambiguous. Hence, they gave more socially desirable answers and were less spontaneous than in class. For instance, Nursen was an out-going girl and very talkative in class. She was excited about doing the interview, but when we entered the room, she became nervous and froze. She gave short answers, spoke slowly, stared at the floor and appeared altogether shy. The second that I turned the tape recorder off, she was talking nineteen to the dozen again. Most of the pupils, nonetheless, enjoyed being interviewed. Unlike in Anglo-Saxon countries, where 'an interview' might have a negative connotation of formality (cf. a job interview), in Dutch daily language the term 'interview' suggests media interviews. Being interviewed thus has a connotation of being special, like someone on television. Moreover, all the pupils appreciated being out of class for a while.

The topic list was built around general themes: family, friends & leisure, media, appearance and ethnicity. It consisted of four types of questions. First, survey-like questions to note and compare family backgrounds (to find out their socio-economic class) and media use. I chose not to put the background questions into a survey, because children of this age have difficulties in answering certain questions without help (Borgers, 2001). The excerpt below shows how a seemingly straightforward question is confusing and imprecise. I encountered this problem with several pupils.

English:	**Dutch:**
Linda: Do you have any little brothers or sisters?	Linda: Heb je broertjes of zusjes?
Romeysa: No.	Romeysa: Nee.
Linda: You are the only one at home?	Linda: Ben je de enige thuis?
Romeysa: Yes.	Romeysa: Ja.
Linda: Really?	Linda: Echt waar?
Romeysa: Yes.	Romeysa: Ja.
Linda: Okay. Then you're one of the few in class who is an only child, right?	Linda: Oké. Dan ben je een van de weinigen in de klas die enig kind is, toch?
Romeysa: But I do have older brothers and sisters.	Romeysa: Ik heb wel oudere broers en zussen.
[Interview Romeysa, 7 July 2006]	

The interviews were semi-structured, but should not be confused with quantitative interviews. I did allow changes in the order of questions, letting the conversation flow and following up on some of the answers. The second type of questions were central to my main research question: about their motives for dress choices, and their experience of gender, ethnicity, religion and multicultural society. Third, I asked questions about their experiences of popularity and cliques. From my observations, I gained a good sense of the cliques in the class, but I wanted to get a greater insight into their experiences of this. These questions are difficult to ask informally in class. Fourth, I included questions about their opinions of current media issues (video game violence and sexuality in music videos). These topics became the subject of media panics during the fieldwork and I wanted to gain an understanding of their opinions, since these issues directly involved them, yet their voices were never heard. The topic list is set out in appendix III.

4.6 Additional methods

Performance studies foreground processes of construction rather than effects, and participant observation fits this approach. However, I also wanted to tackle my research question in a different way. By asking informants to create data themselves, the researcher gets a different angle into the informants' own understanding of themselves. Creating data means the informant can thoughtfully reflect on the project, instead of providing an instant response to the researcher's question (Gauntlett, 2006). Although teachers often use such methods to learn more about their pupils (for instance, teachers can gauge something about a child

by his/her drawings and essays), such methods are relatively unused in social science (Baker, 2001; Gauntlett, 2007). I collected such additional data in three projects: the photo project, the website/profile project, and the first day of school essay. In the *photo project*, I supplied all pupils with a disposable camera, and invited them to tell a story about themselves in pictures: 'what is important to you'. I asked them to write down the subject matter of the photo, and I also sat down with them to record this. This method is known as photovoice (Wang & Burris, 1997) [8], and is often used in research with less eloquent respondents, for instance children (e.g. Clark & Zimmer, 2001; Einarsdottir, 2005). These photos yielded interesting data, although unfortunately many pictures did not come out well because pupils forgot to use the flash. Furthermore, five girls at the Kantlijn lost their cameras, and two other girls did participate but their cameras were lost at the photo shop. To ensure confidentiality, I agreed with the pupils that no visual material would be reprinted in this book. At the Gunningschool, I asked the pupils to make a *profile* on a personal web page. The idea came from Thomas and I worked with the children on the computer during school hours. As this was not possible at the Kantlijn, I asked the pupils there to create a profile on paper. Third, I asked the girls to write an *essay* about their first day in secondary school, focusing on what they wore and how they made friends. To increase response, I raffled two twenty Euro gift certificates from the Hennes & Mauritz department stores. In total, 21 girls participated and emailed me a report. The seven girls who did not take part, all came from the Gunningschool.

