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***OUTSIDE DANGER:
CHILDREN'S INDEPENDENT
MOBILITY AND PERCEPTIONS OF
RISK IN THE LIVED
ENVIRONMENT***

***PhD THESIS
submitted to
NOTTINGHAM TRENT UNIVERSITY
by
PATRICIA ANN PUGH***

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Abstract

This thesis is a study of the relationship between young children and their environment, focusing on the impacts of containment of children in the home and the perceived need for constant supervision when they are outside. The fieldwork prioritises children's voices through focus group discussion, underpinned by questionnaires and discussions with parents. It shows that most children aged 9-11 lead lives which are highly controlled. Children in middle class suburbs enjoy the least freedom, children in rural environments have localised independence but rarely venture beyond the village borders, whilst in working class suburbs and the inner city more children of this age demonstrate some independence. Traditional gender differences are narrowing but girls show a different pattern of home range mobility to boys, travelling to and from destinations directly, whilst boys are more likely to roam within a negotiated area.

Of the most commonly identified fears, fear of strangers is ranked higher than that of traffic despite the probability of death and injury through a traffic accident being greater. The 'stranger danger' discourse is shown to be the construct of multiple other hegemonic structures: law and order, the family, sexuality and childhood. These have contributed to a moral panic which has demonised a variety of groups including paedophiles, parents and some groups of children.

The attitudes of parents and children to the perceived danger is considered. This shows that parents are inclined to give their children greater freedom in environments which they perceive to be safer, particularly the 'utopian' holiday environment which suggests that social pressures on parenting influence the restriction on children at home. The children's stories suggest that the fears they articulate initially are not always representative of their lived experiences. Most consider themselves competent to cope with traffic and few have experience of any real threat from a stranger - although they demonstrate that they have devised numerous strategies to deal with such an occurrence. The greatest impact on their day to day lives comes from older children who can intimidate or bully them and may exclude them from spaces within their home range.

Increased containment is shown to be detrimental to young children's development and the thesis considers a variety of strategies which might be implemented to improve their experience of life.

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I am sad that neither of my parents are alive to see the fulfilment of this project, they would have been surprised and proud.

At eighteen I trained to teach mathematics because it required the minimum of writing. I dedicate this thesis to all others who have been made to feel stupid and inadequate because they couldn't spell - and I give thanks for computer spell checks!

Introduction

Evolution of the Thesis

This thesis is concerned with the relationship between young children and their environment. The specific aspect on which it focuses is their ability to interact with their environment independently - independent, in the sense that they are not supervised or controlled directly by any other individual considered to have authority over them. 'Independent mobility' thus implies either being out alone or in the company of other children of a similar age and is a term of which I shall make frequent use throughout this work. In this introductory section I will discuss how and why I became interested in this particular topic and lay out the aims and objectives of the research. The section will conclude with an outline of the chapters which make up the thesis.

My interest and concern relating to children's independent mobility first arose when I became aware of the increasing restraints I felt it necessary to impose on my own children. This was particularly noticeable when the family moved from a small rural market town to the middle class suburbs of a city. In the new environment, I encountered different expectations of 'good parenting' which involved closer supervision of the children's movements and the imposition of an extremely limited range of independent mobility. From the first week in the new school it was made clear by the teaching staff that I was expected to accompany my children to school, an expectation which I saw as an imposition on me and a restriction on them.

Over the next few years I became particularly aware of an increasing concern with 'stranger danger', the concern that a child might be harmed or abducted by an unfamiliar person. This was evident from school publicity sessions, media representation and significantly from the semi-hysterical response of parents to any incident which might be considered suspicious. I was unable to empathise with this concern. My children and I felt safe on the streets and I considered the chance that a stranger would appear out of the blue in order to do harm to any of the family remote in the extreme.

I became concerned that the lack of independent mobility within their local environment was having a detrimental impact on my own and other children. My instincts were that it could

impair their social, physical and mental development; but at that time little research existed supporting this view. When the opportunity arose to undertake a research project myself, I saw this as an chance to consider in depth some of these issues which had been causing me unease.

Thirty years ago I trained to teach mathematics and geography. Human geography at that time tackled broad issues concerning the impact of the landscape on humankind and visa versa. It was refreshing to return to the subject in the nineties and find how much it had moved on. A new focus on the individual's experience of space in a local and global dimension was apparent, and a wider acceptance of the application of social and cultural analyses in a spatial context. Minority groups' interests were under consideration and leisure studies had been absorbed into the spectrum of study. This broadening of the discipline allowed unrestrained research of this topic: a topic that is geographical in nature since its primarily concern is the use of space.

Aims and Objectives

The motivation behind this thesis was to discover exactly what changes were occurring in the lives of children in relation to their environments, particularly in the curtailment of their mobility, and also to understand the processes and beliefs which had contributed to this change. I was not convinced that the environment was as dangerous as its popular representation suggested and wished to discover whether other parents shared my view. My aim was to contribute findings which would encourage discussion around the topic. I felt the whole process of increasing child containment was going unchallenged. I also hoped to put forward suggestions which might prove constructive in making some reversal of the current trend.

I was also aware that children's concerns were under-represented in geographical research and that children rarely were given the opportunity to speak for themselves in matters which concerned them. In the context of this research I felt it was essential that it was their voices that dominated and this became the criteria on which I determined my methods of research.

It was with these aims that I determined the objectives of the research. The first of these was to map the independent mobility of children of a chosen age, within a variety of

environments with reference to the gender, social class, and residential setting.¹ These formed a matrix of determinants within which I looked for patterns of similarity and difference. This information gave me an overview of the expected pattern of children's mobility and some insight into the relative importance of particular determinants. Not only was a comparison to be made between determinants but also between different combinations of determinants: for example, a comparison was made between each lived environment and also between the boys and girls from each lived environment. I was thus able to comment on the various interrelationships between the factors I was considering and what impact they were likely to have on a child's experience of its environment.

I chose to work with children in years five and six of their primary education² and, at this age, the two most important controls on children's independent mobility are the restrictions placed on children by their parents or guardians and the limits that children impose on themselves. The fieldwork sought to investigate these issues, recognising that they differ from individual to individual, and for many of the children were not constant or consistent. During the early stages of the fieldwork it became apparent that the children were also restricted by the imposition of territorial claims by others. This prompted me to consider the question of territoriality and how it relates to the research topic. The possibility that a child's movements may be restricted by others was therefore incorporated into the research structure. The concept also proved useful when considering how the boundaries imposed upon a child's movements are constructed and how they are transgressed by children both with and without parent's knowledge.

Establishing the parameters of children's mobility provided a base structure from which it was possible to explore the factors which contribute to the imposition of constraints. I sought to understand those fears experienced by children and parents which had the most impact on decisions relating to the children's freedom of movement. By first identifying these fears and then deconstructing them, I was able to gain some understanding of the influences involved in constructing the patterns of mobility which I had identified. I was particularly interested in the influence of the moral panic surrounding 'stranger danger'. I considered how this fear was transmitted by the various forces involved in cultural

¹ It had been hoped in the early stages of the research also to consider differences due to race. However there were objections from two schools to the inclusion of any method of identifying racial origins on the questionnaire. In addition the numbers of children from ethnic minorities in the schools studied were not large so the sample involved would have been too small to identify differences.

² A full explanation as to why this particular age range was selected will appear in Chapter Two.

production, how it was experienced by children and their parents, and how it affected their behaviour.

The qualitative methods used in the research made possible the evolution of new lines of investigation as the research progressed. Two such issues became additional foci of the research. One was the change in parenting practice which occurred when families were on holiday. This had interesting implications relating to the parents' interpretation of risk and the idealised lifestyle they desired for their children. The other was the discrepancy between the children's articulated fears and the stories they told of their experiences in their lived environment. These discrepancies bring into question the results of previous research into children's fears, which may have failed to take into consideration the tendency for children to reiterate the dominant even if it does not match their experiences. The discussion on these themes represents new insights on the behaviour of children and of their parents.

A significant aspect of the research was a review of recent writing on the physical and mental health of children and other aspects of their development. This identifies the importance of the issue of children's independent mobility and represents an increasing concern for the well-being of the child as a result of increasing restraints. It was my aim that, based on the various findings of the research, I might ultimately be able to suggest ways in which some improvements in the situation could be made.