Next to participant observation in class, I engaged in instant messaging with the pupils. Instant messaging plays an important role in the girls' lives and offers many opportunities for identity performance. The chatting never really took the form of a conversation. Instead, it was an exchange of different emoticons. As such, I did not collect much data from these sessions, but they were useful as it helped me to gain the girls' trust. Nonetheless, by having all the pupils on my contact list, I observed their changing nicknames and picture profiles.

4.7 Visits to secondary school

Originally, I planned to continue my ethnography by observing the girls in their new secondary school settings. My aim was to find out if/how the performance of identity changed in the transition to secondary school. When the year came to an end, and the girls had chosen which secondary school they were going to attend, I realised that my project was not

feasible. The remaining 28 girls had chosen eighteen different secondary schools. Interestingly, there was no overlap between the girls of the Gunningschool and those of the Kantlijn. I decided to visit each girl at her new school, to observe her in the new setting, and to interview her about the change. I was specifically interested in their experiences of the new setting and/or new neighbourhood, and if/how their circle of friends had changed. The topic list for these visits is attached in appendix IV.

The visits to the secondary schools were informal. I arranged to meet the girls during lunch breaks or after school, and I asked each of them to show me around school, before sitting down with them to do the interview. I did not record the interview, but took notes which I elaborated on immediately upon my return to the university. These visits to the secondary schools took much time to plan and conduct. The girls were difficult to get hold of on the phone, and they were nervous about my presence in the new school. On three occasions a girl did not attend her appointment, claiming she had forgotten (two girls) or school had finished early and she could not contact me (one girl). After visiting seven girls, I felt I was not learning much by seeing the girl by herself (i.e. not interacting with peers) in the school environment. I therefore decided to transfer the topics of these interviews to joint focus groups instead.

4.8 Focus groups secondary school

As participant observation in eighteen secondary schools was impossible, I conducted focus groups. Such change in research design is part of the iterative approach. I wanted to find out how the girls experienced their transition to secondary school. Moreover, I was interested in their collective definition of certain social situations and their dress choices for these situations. Third, I aimed to confront the girls from the two schools with each other, to investigate how 'politically correct' their previous statements on multiculturalism were. In everyday life, and especially for girls of this age, meaning is often collectively constructed. The reflexive project of the self and identity performance are shaped in negotiation with others. A focus group is not a naturally occurring setting, but it provides "a valuable resource for documenting the complex and varying processes through which group norms and meanings are shaped, elaborated and applied" (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2001: 17). Focus groups are thus the most appropriate method for yielding data on group meanings, processes, and norms. Furthermore, they have a practical advantage over participant observation, as they are less time consuming (Bloor et al., 2001: 8). Finally, focus groups can be recorded

and transcribed, thereby putting a greater focus on language than participant observation does, whilst interaction is nevertheless preserved. The focus groups involved five focusing exercises (Bloor et al., 2001: 43) and several elements of semi-structured group interviews. Appendix V contains the topic list, with a description of the exercises. During the groups, the girls were indeed adaptive to each other's behaviours and opinions, and their interaction resembled their interaction in class. The focus groups took place at the university's research facility, which is decorated like an ordinary living room. The interviews lasted for a little over an hour. All were audio taped and fully transcribed[9]. A student, Pauline Koppe, helped me to conduct them[10]. She assisted me with the organisation, took notes on the girls' behaviour, and provided short profiles of the girls, which I compared to my observations. Each girl received a twenty Euro Hennes & Mauritz gift certificate to encourage their participation in the focus groups, and to thank them for their cooperation within the research project as a whole.

Again, the girls were difficult to contact, and even more difficult to bring together at a convenient time after school hours. I initially planned six groups, sorting the girls into groups based on the themes I wanted to explore (tomboys, popular versus unpopular, former friends, same secondary school, and friendship across ethnicity). However, the practical problem of getting the girls together forced me to abandon this idea and to settle for whoever was available. In the end, 21 girls participated in five focus groups. Appendix VI shows the composition of the groups and the reasons why the others did not participate. The last focus group took place after the first four groups had been analysed. The focus groups provided an opportunity for the girls to see their old classmates, and most girls were excited about this. They preferred a group with their old classmates to a mixed group (with girls from both schools). Bianca, who was bullied at the Gunningschool, insisted on the opposite, wanting to participate in a group with Kantlijn-girls and her former friend Amisha. Focus group 3 featured five girls from the Gunningschool. I agreed to pick them up by tram, as they were not allowed to travel to the city centre by themselves. The girls were over-excited to see each other and they could not stop giggling and gossiping. Likewise, group 1 consisted of four girls who were at the same new secondary school. As they were spread over different levels in a large school, they saw each other less often. Their conversation resulted in gossip sessions about other pupils at their new school. All girls mentioned that they enjoyed participating in the focus group and all groups were disappointed when the interviews were over.

4.9 Analysis

Earlier in this chapter, I distinguished method from methodology. The method of analysis of this study is based on the coding principles of the grounded theory approach, but grounded theory was not the methodology of this study. Strauss and Corbin make a clear distinction between methodology, which they see as a vision, and method, which is "the techniques and procedures … [that] furnish the means for bringing that vision into reality" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998: 8). The grounded theory approach was originally conceptualised by Glaser and Strauss, but their understandings of it has diverged (see Heath & Cowley, 2004 for a discussion of the differences). Strauss, in cooperation with Juliet Corbin, has focused more on developing practical guidance to analytic techniques. As a result, many qualitative researchers only use certain aspects of the grounded theory approach (Bryman & Burgess, 1994; Wells, 1995). As Baptiste (2001) notes, all qualitative data analysis strategies (e.g. conversation analysis, framework analysis, discourse analysis) follow the same, common phases. To me, the advantage of the grounded theory approach, over other forms of data analysis, is the explication of the different coding phases.

Strauss and Corbin distinguish three phases in coding. During open coding, the researcher reads all data (e.g. field notes, interview transcripts) separately to build a code tree. Hence, the code tree 'emerges' inductively from the data rather than being superimposed on it, as is usually the case in quantitative content analysis. In the second phase, axial coding, codes are compared, related and ordered. Thus, the researcher selects all data with the same code, and finds patterns, similarities and deviant cases within a code. In this phase, categories and concepts are formulated[11]. In the final phase of selective coding, the researcher checks the concepts that have emerged and pushes the analysis to a more abstract level. In this final phase, constant comparison again plays a key role. Constant comparison means that coded segments are compared to other similarly coded segments, in order to identify relationships between codes (see Boeije, 2002 for an instruction and demonstration).

After my prolonged fieldwork, I found myself with huge piles of data: field notes, interview notes and transcripts, and focus groups notes and transcripts. I used *MaxQDA*[12], a computer programme designed to facilitate coding. Discussions about Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Systems (CAQDAS) question if CAQDAS improves or harms the quality of the analysis (Fielding & Lee, 1998; Kelle, 1997; Marshall,

2002; Morison & Moir, 1998). Opponents fear computers bring positivist assumptions and a lack of creativity, whereas proponents celebrate the rigour and speed that computers add to the coding process. Having grown up with computers, this discussion seems tedious and outdated to me. A computer programme merely manages large quantities of data, which is unrelated to acknowledging the interpretative nature of qualitative data analysis. *MaxQDA* allows the researcher to build a flexible coding scheme, because the names of codes can be easily changed, and codes can be easily moved across the coding tree. Furthermore, the programme allows the researcher to retrieve codes yet preserve the context from which the segment was retrieved as well. I created separate files for different data, meaning my field notes were analysed in one file, the interviews were analysed in another et cetera. Most qualitative researchers do not describe the analysis process (Boeije, 2002; Bryman & Burgess, 1994; Van Zoonen, 1994), as this is often a mixture of systematic coding and intellectual reflection that is difficult to describe step-by-step. In this section, I aim to provide the reader with an understanding of the analysis processes, by describing how the analysis of the media use came about. However, I have no illusions that this process can be ever be fully transparent. Although the following might be read as a linear process, it was not. Theorising and thinking are continuous and iterative – again, the image of a spiral is illustrative of this process.

Mapping media use

In the first phases of open coding, I structured my coding into three main coding categories: performance practices, identity markers, and class rituals. The code PERFORMANCE PRACTICES followed on from the theoretical framework: which objects do girls have at their disposal to distinguish themselves from others? This code quickly filled up and I added more branches to the tree, dividing performance practices into those related to the body, the media, and to clothing. From the literature review, the sensitizing concepts (Blumer, 1954: 7) gender, sexuality, ethnicity and popularity had arisen. The code IDENTITY MARKERS was thus a consequence of the literature review: girls can have different identities and I wanted to mark those instances where these identity markers were mentioned or discussed. Later in the coding process I added codes like 'school spirit' (an identity tied to the school). CLASS RITUALS was the category in which I sorted the daily routines and behaviours in the 8th form. From the start, I wanted this dissertation to provide an insight into the

daily lives of girls at a primary school. I therefore sorted my field notes into different times of the day: before school, breaks, lunch et cetera. I added codes such as 'having a birthday', 'week opening' as I went along.