Synopsis of Chapters

Chapter One of the thesis considers the position of children within existing practice and in particular within geographical research. It begins by charting the cultural shift in geography, which has led to the increasing engagement of neglected groups such as children. The notion of childhood is explored as a social construction which varies over space and time and this is related to the way children have been excluded or misrepresented in research. Current trends in research are explored, in particular the recognised importance among researchers of allowing children their own voice in affairs which concern them. The chapter contains a literature review of the work most influential in the formation of this thesis and in particular focuses on the article of Hugh Matthews and Melanie Limb (1999) which defines an agenda for the study of children in geography. An appreciation and critical appraisal of this article enables me to outline the methodological and epistemological approach I took within this study.

Chapter Two is concerned with the methodological approach taken for the research. It first considers impact on method of the shift in epistemological approaches, and considers the consequences for this work. Some of the problems of conducting research with children are identified in the first chapter. This chapter expands these issues, particularly the relationship between the researcher and subject of research. It explains the decisions I took about the research process, and sets out the steps I took to ensure, to my satisfaction, that I was taking the right approach. I chose to use focus groups, a little used form of research in this discipline, particularly with children. The originality of this research method is such that the chapter gives details of the trial exercise that helped form the structure of the research and a description of the research process itself.

The next two chapters use the research findings to establish the extent to which children are excluded from their environment and the perceptions of danger which have led to this exclusion. Chapter Three summarises the findings of the questionnaire on mobility exposing the limited range of the majority of children in the study. It determines whether the variables included in the study, gender, class and residential setting, play a significant role, singly or in combination, in the mobility of those who took part. The chapter constructs an overview of the ranges of different groups of children in different locations, highlighting particularly where the greatest differences are to be found. It thus identifies the groups likely to be the least and the most restricted in their movements and identifies patterns of mobility where they exist.

Chapter Four is based mainly on the findings of the discussion groups and considers the feelings and opinions of the children and their parents pertaining to the children's movements outside the home. It identifies, through the analysis of the stories of their experiences, those fears that have the greatest impact on the participants and considers how these relate to the variables included in the study. These chapters together articulate the constraints under which children's lives are managed. Children are increasingly confined in the home as a result of particular fears located in the outside environment. The next chapter is concerned with understanding the way in which these fears have become part of the dominant discourse within society today.

Chapter Five examines more closely the fears which have led to children's exclusion from their lived environment. The two greatest concerns of the children and their parents were

'strangers' and traffic. The chapter, using the work of Antonio Gramsci, considers the logic underlying these fears, particularly the fear of strangers which studies have shown to have increased in recent times. It analysis the amplification of the 'stranger danger' myth and the various discourses which have contributed to its production. Law and order, the family, child abuse and sex education are considered in the context of children's independence and their contribution to the escalation of the moral panic established. To support these ideas, relevant stories from the media are examined as case studies, in the context of the impact they may have on children and their parents. Explaining the ideology, processes and agencies involved in constructing perceptions of dangers leads into the two subsequent chapters which consider how this constructed fear influences the everyday actions and experiences of the children and their parents.

Chapter Six makes use of the issues relating to the deconstruction of the 'stranger danger' myth to consider the stories of the parents in relation to their parenting experiences, and the comments of the children about the way their parents exert their authority. It focuses on a mismatch between the parents' articulation of their fears and their actions in particular circumstances. Parents are shown to regret the restraints they feel obliged to impose upon their children and look back with nostalgia to their own childhoods, which they consider were times of far greater freedom. These feelings may be a significant influence on the parenting behaviour exhibited on holiday, which the research shows to be inconsistent with more generally expressed values. The chapter considers differences in holiday conditions which may induce such changes in behaviour. One identifiable difference is the absence of the peer group gaze in holiday locations and the final section considers the importance of social pressures on parenting practice. The chapter thus demonstrates that parents' practices do not always reflect their articulated fears, fears which are drawn from the dominant discourse. Their actual practice is produced by an interplay of their fears with other considerations such as desire for their children's freedom and peer group pressure.

The penultimate chapter considers the stories of the children and the everyday representations of their lives that these illustrate. These are set in the context of their representations of the dangers within their lived environment - particularly their engagement with the discourses relating to 'stranger danger'. These children regularly negotiate their way around barriers which affect their freedom of movement in their lived environment and, significantly, the constraints they identify are not always the fears that they identified in the early stages of the discussions. The most frequently mentioned negative presence is older

children, who are identified by these stories as the challenge around which the younger children must negotiate their movements. This raises issues of territoriality which have often gone unidentified by adults, but are a significant factor in young children's experiences of their lived environment. The chapter demonstrates that, as with the parents, the articulated dominant fears expressed by children are not the only influence upon their lived experience.

The concluding chapter considers how the research findings may be used to influence change. Since this assumes that the ever-increasing confinement of children is a cause for concern, it reviews work recently conducted in a wide variety of fields to demonstrate that this is the case. There is evidence that the physical and mental health of children is suffering as a result of lack of independent activity and educationalists are increasingly aware of the gaps in children's life experiences. This evidence suggests that efforts should be made to influence parenting practice, but, to effect any change, confidence in the environment must be restored. It must be reconstructed as a safe place for all of society. This research contributes to the deeper understanding of the issues and specific suggestions are proposed which might be of use to those whose actions influence children's lives. It is hoped such suggestions might eventually improve the lot of our children, who as research shows are becoming bigger, fatter, more neurotic and have less experience of the world around them.

The short title of the thesis has multiple meanings. 'Outside Danger' describes the way the environment is perceived with respect to children. It also implies that if the danger is without, then there is 'Inside Safety', which will be shown to be manifestly untrue. Another interpretation of the title is in terms of risk. An 'outside' risk is one that is very unlikely to happen. The fear of strangers is such a risk but this is not how it is perceived today. 'Stranger danger' will be shown to have become the greatest concern with respect to independent mobility and child safety. The title was therefore chosen to reflect some of the significant issues which this work addresses.

Notes

The relationship between children and those who care for them on a regular basis constitutes a significant part of this thesis. I am aware of the multiple forms of relationships that this care bond may take: one or two parents, step-parents, parents' partners, foster parents, grand-parents, other relations may all be a child's principal carer. For ease of reference the term 'parent' has been used in the context of this work to apply to all those responsible for the primary care of children.

The words of the children constitute a significant part of this work. They have been replicated as faithfully as possible in transcription. I have used my initials to indicate any contributions I made to the dialogue.

Chapter One

Children and Geography

The Excluded Child

There has been recognition among geographers in contemporary times that societies cannot be studied as homogenous groups. New areas of research have recognised that the complexity of difference which constitutes humankind is not merely a social phenomenon but also has spatial significance beyond traditional regional and national distinctions. Whilst continuing to adhere to the idea of 'landscape' there has been a move to identify the plurality of cultures and the multiplicity of landscapes within which these cultures are located (Jackson 1989).

The 'Berkeley School', and its head Carl Sauer are recognised as the most significant influences in the early days of cultural geography, particularly in North America. However, their anthropologically based 'super-organic' approach is criticised by Peter Jackson, in his seminal work *Maps of Meaning: An Introduction to Cultural Geography*, as reifying culture and ignoring its social context and the input of human agency (Jackson 1989:20). He likewise rejects other approaches such as those adopted by humanist geographers and suggests an alternative materialist approach:

The deficiencies of a super-organic approach are now generally recognised and a more active conception of culture is required, acknowledging the extent to which cultures are humanly constituted through specific social practices. An exclusive interest in the physical expression of culture in the landscape now also seems unnecessarily restrictive. Elitist concepts of culture, concerned only with the Great Tradition of English literature and the fine arts is, likewise no longer acceptable. Instead, cultural geographers are beginning to recognise a plurality of cultures and to shift analysis away from a few privileged texts towards an analysis of the social relations through which cultures are produced and reproduced.

(Jackson 1989: 23).

The theorists who have provided the grounding for the analysis of social relations through which cultures are produced and reproduced belong predominantly to a Marxist tradition,

for example: Raymond Williams' work on culture and society, Antonio Gramsci's discussion of contested hegemony, and the work of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University. It has been work by writers such as these that has been influential in originating new directions of research and analysis by human geographers.

Complementary to this approach has been the rise in the application of feminist theory in a geographical context (see the reviews by Zelinsky et al 1982 and Women and Geography Study Group 1984). Whilst some feminists have considered the oppression of women the most pervasive ideology of our culture (Millet 1977), a more constructive approach considers the complex intersections between patriarchy and capitalism (Barrett 1980, Pratt and Hanson 1994). This has led to the recognition that gender differences are socially constructed and rooted in power relations within cultures. Such recognition prompted the consideration of the position of groups, other than women, who occupy similarly subordinate roles. As in other disciplines, new voices in geography have challenged the dominant ideologies, which have historically derived from a middle-class, western, white, heterosexual, male perspective. Marginalised groups have become the focus of cultural geographers' interest. As well as the role of women (Women and Geography Study Group 1984, Rose 1993, Bondi 1990, 1992), geographers have addressed the geographies of black people (Jackson 1989, Kobayashi and Peake 1994, Dubois 1995, Dwyer 1998), youth (Skelton and Valentine 1998, Matthews, Limb and Percy-Smith 1998), and gays and lesbians (Whittle 1994, Bell and Valentine 1995). Such groups occupy socially constructed roles within society and can be identified by their relative lack of power and autonomy. In the past, this lack of power has resulted in representations of their lives from perspectives other than their own or, in some narratives, an absence of representation altogether. In practical terms most have been excluded from influence over their own lived environments, their needs have been interpreted by others, and some groups have been spatially marginalised, only able to occupy the least favoured areas (Sibley 1995). The work in many disciplines has contributed to the raising of awareness of these groups and their right to be heard and to express their own needs.

The study of marginalised groups within a geographical context has particularly engaged with the consideration of boundaries which regulate their exclusion. David Sibley, in his work 1995 work *Geographies of Exclusion*, considers the process by which such boundaries are formed. He makes use of psycho analytic object relations theory, particularly the work of Melanie Klein, which contends that, from infancy, entities perceived separate

from self are separated into the 'good' and the 'bad'. Sibley suggests that society operates to exclude those constructed as 'other' or 'bad/unclean' through the imposition of boundaries (Silbey 1995). The dominant group purifies its own space in response to fear of the pollutant nature of others, not only excluding the other spatially, but also neglecting their needs and negating their voices and their knowledge. It is this exclusion that those active in cultural geography seek to address.

These new interests on the geographical agenda have made constructive contributions to this growing dynamic. However, not all groups have been awarded the same depth of consideration. In the last decade writers have drawn attention to the historical lack of serious focus on children as a group (James, S. 1990, Sibley 1990, Philo 1992, Aitkin 1994, Matthews 1995a, Chouinard and Grant 1995, Matthews and Limb 1999).

My own interest in the position of the child in geography was initially sparked by an excellent lecture on new feminist perspectives within the discipline in 1993.³ Alerted, by the lecture, to the minimal presence of women and minority groups within research, I came to consider the position of other marginalised sections of the population. A long interest and association with children identified them as a group about whom little was written and whose voices were rarely heard. They are often absent from geographical discourses. Children were, and still are, neglected by many of the sets of basic statistical information in current use in geographical texts.⁴ In many instances, when children are included in research, their lives are represented by those close to them, such as parents and teachers. It is only in the past ten years that interest in the world of the child has gained any momentum and until very recently the availability of literature has been very limited.

This was the context within which I embarked on this study. The principal objective was to explore an aspect of children's environmental experience which was in the process of change, grounding the research in the children's own interpretations of this change. Yet it is impossible to interpret the experience of a subordinate group without reference to the influence of those in control. Just as gender relations are embedded in a matrix of social relations involving both men and women (Jackson 1989:129), children's lives are managed by adults. This thesis, therefore, seeks to represent the newly evolving approach to research

³ My thanks to Tracey Skelton, Nottingham Trent University for her lecture.

⁴ See most EU statistics and General Household Survey, HMSO.

involving children which recognises and respects their individuality and agency, contextualising this in terms of their subordinate role within adult society.

As the study of children's worlds has emerged the particular interests and approaches of geographers have generated discussion over terminology. The concepts of 'children's geographies' and 'the geography of children' have been used on both sides of the Atlantic to clarify particular fields of research, at times with a certain lack of consistency. Stuart Aitkin in his book *Putting Children in their Place* suggests:

There are some fundamental questions that arise with a discussion of children's geographies: How does a child grow into the world and develop as a cultural, coherent self? What are the social, ethnic and racial contexts of their development and how are these mediated by space? How do political and economic circumstances constrain or enhance a child's development? What fundamental geography is at work with a child as her or his horizon expands from the home and the neighbourhood to encompass the city, the nation and the world? What are the everyday experiences of place that mould children's lives?

Aitkin (1994:2-3)

He considers the 'geography of childhood' to refer to the '*spatial distribution of variables and factors which affect the well-being of children*' (Aitkin 1994: 2). The examples he gives of such factors are the incidence of poverty, child-care and single-parent families, as well as indicators of global mortality, health, education, housing and education.

More recently contributors to a book edited by Holloway and Valentine entitled *Children's Geographies: Playing, Living, Learning*⁵ have emphasised different distinctions in the field. In their introduction the editors suggest a two-fold split in work on children within geography, characterised by a psychological approach on one hand and the other having its roots in sociology. Their book, they contend, takes the latter approach (Holloway and Valentine 2000:8). They also suggest that it is the sociological approach which aims to give children a voice in an adultist world and has therefore '*led to the development of child-centred methodologies*'. This is further expanded by Kong writing in the same text. She cites Roger Hart as first making the distinction between the terms.

Geographical research on children may be classified broadly in terms of exploration of the environmental behaviour of children and the development of children's knowledge of the geographic environment (Hart

⁵ This text was published after the initial completion of the thesis.

1984). *The former which Hart termed the 'geography of children', is concerned largely with children's spatial behaviour, and draws heavily on psychology. The second area of research, which Hart terms children's geographies, is focused mainly on children's understanding of spatial location and phenomena and their spatial awareness.*

(Kong, 2000:258)

The term the 'geography of childhood' appears to have different interpretations and the discipline would benefit from some clarification of its meaning. However the definition of 'children's geographies' is consistent within most texts⁶ and reference back to the introduction of this work demonstrates that it is within this field of research that my own work is situated.

Rarely, before this decade, have children themselves been listened to directly or been asked to contribute their own perspective on the geographies of their everyday lives. (For a notable exception see Hart 1975.) Suransky (1982) suggests there were significant consequences inherent in the presumption that children's worlds could be represented by others. She asks:

To what extent have adults' constructions of reality misrepresented the child and to what extent do they continue to misrepresent the child's experience of being in the world?

(Suransky 1982:16)

Recent times have seen a new awareness of this past neglect and misrepresentation. The second half of the 1990s has seen significant attention and resources awarded to the consideration of children's spatial experiences. Holloway and Valentine point out that new methodological approaches have been evolved to tackle this challenge of investigating the world from the perspective of children, as opposed to treating the child as an object of investigation (Holloway and Valentine 2000). This being said, some past work in the fields of geography and environmental psychology has implicitly recognised the agency of children when investigating their mapping skills and cognitive development (Blaut et al 1970, Blaut and Stea 1971, Moore 1976, Spencer et al 1989). Matthew's work *Making Sense of Place* provides a comprehensive study of children's understanding of large scale environments and includes their capacity to understand spatial information and make sense of their

⁶ Matthews and Limb reverse the definitions in their paper 'Defining and Agenda for the geography of children' - but as they cite Hart as their source this may not signal a difference in approach (Matthews and Limb 1999: 65).

environment (Matthews 1992). He does not neglect giving credence to children's feeling about place and their expressed play requirements, which often differ from adult perceptions of their needs.

Significant changes have occurred in the time since I embarked upon this research, and as I now commence writing this final chapter (I am advised all good researchers write their first chapter last!) I am conscious of the progress that has been made in recognising the importance of the child as an social being capable of independent agency. An indication of this new focus of interest is the 1996 launch of the Economic and Social Research Council Programme 'Children 5-16: growing into the twenty-first century', which is a multi-discipline project supporting 22 research teams, of which six focus on work with geographical implications.