This initial coding reflects my focus in this research. As O'Reilly (2005: 28) argues, all ethnographic research needs to start with guiding questions that focus observations. As the fieldwork and coding moved along, I added new main codes. To quickly retrieve some observations about individual girls, I added INDIVIDUAL GIRLS as a main code. As I developed my ideas about the consequences of all these performative practices, I added a category called SUBJECT-POSITIONS. This is an example of the ways in which the coding phases are interwoven. The category SUBJECT-POSITIONS was a *consequence* of certain practices. Looking for consequences is located in the selective coding phase. I still went through each text, separately coding for this category, and as such found myself back in the open coding phase. The main code MISCELLANEOUS is perhaps the best example of the entwinement of coding phases. Here, I systematized notes that were relevant but outside of these categories: peer pressure, future dreams, asking for attention. Most of these free nodes (Marshall, 2002) had a memo attached to them: why was this relevant? Why did it not fit into one of the other main codes? What was the connection to theory or the bigger picture?

The process of coding points the researcher towards similarities between data. Analysis of coded segments turns one's attention to similarities and differences. As the fieldwork took place at two very different schools, I found myself easily making generalisations about one school versus the other. In writing the first drafts of the results' chapters, a one-sided perspective resulted, wherein I granted too much 'sameness' to the girls from the same school. I therefore returned to my data and coded individual deviant experiences. A good starting point was the outsiders in class: why were they outsiders? How did their behaviours and experiences differ from the other girls? Did similar girls also show diverging behaviours and experiences? This is an example of asking questions, an important feature of the constant comparison method propagated by the grounded theory approach.

Basic analysis

After having read through the field notes several times, and having coded almost all text segments, I engaged in the phases of axial and selective coding. I started to create a picture of a typical day at school.

This view of life at school was mostly descriptive, but it also gave me a fuller sense of events, incidents and actions that were indicative for other, more theoretical aspects of the analysis. During the fieldwork I had already written extensive memos about, for instance, performance in class and the workings of ethnicity at both schools. Whilst writing about life at school, I elaborated on these memos and connected incidents to other notions. A good example is the *Charmed*-discussions in class, which I discuss in chapter 9.

Another basic step in the larger analysis was mapping friendships between the girls. I used two sets of data for this: my observations in class and the girls' listing of friends in the interviews. Using a simple *Excel* spreadsheet, I made lists of who was a friend of whom. I then used *Pajak*, a software programme designed to draw social networks, to get a visual picture of friendship ties. At the same time I wrote about friendships, which in turn caused me to think about popularity. For popularity, I analysed the interview data. I had coded the girls' answers to my questions about popularity in *MaxQDA*. I further coded these on paper, summarising each code with a keyword. My discussion of popularity in section 5.5 shows the results.

Expanding the analysis and comparing codes

In the interviews, I asked several questions about media use. I first coded the interviews in *MaxQDA* solely for any mention of any medium, thus creating the codes of television, radio, internet et cetera. I also marked all segments wherein the girls talked about parental restrictions. I then analysed the profiles the pupils had supplied. Again, I used *Excel* to list favourite shows, movies and games per girl. These lists were subsequently reversed (listed per named show) and compared: what differences existed between schools and between ethnicities? Next, I compared these lists with the retrieved segments from the interview data. I then not only got an idea of the most favoured titles, but I could also connect these to the media use of a specific girl, in combination with the restrictions imposed on her by her parents. I started writing these analyses down in a text document: how the girls made different uses of media, to what extent the media were central in their lives, and how parental restrictions limited the girls' use of media. Whilst doing this, I realised that media use in the classroom was influenced by these practices at home. This put me onto the idea of limitations: how is the girls' use of media limited? I later returned to all data sets to investigate this

further. In this search, I also read theory and returned to my initial literature review. Hence, the analysis of restrictions was a combination of inductive coding, open coding, reading and thinking. In the end, I reconstructed several restrictions on media and appearance use; these are described in section 8.5.

I compared the uses of media and favourite titles of girls with field note segments and my notes on the individual girls, which were by then coded into the categories of subject-positions and media as performance practices. From here I started to think about the consequences of media use. I distinguished between talking about media, and actually using media in class. I could then analyse the ways in which different girls used and talked about different media with different consequences. Here, I connected these codes to the codes I had created whilst mapping life at school. By linking these different types of codes, I was able to classify incidents in order to provide descriptions of media use and talk. Again, reading theory was helpful in thinking about these processes.