The Concept of Childhood

The past studies of the child as object were concerned principally with the most effective transformation of the feeble child to the proficient adult. Concern over the social, educational, psychological and physical development of the emerging adult has spawned numerous treatises. Famously Piaget (1926, 1937, 1948 etc.) theorised how children learnt, Murdock (1949) and Parsons (1959) how children were socialised to become co-operative adult members of society, and Kohlberg (1973) how they developed morally. Subsequently, all these writers' ideas have been challenged on the grounds that they failed to address the issue from the perspective of the child. Piaget's linear developmental route to adult cognition has been challenged as ignoring children's perspectives, social context and symbolic meanings, whilst Gilligan suggests Kohlberg's categorisation of moral values was based on masculine presumptions (Donaldson 1978, Alanan 1990, Gilligan 1982). A new paradigm of childhood studies has evolved with the conviction that in order to map the experiences of children, we must listen to the voices of children, and consider their unique role in cultural production. This approach has emerged within many disciplines: history, geography, sociology, psychology, socio-anthropology and cultural studies (Pollock 1983, Cunningham 1995, Matthews, M 1995a, James 1990, Matthews, G 1994, Blizter 1995, Alanan 1988, James and Prout 1990, Epstein 1993b etc). Common to all the approaches has been an interest in the concepts of 'childhood' and 'the child'.

It is essential that an awareness of the multiplicity of meanings that these terms represent must preface any scholarship on the subject. Although both concepts are basically

derivatives of age, and describe the early years of human existence, there are no clearly understood boundaries or representations which define them. The term 'child' is used variously within our own society to include infants, adolescents, teenagers and youths. The transition from child to adult is a fuzzy boundary with multiple rites of passage prescribed by tradition, culture and law. School leaving, 18th and 21st birthdays, Bar-mitzvah, legal ages for sex, drinking, marriage and driving are just a few of the rites of passage recognised and celebrated in our own society. Such a situation is confusing for the researcher working with children and even more confusing for those living through this ill defined transition. The multiple layers of exclusion from adult activities conflict with similarly complex expectations of young peoples' behaviour. The young person feels pressure to behave in an 'adult' way but does not feel treated as an adult. Such confusion is institutionalised in spaces such as the cinema, where adult prices are charged to children who are not allowed to watch adult rated films and in swimming pools where a sixteen-year-old is charged at adult rates but is not permitted to supervise younger children.⁷ 'What is a child?' is a question posed not only by academics but also by parents buying bus, train and air tickets, entrance tickets, paying for haircuts, buying VAT exempt clothes, special meals in restaurants etc., Since a clear, age derived, definition is not possible then the meaning of childhood must be considered as it is constructed and negotiated by each society (Boyden 1990).

Childhood is a division of society which is classified and recognised by the members of that society and involves an actively negotiated set of social relationships. Within this division the early years of human life are constructed (James and Prout 1995). Bourdieu referred to such divisions as the doxa within society, by which he meant:

'...systems of classification, which reproduce, in their own specific logic, the objective classes, that is, the divisions by sex, age or position in the relations of production, and hence the recognition of arbitrariness on which they are based.'

(Bourdieu 1977:21)

The acceptance of such systems by society ensures their continued reproduction. As the feminist lobby has discovered, any challenges to the social hegemony require persuasive and persistent voices to achieve any impact. The doxa of childhood is widely recognised as a social construct which varies over time and space (James and Prout 1990, Valentine

⁷ Rushcliffe Leisure Centre in West Bridgford was challenged over this by a sixteen year old single

1997a). A review of historical texts on the topic suggests that in the past the status of children was considerably lower than it is today. In the seventeenth century Molière considered that the infant *'did not count'* because it took no part in adult life and might well disappear.⁸ The lack of significance of childhood in early writing is shown by the absence of children in historical records, an absence which caused Laslett to wonder at the:

Crowds and crowds of little children strangely missing from the written record. There is something strange about the silence of all these multitudes of babes in arms, toddlers and adolescents in the statements men made at the time about their own experience...nearly half the whole community living in a condition of semi-oblivation.

(Laslett 1965 :104-5)

Historical treatise in the 1960's and 1970's suggested that a concept of childhood, as such, did not truly exist until the eighteenth century and that until this time parents engaged very little with their children (Aries 1962, Stone 1977, Anderson 1980). Pollock (1983) considers that such extreme theories are based on weak evidence. Her ethnographic work on parent-child relationships using evidence from diaries identified strong attachments and parents' intense grief at the loss of a child. There is, however, evidence that there was less awareness of a particular nature that distinguished the child from the adult, especially in respect to notions of sexuality⁹ and in the artistic depiction of children at the time. Aries suggested that it was only in the eighteenth century that children gained a new importance and were positioned at the centre of the family. The attention paid to child rearing practice by influential writers at this time demonstrates the increasing engagement with the issue. There was, however, little consensus about the best way to prepare children for adult life: Defoe wished to mould the child like wax into 'a man of sense',¹⁰ Locke regarded children as individuals but also as 'tabula rasa' (blank tablets) which adults must fill by strict teaching and reasoning, and Rousseau advocated a free, happy childhood where the child's innocence is preserved and learning takes place through experience. His views were particularly revolutionary and in his treatise on childhood *Emile* he anticipated the ideas of many of today's writers when he observed that childhood has its own way of seeing, thinking and feeling (see the propositions of Matthew and Limb 1999: 67,68).

mother but refused to change its policy.

⁸ Quoted in Pollock (1983) p22.

⁹ Aries (1962: 98-124) quotes from writings about Louis XI11 who at the age of one made 'everybody kiss his cock' and whose attendants indulged in games and innuendo relating to his engagement to the Infanta of Spain.

¹⁰ Quoted in Cunningham (1995: 64).

During the 19C the paradigm of childhood increasingly embraced the concepts of innocence and vulnerability as identities, and the writings of Romantics, such as George Elliot,¹¹ Percy Shelley and William Wordsworth¹² added to this a notion of purity. The child was 'fresh from God' and required the protection not only of its parents but also increasingly of the state. Active reformers successfully urged the introduction of the Factory Act 1883 aimed at limiting the hours worked by children. The objective was to allow children a proper childhood, and the new paradigm, achieved by the middle class and aspired to by the working class, deemed childhood to be a time of education as well as pleasure and lack of responsibility.

As the infant mortality rate has fallen in the western world, so emotional and financial investment in children has increased. Parents, of all classes, increasingly invested more time and money in their child's upbringing. This, together with ever more institutional controls has helped define the construct of childhood today. Cunningham wrote about *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500* (Cunningham 1995). He suggests that both Aries' theory of a transformation in the concept and treatment of the child in the seventeenth century and Pollock's counter argument have been overshadowed by changes in the twentieth century. He sees the key feature in the early twentieth century the idea that 'children should have a proper childhood' and he demonstrates that in many ways this goal has been successfully attained, most notably in the increase of the survival chances of children. It is in the second half of this century that he considers the most significant change has taken place.

The twist comes in the second half of the twentieth century. Children have begun to break out of the ghetto of dependency in home and school to which they have been assigned. Acquiring a degree of emotional, economic and legal power in relation to their parents, they have been able to become participants in a commercial culture dominated by the search for profits.

(Cunningham 1995:188)

For Cunningham one source of the complexity and angst surrounding childhood today is the conflict between this new notion of childhood autonomy and the deeply rooted traditionally

¹¹In George Elliot's (1860) book the eponymous hero Silas Marner is rescued from a miser's life of misery by the innocent, pure, child Eppie.

¹²Wordsworth's poem *Ode on Intimations of Mortality from Recollections of Childhood*, was considered by the writer Garlitz (1966) to have been as influential in the 19C as Freud in the 20C.

romantic concept of children. In one discourse there is a merging of childhood and adulthood and in the other childhood is separate, acknowledged as a special time of life. The products of these discourses produce varying constructs of childhood; multiple, and differing interpretations within micro-cultures, all of which are influenced by the ideologies of the powerful.

Within each society, institutions such as the Government and the education system play a significant role in cultural formation of childhood (Poulantzas 1973). Ideologies are formalised in national legislation which impacts on each state independently. This institutionalisation is subject to considerable spatial variation even between societies which have close cultural, social and economic ties. Take as example the diversity in the 'age of consent' in Western European society today. In Britain until 1888 the age of consent for girls was 13. It was raised to 16 as part of the reforms mentioned above which aimed to preserve childhood as a time of innocence. However in Northern Ireland it is 17. In other European countries today it ranges from 18 in Turkey to 12 in Spain, for heterosexual relationships, and for homosexuals it is 18 in Britain and Turkey and 12 in Spain. In fact until 1994 the age of consent for homosexuals was 21 in Britain. Such diversity in relation to an activity which is considered 'adult' demonstrates how varying are the definitions of childhood in Europe today. On the international stage the variations are even wider. In Iran the age of consent is 9, in Egypt 21, whilst in Saudi Arabia there is no minimum age as such: the basic requirement for sexual intimacy is marriage.

In this context, it is remarkable that the United Nations' *Charter for the Rights of the Child* (1989) has received such world-wide support. The international community spent ten years considering the status of children and their entitlements. Its conclusions are enshrined in 41 substantive articles which encompass a broad range of rights from rights to privacy and freedom of expression, to preventing child abduction, economic and sexual exploitation and prohibiting all unjustifiable forms of discrimination against children (Van Bueren 1996). Van Bueren, a lawyer involved in the writing of the convention describes its provisions as being divided into four P's: prevention, provision, protection and participation. It has now been ratified by all but two countries: The United States and Somalia. The shared sentiment this implies is extraordinary and it represents the measure of the international concern about children. It is a demonstration of the cross-cultural recognition of the vulnerability of the child and of children's lack of power to promote their own needs. It also recognises that as a group children are not just entitled to the human rights they have been denied in the past

but to unique rights related to their childhood. The aims effectively combine the paradigms of childhood as identified by Cunningham (1995) to produce a construct of children as vulnerable individuals in need of protection who are also entitled to rights of their own. These unique rights include the right to security and the right to play. Many children are deprived of these rights and this research will demonstrate that a safe place to play outside the home is not available to many children in Britain today.

Children and Research

The complex nature of childhood and the particular relationship of those involved in research to the doxa necessitate a clearly defined approach as prerequisite to any research. Childhood is unique among the neglected elements of the population in that everyone was a member of the group at one time. In the past this has enabled writers to claim a sufficient understanding of the perspective of children as Sibley did when he drew '*largely on recollections of childhood*' in his essay relating to the construction of the boundaries of childhood (Sibley 1995). Other writers such as Aitkin and Herman (1996) regard it as '*an opportunity and a danger*'. They are concerned that whilst memories may be a rich source of reflection upon childhood, they may be flawed by inaccurate recall and the embroidery of retelling. It is my contention too that to understand the experiences of children, we must not look back with a lens distorted by experience, but engage with children directly.

Other minority groups have been encouraged to tell their own stories on the academic stage but we cannot expect children to have grasped the skills required to engage directly in analytical discourse at the sophisticated level required to satisfy this tradition. Childhood is past before such competence is acquired and the language of academia takes time to learn. Children are therefore excluded from telling their stories themselves in many arenas. It is up to others to report and, where appropriate, interpret their words. This is not ideal, but it is necessary. It is the only way the stories will be told, and to neglect the telling would be a far greater offence.

The methodological difficulties this involves are many but one early work has been particularly instructive in showing possible ways forward. Hart in his groundbreaking book *Children's Experience of Place* was one of the first writers to engage with children's experiences of their lived environment (Hart 1979). This extensive piece of research into the lives of children in a small New England town took place over a period of a year and a half. In order to unravel the complex mappings of the children's experiences extended fieldwork

was necessary. This involved gaining the trust of the parents and children participating in the research. Hart lists the methods he used as: direct observation, structured interviews, tests and ethnographic interviews. In addition he organised model making sessions, sand box sessions, map drawing and diary keeping with the children. This was ground breaking work, in its time, because it not only acknowledged the importance of exploring children's experiences of their environment but also respected their right to speak for themselves. The result is a vivid evocation of the children's recreational customs, their relationship with their surroundings and their knowledge of their lived environment. Although aspects of the theoretical approach appear dated¹³, the ethnographic methodology provides a blue print for much research today.

Despite the inspirational nature of Hart's work, the engagement with a geography of children has been slow to develop. It has taken twenty years until a substantial article appeared tackling the agenda for such research. Matthews and Limb (1999) have done this in their recent article, *'Defining an agenda for the geography of children: review and prospect'*. They suggest seven propositions which *'highlight different aspects of children's relationship with their physical environment, beyond home school and playground'* to form the basis of an agenda for the study of the geography of children. The article post-dates the bulk of this research and its agenda addresses many of the issues which concerned me and informed the epistemological stance with which I commenced this work. The critical summary of their proposals which follows provides a structure within which my own perspective on the study of children in geography is expanded and also provides a context for a review of literature most relevant to my research. The body of work relating directly to my research topic, children's mobility and perceptions of danger, is very limited. The work reviewed will be that identified at the commencement of the research and which was influential in the early formation of the thesis. However, within the recent past, the interest in children's mobility has increased within the academy and beyond and more recent publications are cited in the body of the thesis where relevant to my own findings. The lack of relevant literature supports the need for more research in this area, as does the increasingly heard public discussions around the topic. Within the critique which follows, I have been able to identify gaps in the literature which my own research sets out to fill. My findings will provide some original contributions to the debate concerning children's perception of and interaction with their environment.

¹³ Hart makes extensive use of the work of Piaget whose approach has been subsequently criticised by writers such as Donaldson.

'Defining an Agenda for the Geography of Children' - a review

The abstract of the Matthews and Limb (1999) article '*Defining an agenda for the geography of children: review and prospect*' states their purpose as:

...defining an agenda for the geography of children which not only takes into account earlier studies which can inform contemporary debate, largely drawn from an environmental psychology background, but which also recognises the interface between sociology, anthropology and cultural studies and draws upon important work being undertaken by feminist and critical geographers.

(Matthews and Limb 1999:61, their emphasis)

The propositions are a convincing list of the issues engaging geographers interested in the lives of children. I will take issue, however, with some aspects of their arguments, where I suggest they fall victim to some of the pitfalls they themselves signal.

The first proposition contends that children's 'ways of seeing' differ from those of adults. Expounding this proposition Matthews and Limb consider the multiplicity of childhoods described in Valentine's work to demonstrate that the experiences of growing up can never be considered to be universal (Valentine 1996a, 1997a). They acknowledge the dominance of the concept of the universal child as an individual temporally set apart from the adult world. The child is defined as innocent, incompetent and vulnerably dependent on parents and the state. Childhood is seen as a time of freedom and happiness and without responsibilities. Matthews and Limb describe such a concept of childhood as barren. Even within a similar time and space frame, other determinants such as poverty, disability, ill-health and relationships can all affect the experience of childhood. They are unhappy with psychological or sociological models which see children as constructing a cognitive map in order to define their adulthood or undergoing a process of socialisation in order to take their adult place in society. Instead they adopt the model of James and Prout (1990) which suggests that, firstly, childhood is recognised as a social construction subject to different interpretative frames between and within cultures and historical epochs. Secondly, childhood is always an individual experience affected by other social dimensions such as class, race and ethnicity. For each individual the experience of childhood is an amalgam of the dominant ideologies within the various layers of society, the family, friends and relations, the local community and the state. Finally, children must be regarded as cultural producers in their own right, actively involved in shaping their social and environmental

transactions (James, A. 1995:45). These propositions effectively deconstruct childhood and '*shift(s) the attention away from age as the cultural determinant*' (Matthews and Limb 1999:68).