Checking and following-up

By the time I conducted the focus groups, I was well underway with coding and analysis. The focus groups thus allowed me not only to investigate the themes mentioned in the previous subsections, it also allowed me to check my findings. One of the things I had become interested in was the relevance of popular media. From my earlier analyses, I learned that the girls did not ascribe much weight to their media use and I was afraid I had overvalued its relevance. From my observations in 8th form, I had concluded that musical preferences did not function as style dividers. I wanted to validate this conclusion with the girls, and in the focus groups I had the opportunity to do so. Furthermore, I conducted the last focus group when I had finished coding the previous four. I was therefore able to specifically ask about the themes that had emerged from the previous groups. For instance, in the final focus group, I asked more directly about changes in personality (see §6.3).

This section set out to provide the reader with insight into the process of analysis. This description is necessarily fragmented. Spatial considerations are an obvious impediment to providing a full account of how thousands of pages of data came to be represented in this dissertation. However, the nature of qualitative inquiry, with its inductive and iterative character, also limits the extent to which the researcher can fully account for all analytic decisions.

4.10 Ethical considerations

Qualitative research implies a reflexive and critical stance. Within media studies, ethnographic approaches to media share "a concern with ethical aspects of social and cultural change that necessitates a continual scholarly self-reflexivity" (Drotner, 1994: 343). When I started the research, my faculty did not have formal ethical guidelines, but this did not mean I did not consider ethical issues.

Disclosure

I have always been open with the schools and my informants about the nature of my research. My research was overt and the children knew I was studying them. However, I did not disclose my research questions to them and did not inform them that I was only studying the girls. I considered my research question to be too theoretical for 8th formers[13]. Instead, I told them my research was about youth culture and 'what it is like to be in 8th form'. This question was not far from the truth, and was recognisable, relevant and logical to this group. Suzanne Kuik had advised me not to inform the class that the research only involved girls, as I might run the risk of sabotage from jealous boys. This caused some problems in the second phase of the research, as certain boys wondered why I did not visit them. At that time, I explained that this specific phase no longer included them. My observations were done in class and although I did not focus on the boys, I obviously gathered data about them as well. In this dissertation my interest lies with girls, but boys are mentioned occasionally.

During my participant observation in the two primary schools, the pupils often forgot why I was there. Most children do not know what a PhD student is or what social science entails. For instance, when I announced the interviews, I was surprised by their response: what were the interviews for? I openly and continuously took notes in class, but I often encountered questions about why I was writing everything down. Participant observers often hope that subjects forget why the researcher is there, thus ensuring more natural behaviour (O'Reilly, 2005: 61). I endlessly explained to the pupils that I was writing a book about them, to which they reacted surprised yet honoured every time.

Informed consent

At both primary schools I had intended to give the pupils a letter to take home to their parents, informing them about the research and pro-

viding an opt-out[14]. However, at the Gunningschool, the principal and Thomas deemed this to be unnecessary and unproductive. They argued that most parents do not read Dutch or would otherwise be unable to understand the letter. They insisted this consent was the school's responsibility. Instead, they introduced me in the monthly newsletter:

> Linda Duits, student at the University of Amsterdam, will come in 8th form on Mondays and Tuesdays because of her research into the behaviour and interests of pupils in that age group.

Unfortunately, this did not inform most parents, as the few I met were unaware of my presence. The announcement unsettled me, because it was incorrect ('student'), did not disclose the aim of the research (academic reports) and did not provide an opt-out. Although I disagreed, particularly with the patronizing stance towards the parents, I complied with the school's decision out of fear of losing my access. I did not feel I was in a position to fight school policy.

At the Kantlijn, the teacher agreed with the informing letter. On my first day, all pupils took a letter home promising confidentiality, and informing parents about the research question, the nature of the observations, and the larger PhD project (book, articles). Parents were encouraged to contact me if they objected to their child being in the study or if they had questions. I received no objections, and from later contact with the parents, I learned all pupils had taken the letter home and that some had mentioned me in their conversations with their parents.

In the second phase of the study, I informed all the secondary schools about my visits during breaks or after school. Furthermore, after the summer holidays, I sent all girls a letter to show their parents, explaining the second phase of research and again encouraging parents to contact me with questions or objections. Whilst arranging the focus groups, I talked to several parents on the phone. Before participating in the focus groups, the girls received a letter explaining the procedure.

In the context of this study, it might appear strange that I obtained consent from the parents, and not from the girls. After all, this study aims to take girls seriously and to gain an understanding of their everyday lives. Morrow and Richards (1996) discuss the ethics of research with children, exposing how children's acts and opinions are often trivialised and devalued. Informed consent is difficult to obtain from children, because they might not have the skills to understand what the research is about or what its implications are. Furthermore, a school context might keep a child from dissenting, because most things are

compulsory at school. Rather than obtaining formal informed consent, I emphasised to the pupils they did not have to take part in the research, giving them the right to say no. One boy indicated twice he did not want to be 'in the book', meaning he did not want me taking notes on him. Both times he later retracted this, claiming he had said this out of anger. Two boys from the Gunningschool did not want to be interviewed, and I complied with their wishes. When I arranged the focus groups, I did specifically ask the girls on the phone if they wanted to participate in the interviews. One girl declined.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality and anonymity are often confused (O'Reilly, 2005: 65). In an ethnographic study, anonymity from the researcher is impossible. Confidentiality, however, means that the data cannot be traced back to the respondents. All the names of the participants (children, teachers) and schools in this study are fictitious. I have kept the characteristics of the participants consistent and therefore insiders, both the girls themselves but also teachers or parents, can and probably will easily work out who's who in this book. The notion of confidentiality was lost on the girls. They could not – for the life of them – understand why they would be given fictitious names. They said they did not mind being recognisable, and I believe they might be somewhat disappointed that the book is not 'literally' about them.

Whilst making field notes, I never wrote anything incriminating in my notebook, which was open to the pupils to examine. Trust was important during the participant observation, and the pupils needed to be sure I would never disclose any secret or forbidden behaviour to the teacher. Eder and Corsaro (1999) describe this as an ethical dilemma: non-intervention can damage children's views of adults, intervention threatens the trust of the researcher. Aware of this dilemma from the literature, I came prepared. I told them I was not the teacher's spy and would never tell them anything, unless there was behaviour that went beyond all reasonable boundaries, such as extreme fights. The pupils repeatedly asked about and tested this position throughout the research period. One incident at the Kantlijn forced me to break my confidentiality. Some girls informed me their classmate had threatened to kill a boy, whilst waving scissors. I discussed what I should do with the girl in question (a strategy recommended by Morrow & Richards, 1996) and although she feared severe punishment, she understood why I had to tell her teacher.

4.11 The quality of this qualitative research

In this chapter, I have given a thorough description of the research process. Such methodological awareness is one of the many strategies to control for quality in qualitative research. The epistemological positions, and the strong emphasis on philosophy that comes with qualitative research, have led to a cacophony of terms substituting the alleged positivistic notions of reliability and validity. Reliability in quantitative research refers to the replicability of a study, which is usually impossible in qualitative research (Johnson, 1990; Stewart, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Van Zoonen, 1994). Validity refers to the accuracy of the findings under study. Since validity is a statistical concept, qualitative researchers have proposed different substitutes: for instance adequacy, authenticity, credibility, goodness, plausibility, trustworthiness, and veracity. In this heated discussion, different authors propose various strategies to improve or judge the quality of qualitative research (cf. Bergman & Coxon, 2005; Drisko, 1997; Golafshani, 2003; Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002; Seale, 1999b; Stewart, 1998; Tobin & Begley, 2004). Unlike those authors, Creswell and Miller (2000) actually provide guidance in selecting a validity procedure. They discuss nine validity procedures, which they structure in a two-dimensional framework governed by two perspectives: the researcher's lens and the researcher's paradigm assumptions. The framework is replicated in table 4.1. Validity of research matters differently to the researcher, to the people in the study and to the people outside of it, such as readers and reviewers. Although I work from a constructivist (or interpretative) paradigm, I also deployed strategies best suited to researchers in the postpositivistic and critical paradigms.

	Postpositivistic	**Constructivist**	**Critical**
Researcher	Triangulation*	Disconfirming evidence*	Researcher reflexivity*
Participants	Member checking*	Prolonged fieldwork*	Collaboration
Readers	Audit trail	Thick description*	Peer debriefing*

Table 4.1: Validation strategies (Creswell & Miller, 2000: 126)

In this section, I discuss the different actions I have taken to increase validity (marked with an asterisk in the table). I used all three recommended strategies to increase validity from my point of view as researcher. Triangulation is a well-known strategy to increase the validity of a study through "the act of bringing more than one source of data to

bear on a single point" (Marshall and Rosman, 1989: 146 in Van Zoonen, 1994: 139). Triangulation consists of using multiple methods to more accurately assess what is going on and to reduce the flaws of single methods. I indeed used multiple methods, but not to 'uncover' a certain truth. Instead, as Seale (1999a: 474) points out, triangulation can also reveal how respondents' accounts differ. In the results sections, I demonstrate how accounts given to me in the interviews sometimes differ from my observations. Disconfirming evidence means the researcher searches for data that disconfirm the identified categories and themes. I already discussed this in section 4.9. Researcher reflexivity means self-disclosure of assumptions, biases, and beliefs relevant to the study. I provide this account in the next section.