These arguments are all well founded but they generate the concern that they effectively deflect from the original proposition that children's ways of seeing are different from adults. If attention is shifted away from the age determinant how can the authors support the propositions in their agenda? How can they generalise about children's ways of seeing if they insist on stressing the experience of the individual? *Why study children as a group at all?*

Just as women are identified by their biological sex, children are identified by the passage of time since their birth. Around these aspects of identity are constructed the social institutions that are gender and childhood. These structures, as has already been established, vary over space and time. Despite this variation there will exist commonalities of experience within which individual lives will be conducted. When feminists invite women to tell their stories, it is expected that most will have similar positions in relation to patriarchy. Each story will be individual, but what they share is the experience of being a woman within the construct of a particular society. What is common to the stories of women is that the tellers are *not* men (McDowell 1991, Oakley 1994). In the same way we listen to the stories of children because they are *not* adults. The life stories will differ, because for each child the experience differs, but the commonality is their membership of the doxa of childhood and the constructs it imposes upon them. Treating children as a group is relevant only if their experiences are considered in the context of the power relationships which define their lives *because they are children*. As Pratt (1993:56) said of feminism '*Feminism threatens to self-destruct as feminists deconstruct its central analytical category*', so the Matthews and Limb notion of moving away from age as a category holds dangers for the study of children.

James and Prout (1990) do not themselves cast away structure, but suggest that whilst agency must be recognised it cannot be divorced from structure. They acknowledge that it is important to recover children as social actors but that:

..we also need to grasp childhood as a social institution that exists beyond the activity of any particular child or adult. There must be theoretical space for both the construction of childhood as an institution

and the activity of children within and upon the constraints and possibilities that the institutional level creates.

(James and Prout 1990 :28)

In concentrating on the individuality of children Matthews and Limb fail to clarify their approach to the social institution of childhood, an institution implicit in all their propositions. My research does not ignore those determinants that play significant roles in constructing children's life stories, but it also identifies the shared experiences of children of different gender, social background, ethnicity and lived environment. Such experiences, not shared by the adults around them, relate to their relative position of power within society and are thus a consequence of their shared membership of the doxa of childhood.

Despite the importance of other determinants, the progressive nature of childhood makes it difficult to ignore age-related distinctions. It is grounded in biological development and reinforced by social and cultural expectations. For many life experiences a child's age has the greatest significance. I chose to work with children aged between 9 and 11, dubbed by some the 'middle-age range' of childhood (Roberts 1980). The choice reflects the structures of childhood development within our society, for they fall into school years 5 and 6, the final two years of primary education. I wished to work with children who were beginning to seek some independence from their parents and so identified the stage at which this was most likely to happen (Hillman 1993, Meadows 1986, Roberts 1980). The children are within structures imposed upon them by society which groups them together by age, and research can demonstrate the similarities and differences of behaviour within this structure.

The second proposition put forward by Matthews and Limb is that childrens' place use differs from that of adults. The authors here discuss areas such as playgrounds, allocated by adults for children, which are described as unrewarding and sterile for children's play. They also suggest that many such areas are provided in order to contain children in a safe cocoon and to segregate them from adults. Play areas in public houses and on motorway service areas are obvious examples of such segregation. Since adults always define the use of space, any children who are allowed free range may come into conflict with adults because they subvert the intended use of the space. The young people use space allocated by adults for a particular use in an alternative way. Adult shoppers are alarmed and intimidated by the groups 'hanging around' in the shopping centre (Corrigan 1979, Pressdee 1986, Massey 1998, Watt and Stevenson 1998). Space intended for consumers is used by the young people to congregate and participate in the social interaction which is a significant factor in

their construction of individual and group identity. Other arenas of conflict are, ironically, children's playgrounds as young people occupy the space intended for younger children (Matthews, Limb and Percy-Smith 1998). In my own locality an area of reclaimed railway line developed as a nature conservation area became a popular meeting place for young people in the summer months. As a result of this the police warned parents in the local press '*to get your children off the streets before we do*'.¹⁴

It is evident from this article that gatherings of young people are perceived as threatening where ever and whenever they congregate unsupervised within a public space. Matthews and Limb imply that young people are excluded because they violate the designated use of the space but it could be argued that such groups are excluded *wherever* they collect together. Sibley suggests they are considered pollutant elements in adult space (Sibley 1995) but quotes a Home Office study which suggests that the '*mere sight of such groups, however rarely they infringe the law, can be alarming to others*'.¹⁵ The designated use of space becomes merely the excuse, used by adults, to exclude the groups of young people who offend society by their mere presence. It is difficult to imagine a public space where groups of young people gathering, without a specific purpose, are *not* seen as threatening. Effectively all public space is adult space and controlled by adults. Whilst concessionary space may be allocated to young children in the form of play areas, older children and young people rarely are allowed access to space unless they appropriate it for themselves (Massey 1998, Matthews, Limb and Percy-Smith 1998).

The ideas of Matthews and Limb concerning children's use of space are grounded in a new reading of children as cultural producers. Children are not merely conforming to the definitions of space imposed upon them by adults but are redefining the spaces as their own - creating their own geographies. To demonstrate this, the writers make use of the ideas of the social anthropologist Allison James who works on children's language (James 1995). She suggests that children create their own vocabulary and pattern of language use within the framework for language laid down by adults. These variants, which are often in conflict with adult forms, are handed on by each generation, at each stage defining membership. Children's linguistic culture is therefore a series of formations which children move into and out of as they move towards adulthood. The suggestion is made that similar patterns operate

¹⁴ Nottingham Evening Post, Neighbourhood News. Aug 16th 1996.

¹⁵ M. Ramsey, Downtown Drinkers: The perception and fears of the public in the city centre, Crime Prevention Unit, Paper 19, Home Office, London, 1989, quoted in Sibley 1995.

in the physical world. Children are active cultural producers within the adult regulated structures of land use. They use markers such as graffiti and vandalism to claim public space, to mark out territorial boundaries.

Matthews and Limb take from James' work the idea that children are capable of cultural production and apply it to the environment. What they do not engage with is the temporal dimension of James' work. This leads to a significant flaw in their argument since there is a vital difference between the opportunities available to the children in these two aspects of their development. Children have a far greater autonomy in the verbal field. As soon as children are verbally interacting with other children they have the autonomy to develop their own language structures. For all children such interaction occurs from the age of 5; for many it starts even earlier. Parents may attempt to correct and reconstruct children's use of language but they cannot control it when they are out of earshot. Children's independent interaction with the environment is far more firmly controlled by adults. Not until they are deemed competent to take care of themselves do they have the freedom to interact independently with their environment. In addition, the age at which children are deemed competent has been shown to have increased significantly in recent times (Hillman et al 1990, Valentine 1997b, Pugh 1996). The work of Gaster traces access to the neighbourhood over three generations and demonstrates just how significant is the change that had taken place (Gaster 1991).

My research will show many children in the upper classes of primary school are rarely permitted beyond the home independently. The opportunity to develop cultural formations in public space is therefore denied for much of childhood. School playgrounds and back gardens are often the only spaces available for individuals to indulge in independent social interaction, and even here they are under the watchful eye of parents, teachers and playground supervisors. Whilst I would not wish to discourage engagement with the issues concerning the interaction of youth cultures and the environment, I would suggest that most of the environmental cultural formations of which Matthews and Limb write are the product of older groups. Whilst older children may be considered polluters of adult space, and thus excluded from it, the situation is more complex for the younger child. Parents, conscious that they cannot create a space unpolluted by 'others' who might harm their children, create inclusive boundaries to keep the child safe. For some children, these boundaries deny them access to a wider lived environment altogether. Care must be taken that these children do not become an absent voice, unnoticed because of their containment in the home.

The authoritarian style is associated with rigidly enforced rules, narrow territorial limits and low patterns of acceptance. In this sense, place behaviour is dictated. The authoritative style combines reasoned and firm control with a clear definition of rules, role and territorial margins. For these children, place behaviour is an outcome of mediation and a certain amount of give and take. In both these cases, parents draw their children towards home, with greater and lesser stringency. In contrast, the permissive style provides a high amount of tolerance with weak definition of territory. Parents are supportive and approving but there is considerable leniency in terms of place limits. The neglectful style reflects lax and poor parenting, with imprecise guidance. Children's place behaviour is often ignored and they are left to get on with their own lives. Although these two styles differ sharply in respect of love and acceptance, both are susceptible to the centrifugal impulses of the children, but again to varying extent.