Validity, from the lens of the participants, refers to how well the interpretations represent the participants' realities. As I argued in this chapter, my respondents could not make much sense of the whole research, let alone read this academic account in a language that is not their own. However, during my time in class, the pupils often read my notes and corrected me if they saw a 'mistake', for instance when I had got names confused. They also added things to my notebook. For instance, I once noted down an incident between Thomas and Consolacion. He was giving arithmetic instructions and ordered her to put her pen down. When Consolacion read this, she added in my notebook: "I wanted to finish my sums and I was almost done", thus providing an explanation. As such, there was minor member checking. A second strategy I used to increase validity from the participants' perspective was to spend a prolonged time in the field. Prolonged fieldwork increases 'veracity' (Stewart's substitute for validity), because more time means more complex information, more self-correction, and deeper contextual understanding (Stewart, 1998: 20). Collaboration means that "participants are involved in the study as co-researchers or in less formal arrangements" (Creswell & Miller, 2000: 127). Given the unfamiliarity of social science to my respondents, this was not a suitable strategy for this project.

For the readers' perspective, I do not provide an explicit audit trail, although I do elaborately report on the methods used. The notion of an audit trail entails a positivist assumption that the analysis trail can be known, and in the previous section I claimed otherwise. Second, I provide rich accounts throughout the dissertation. Such descriptions are meant to 'transport' the reader to the setting and make the situation verisimilar. Furthermore, I spoke to peers and solicited their feedback. In a PhD project, the supervisor functions as the obvious peer reviewer.

Furthermore, the work was discussed at (inter)national conferences, in several meetings of the PhD club Popular Culture at ASCoR, and in the Children's Studies group of the department of Sociology and Cultural Anthropology of the Universiteit van Amsterdam.

4.12 Reflection

Empirical data do not yield self-evident meanings, as Ien Ang (1996: 46) points out: "it is only through the interpretative framework of the researcher that understandings of the 'empirical' come about". As social scientists we do not stand outside the world we research, and ethnographic researchers often reflect on the contexts in which ethnographies are produced (O'Reilly, 2005: 211-217). Since the 'reflexive turn' in social sciences, researchers are aware of the *situatedness* of knowledge (Haraway, 1991). Reflexivity means that researchers should "be reflexive about how they analyse other people's accounts of their lives" (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003: 414). Some ethnographers include autobiographical accounts of their experience of the research (e.g. Powdermaker, 1966). In this section, I suffice with situating myself socially and emotionally in relation to my informants (see Mauthner & Doucet, 2003: 419).

Initially, I was nervous about my role as researcher. This involved both my position as a foreign object in class, but also my subject-position as a highly educated white girl. Would I be able to speak to the pupils, would they feel weird about an outsider sitting in class, would they trust me? My own primary school experience was over fifteen years ago. As a sociable and curious individual (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999: Ch. 8), I learned that it was easy for me to connect to the pupils. I never tried to act their age (see also Aalberts, 2006), but approached them respectfully and with interest.

Although the pupils quickly accepted my presence in class, the pupils at the Gunningschool approached me with some curiosity. For example, on my first day, Chemae asked me if I acted in movies. As I observed later, blond girls are a rare sight in that neighbourhood. At first, this unfamiliarity was reciprocal: not only was I unfamiliar to them, they were unfamiliar to me. I grew up in a privileged town in the centre of the Netherlands, with hardly any allochthonous inhabitants. When I moved to Amsterdam, I remained within a white circle, as autochthonous Dutch populated the university, the restaurants where I worked, and the bars and clubs I frequented. However, in the class at the Gunning-

school, I was not surprised by differences, but by sameness. This helped me to approach the *Gunning-girls* as being more like myself. At the Kantlijn this happened more naturally, as this school resembled my old primary school in a number of ways, and the social class of most pupils matched my own whilst growing up.