(Matthews and Limb 1999:71)

Whilst this model is a useful mapping of behaviour, it appears to be operating in a vacuum unaffected by culturally constructed influences and legislative controls. It fails to consider whether pressures from sources beyond the home may influence parents to act outside their normal conventions of parenting behaviour. This is particularly likely to occur with respect to children's independent mobility since it is such a public demonstration of care taking, and observable by wider society. Thus permissive or even neglectful parents may feel pressurised to contain their children to avoid social stigmatisation. Recent legislation allowing local authorities to impose curfews on children may also have impacts on behaviour.¹⁶ The legislation which is aimed at children exhibiting delinquent behaviour is intended to impact on neglectful parenting. It is likely that some parents may be encouraged or even forced to contain their children as a result of this legislation irrespective of their parenting preference. Neither does the model allow the possibility that there may be conditions under which those parents who normally operate containing conventions may relax the constraints on their children. My research explores paradoxes of parental behaviour such as these, which overlie the simplistic model of typologies. Baumrind's model assumed parenting practice to be spatially consistent, but I will demonstrate that patterns of parental control are more complex and changeable than the model suggests.

The relationship between parents to children is a contextual one. Within the home, for example, children may be treated as 'other' by parents. Boundaries may be drawn, excluding the child from certain rooms and certain objects - 'Dad's chair' for example. In this situation the child may be seen as a polluting influence - creating disorder and dirt in the tidy

¹⁶ Criminal Justice Act 1998.

and clean home. Some of these boundaries are permanently in place and some operate temporally - not being allowed downstairs after being 'put' to bed, for example (Sibley 1995, 1995a). However, the situation is reversed for the young child outside the home. This child is protected by the parents and boundaries are drawn to include rather than exclude. It is the outside world which is objectified as dirty, polluting in both a physical and moral sense and therefore excluded. The family, the school, the community try to impose barriers which protect children, protect them particularly from the dangerous outsiders. My research shows that, in recent times, it is the lack of confidence in these boundaries of protection which has led to the greater restriction of young children. The 'boundaries of exclusion' discussed by Sibley do *not*, in the perception of parents, operate effectively to maintain an environment safe for young children (Sibley 1995).

Parents may be the principal architects in the production of children's boundaries but it would be wrong to assume that these boundaries are not transgressed. Hart showed that there were often several levels of boundaries (Hart 1976). He identified those which parents defined for their children when they were alone and those for when their child was accompanied by friends. There were others, beyond the child's acknowledged range, that represented tacit agreements between parents and child and in some cases there were boundaries beyond this that the child actually observed. The negotiation between the child and parent is often a multi-layered one which allows significant flexibility on either side. The agency of children themselves in the negotiation and implementation of their own boundaries is neglected by Baumrind's highly structured model. My own research furthers the knowledge of children's ranges by considering the boundaries as imposed by parents, and how they are negotiated and ignored. It also looks beyond and exposes boundaries which the children are forced to impose upon themselves, thus presenting a more complete picture of their actual ranges.

Matthews and Limb discuss several determinants which they consider significant in the management of children's spatial boundaries. The role of gender has been shown by many studies to be influential in defining spatial boundaries (Newson and Newson 1968, Hart 1979, Anderson and Tindall 1972, Katz 1993, Matthews 1987, 1992, 1995a, 1995b). Hart's study showed that the mean maximum distance the boys were allowed to wander away from home was twice that of the girls. He observed that girls were expected to be near at hand to help their mothers in the home and with younger children, whilst the boys went 'out into the world' as they would in later life. Newson and Newson (1968) observed similar trends in

the study of children in Nottingham. They considered that parents of older girls restricted their range through fears of molestation. In recent work Valentine (1997a) suggests that the pattern of parenting has changed. The concern about molestation or abduction has become more general, with parents fearful that their young sons as well as their young daughters are at risk.

Whilst this has increased the supervision of both sexes, Valentine (1995, 1997a, 1997b) also suggests in her later work a shift in the gendered nature of parenting. The influence of debates relating to equality of the sexes is evident in the attitudes of many parents and all children are more frequently being assessed on their apparent competencies and sense of responsibility. Integral to the aims of my research is the investigation of any gender specific attitudes of parents to their sons and daughters and the consequential impact this has on the free ranges of the children in the study. Parenting attitudes are not unaffected by their children and the debates concerning gender equality are ones which the children today have grown up with. These are not debates confined to the 'thinking classes' but ones which have permeated our culture at every level. Most young children will be aware of the issue and protest at decisions, made by their parents, which they consider are gender biased. This work considers the professed attitude of children to the issue of gender equality in relation to independent mobility, but in addition, through analysis of their discussions, determines whether these attitudes are reflected in their responses to specific situations in their day to day experiences.

Two other determinants of children's mobility mentioned by Matthews and Limb will figure strongly in my research. Residential setting and social grouping are interrelated factors which have been shown by previous studies significantly to affect children's independent mobility. Hillman et al in their 1990 study *One False Move* showed that in the younger age group (7-10), more freedom was allowed those children living in rural areas compared with those living in cities. Matthews (1992) considers the various opportunities offered to children by the environment in which they live. He cites several past studies which have considered the richness of various environments for the child (Wright 1971, Michelson and Roberts 1979, Porteous 1977, Hart 1979), which variously promote the city or rural areas. More recent work has considered the issue from the child's perspective (Beazey 1998, Hendricks, 1994, Homel and Burns 1985, Katz 1993, Jones 1999, Philo 1992, Ward 1990). The varying age groups and locations participating in these previous studies makes it difficult to isolate the influence of the residential area in the lives of the children. By locating

my research in a variety of settings around the same city, a more reliable comparison can be made of the influence of setting on the experiences of children and of the constraints they are bound by.

The nature of the residential area in which the children live is a reasonable indicator of the social group to which they belong. Children are customarily considered to be in the same social class as their parents (Parkin 1972, Westergaard and Resler 1976). Feminists have challenged the automatic classification of women's status on the basis of their partners' position in society (Millett 1970), but it is more difficult to disassociate children from the status of their parents. Children's dependency on their parents to provide shelter, food, clothing and other essentials in their early years makes their inclusion in the same class grouping automatic in most cases. In the past, some studies of children's mobility have identified different parenting cultures among different social classes (Newson and Newson 1968, Ward 1977, Karsten 1998) whilst others have considered that the parents' actions in response to the risks to their children are universal (van Vliet 1983). The different residential settings chosen for my research can also be shown to reflect social stratification and the results provide a much needed up-date to contribute to this debate.

Past work on children's use of space has concentrated on the wide diversity in the way children make use of the environment (Ward 1978, Hart 1979) and more recent studies in the United States have showed similar results (Aitkin 1994). In this country, the increasing confinement of children has been the most significant development of recent times. Hillman Adams and Whitelegg (1990) were at the forefront of those initially observing this change in work for the Policy Studies Institute. This much quoted study provides extensive information on the movements of children based on the results of questionnaires answered by children and their parents. They show a decline in children's mobility in this country compared with a similar survey conducted in 1971. The work also includes a cultural comparison with matches groups of children in West Germany, which demonstrates far greater independence among the German children than their English counterparts. The increase in motorised travel is shown to be principally responsible for the decrease in children's independence. The writers note that, paradoxically, any benefits to families gained by wider car ownership are offset by the constraint imposed on parents having to escort their children more often because of the rise in traffic danger. They express concern that the focus of many campaigns is to keep children off the streets rather than stress their rights as

road users. This is a demonstration of the way the environment has been appropriated for motor vehicles at the expense of the child.

There has also been a growth of concern among parents relating to the fear of abduction and sexual molestation, often referred to as 'stranger danger'. This has been shown to be an increasingly important factor in excluding children from the streets (Valentine 1995, Pugh 1996). Valentine's research relating to varying aspects of children's interaction with their environment has been published in a series of papers which interface with my own research. In the first paper presented at the Amsterdam Conference, '*Building Identities; Gender Perspectives on Children and Urban Space*', she first identifies the shift in parents' perceptions of risk. Traffic is no longer considered the most significant danger by many parents; a majority of those she questioned considered strangers to be the greatest threat to their children. (This research did not consider children's perception of risk, an omission which Valentine regretted.¹⁷ In her later work in this area this omission is corrected and the voices of children now contribute significantly to her findings.) Understanding how this fear of strangers has escalated in our society is fundamental to understanding the changing relationship between children, their parents and the environment. As yet, no study has been undertaken to trace the development of this particular moral panic or the dominant discourses which have contributed to its formation. An examination of these issues, the way they impact upon children and their parents and are then translated into parenting practices, will constitute a major part of this investigation.