Completely unexpectedly, the hardest part of the ethnography was observing the differences between the Gunningschool and the Kantlijn. Year 8 is an important year for the future of a pupil, because they learn for the first time how they compare to others and what level they can expect to reach. When the CITO-scores came in, pupils from the Gunningschool learned they could never become lawyers, or doctors, or flight attendants. I found it difficult to see the dreams of the pupils, who had by then won my heart, being shattered. The disadvantaged position of this group as a whole became even more obvious because the pupils at the Kantlijn performed so well. Having always had every opportunity open to me, this seemed to be such an injustice. I also found it difficult to observe the strictness of the teachers at the Gunningschool. This excerpt comes from my field notes on the only day we had snow that year:

> Break time is horrific. The kids are not allowed to throw ice balls; they are not allowed to throw at one person when they are with others; they can only throw snowballs whilst standing on the grass field (? How can you see that in the snow ?); and on the square of the other school. Clearly not everyone knows these rules, looking at the faces of those who are being called in as punishment. Instead of the usual three supervisors, a team of five teachers supervises over break. In the end, almost the whole 8th form sits inside for punishment. Instead of fun in the snow, it is a rain of punishment and yelling from the staff. I feel sad and go inside, because I simply cannot bear to look at it anymore. [Field notes Gunningschool, 2 March 2006.]

It was more difficult for me to relate to the teachers at the Gunningschool than it was to the pupils. I empathised with the pupils, who had hardly any choices, and not with the teachers in their lounge, who sometimes made racist remarks (see §5.4). I also did not expect my research to be so arduous. Four days of sitting in class can be tedious, especially when each pupil wants your full attention. Instead of 'going native' (Walsh, 2000: 222), I was thankful when the year came to an end. Spending time away from the field helped me to regain academic distance. However, spending this much time in the field did enable me to understand the social world of girls through interaction and participation. I believe my emotional involvement with the field has made this ethnographic account richer.

4.13 A note on writing

This chapter ends with a note on writing. Feminist researchers have always been concerned with the power relationships between the researcher and the researched (Van Zoonen, 1994: 129-130). Likewise, the reflexive turn in anthropology led researchers to reflect on how the researcher represents his/her informants (O'Reilly, 2005: 211-217). This project arose from a desire to listen to girls, and to take girls seriously as actors in a multicultural society. However, this account can never be more than a *representation* of girls' experiences. This study does not aim to be representative of all girls in the Netherlands. Instead, it aims to provide a deep understanding (Stewart, 1998) or thick description (Geertz, 1973), in order to theorise the ways in which Dutch girls position themselves in the multicultural society. Coming from an interpretative paradigm, I do not pretend my observations reflect general truths or universal facts. I therefore refer to 'the girls' rather than 'girls', so as to emphasise the specific informants of this study. When I use 'the pupils', I refer to both the girls and the boys. Furthermore, I use the past tense to stress the historic situatedness of this group of girls.

This study is written in English, but was conducted in Dutch. Several authors have dealt with translation issues in qualitative research, for instance when the primary languages of respondent and researcher do not correspond (Esposito, 2001; Temple & Young, 2004; Twinn, 1997). Less discussed is the issue of how to transfer accounts across languages (Temple, 2006). This study was conducted in the Netherlands and Dutch was spoken during the observations and all interviews. All transcriptions were Dutch and the analyses are based on the original Dutch material. Translation did not occur until the time of writing down. I aimed to 'preserve' original meanings as much as possible and to keep the original source language visible, whilst at the same time making the text accessible to non-Dutch readers. Therefore, all presented interview quotes are preserved in Dutch in appendix VII. Furthermore, certain specific utterances are represented in English, with the Dutch original between brackets in the text. Occasionally, I explain a specific Dutch term or practice in a footnote. I translated all quotes as literally as possible. I preserved stopgaps and the original sentence structure that characterises spoken language (in contrast to the practice of editing transcripts to increase 'readability', e.g. Hermes, 1995: 'Author's note'). Nonetheless, I am not a certified translator and some subtleties remained untranslated. Several girls made grammatical mistakes in Dutch, which I

saw no way of translating. For instance, they mixed articles, using "de" [feminine/masculine article] when it should have been "het" [neutral article]. Since English has no gendered articles, translating such mistakes is impossible. The girls also sometimes used slang. Any translation of Dutch slang into English inevitably loses subtle meaning, first because my knowledge of British slang is limited, and second because slang is group specific (e.g. translating Dutch-Moroccan slang into British-Asian slang is odd).

In the following chapters I present the results of my investigation into girls' identity performance. Part II elaborates the contexts in which I investigated the girls. In chapter 5, I explore which spaces existed for identity performance at primary school. This chapter provides a detailed insight into the daily lives of girls in the 8th form. In chapter 6, I discuss which differences existed between primary and secondary school, and how these differences affected identity performance. Part III of this dissertation deals with identity performance itself. In chapter 7, I provide an overview of the subject-positions with which the girls identified. Chapter 8 further explores how identity performance was done. I examine how the girls used appearance and media to perform these positions. Chapters 9 and 10 discuss the influences underlying these performances. In chapter 11, I draw my conclusions.