The fourth proposition of Matthews and Limb's agenda states that children's environmental fears and sense of danger differ from those of adults. There are risks to children when they are outside their home. (There are even *greater* risks to children inside the home, an issue which will be addressed in subsequent chapters.) These risks focus in present day western society on traffic (Hillman et al 1990, Hillman 1993, Baker et al 1985, Kendrick 1993, McNeish and Roberts 1995), stranger danger (Blakely 1994, Valentine 1995, Pugh 1996), accidents (Garling and Valsiner 1984, Smith and Roberts 1991, Roberts et al 1995) and pollutant hazards (Bailey et al 1998, Cherkasova 1994, Rosenbaum 1993, Satterthwaite et al 1996). The prominence given to any one of these fears at a given time varies. It varies within whole societies and it varies within micro-cultures as incidents amplify a particular danger. Events such as the Belgian paedophile incidents in 1995 can create concern on a

¹⁷ Disclosed in personal conversation with the author, Jan 1997.

national or even international scale when they gain a high profile in the media. Some experiences, such as a child fatality in a road accident, are felt particularly within the local community and will have local impact. Those who knew the child are particularly affected. The raising of awareness of a particular danger through direct experience or indirectly through some form of communication will intensify the concern about the danger concerned, and frequently results in greater supervision of the child community.

Children are made aware through instruction, from the media and by their own experience, that hazards exist. They are frequently very proficient at repeating lessons they have been taught concerning the dangers they may face when out alone, but such reiteration of adult cautionary tales does not necessarily reflect their own life experiences. By listening to children's accounts of their interactions with their environment, talking through experiences which have worried or frightened them, it is possible to identify their real fears rather than the fears they are expected to have. Valentine (1997b) finds that children consider themselves more competent to take care of themselves than their parents allow and are therefore frustrated at the restraints placed upon them. It is possible that a child's assessment of risk will rank differently from that of their parents and also that they may identify or refer to hazards that their parents have not identified. This is an important consideration and one that has not been addressed in other literature.

The environment is designed by adults and the places assigned for children are not necessary designed to inspire a sense of safety. Matthews and Limb point out that:

On one hand, adults create the myth of stranger-danger and promulgate 'panics' about play in public spaces; on the other hand their planning responses cast children into unsupervised and segregated areas, so creating a disjunction between children's need for freedom and parents' desires for closeness and visibility.

(Matthews and Limb 1999:77)

Identifying where children feel secure and where they feel most threatened may contribute to the greater integration of children into a physical world dominated by designs dictated by the needs of adults.

Proposition five states that children's place feelings differ from those of adults. Studies which have examined children's favoured places have identified a wide variety of spaces which appeal to children and are valued by them. The sense of self and identity that derives

from 'ownership' of space within the environment plays a significant part in development. Matthews and Limb list some of the functions of differing spaces for children:

...social places, where children go to be with friends; activity places, which are favoured for sports, leisure and recreational pursuits; personal places, which are valued for a sense of ownership, belonging and identity; solitary places where children go to be alone.

(Matthews and Limb 1999 :77)

There are some forms of activity only indulged in by younger children. Play activities, particularly imaginative play, belong very much to the early years. Teenagers partake in physical activities together, they socialise, 'hang about', even indulge in acts of vandalism and other anti-social behaviour (Skelton and Valentine 1998, Matthews et al 1998), but they do not usually as a group build or devise camps, dens, forts or spaceships, nor do they do set out to dig 'tunnels to Australia' or 'underground rooms'. (The last two activities resulted in a four-foot deep trench on a piece of waste ground near my childhood home. The group never did achieve its objectives! But the trench became a focus for play activities and social interaction.) Most adults reading the quote above will immediately identify such places from their own childhood. I am concerned that many young children today do not have the freedom to negotiate their environment and locate their own special spaces. Once they are teenagers and allowed access to their surroundings they will congregate in the street or the nearest shopping mall with their friends (Lewis 1989, Massey 1998) or gather to socialise in the children's play areas (Matthews et al 1998), but they will not 'go out to play'. Those young children leading very restricted lives will lose an aspect of their childhood enjoyed by previous generations. Understanding the extent and the consequences of this loss is an integral part of my research. Attention has been drawn to these consequences within a variety of contexts, but before this thesis a multi-discipline overview has not been available.

Matthews and Limb bemoan the loss of treasured environments for children to housing or industrial development and point out that such processes are undertaken with little regard to the impact on the local children. They argue that children denied such space lose the opportunity to explore, learn and acquire competence outdoors. They are deprived of close contact with the natural world which has been shown to be particularly significant for children (Simmons 1994). These are undeniably important issues, but they are only relevant if the child is allowed the freedom to negotiate the environment independently; if they are

given the opportunity to indulge in these explorations. Children today are, for whatever reason, being increasingly confined to their homes. The loss of access to the interesting and exciting places is, sadly, of no consequence to the child, if the adult appropriation of the environment increasingly excludes children from independent exploration or confines them to purpose-built controlled locations with supervised activities.

Children's rights have become a significant issue in this decade (Franklin 1995, John 1996a, 1996b, Wringe 1996, Hogan 1996), and the final two propositions in Matthews and Limb's thesis relate to the child's position in relation to decision making and democratic responsibilities. Since the needs and preferences of children have been of little consequence in the design of lived environment, it is manifest that they have played little part in the shaping of the environment. Their exclusion has been the norm, even in the design of areas specifically intended for their use, such as schools and play areas (Hogan 1996). This exclusion has been based on various assumptions (Lansdown 1995). Children have been considered incompetent to participate in decision making even concerning events which directly affect them such as surgery or custody battles (Alderson and Goodwin 1993, Harrison 1996). The assumption has been that parents or experts are more able to make correct decisions on behalf of the child who will not have 'sufficient understanding and intelligence to understand what is proposed' (Gillick Judgement 1985: 423).¹⁸ The incompetent child is also considered lacking in 'sufficient discretion to enable him or her to make a wise choice in his or her own interests' (Gillick Judgement 1985: 423). Lansdown also considers that children are excluded from decision making because it is thought likely to be disruptive to the institution of the family and that it might effectively infringe the rights of a child to be free from responsibilities. In this country, the Children's Act 1989 attempted to strike a balance between the rights of the state, the responsibilities of the parents and the rights of the child. It includes sections aimed at granting the child the right to a degree of autonomy including the freedom to 'choose his or her own lifestyle...uncontrolled by the authority of the adult world, whether parents or institutions,' but *only* if deemed competent under the Gillick criteria mentioned above (Lyon and Parton 1995). That the rights of children should be defined within legislation would seem a significant step forward and might be considered to

¹⁸ The 'Gillick Judgement', set out by Wolf 1985 and endorsed by Scarman, stated that "a child under 16 can give a true consent depending on her maturity and understanding and the nature of the consent required". It was in response to a case concerning the prescribing of contraceptives to children under the age of 16.

foreshadow a more widespread recognition of their right to participate more in all aspects of life which impact on their everyday existence, including the planning of the environment. Unfortunately commentators on the implementation of the Act have been disappointed at its lack of significant progress towards achieving a greater voice for children in their own affairs (Franklin 1995, Lyon and Parton 1995). Lyon and Parton conclude that the new act:

.. rather than constituting children and young persons as subjects, has provided a new set of strategies and mechanisms for using the voices of children as elements in the newly constituted government of families.
(Lyon and Parton 1995: 53)

If the Act is interpreted in a way that makes little gain for the child then the likelihood of progress in other fields may also be in doubt.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) has also been seen as a progressive step, supported as it is by almost all the nations of the world. It states that children should be consulted, heard, listened to and taken seriously, in accordance with their age (Article 12) - similar provisions to those of the British Children's Act. The problematic implementation of this Act must serve as a warning to those with high expectations of the Convention. It is one thing to ratify a Convention, it is another to implement its articles to the satisfaction of all parties.

The other article in the Convention of particular relevance to this discussion is No. 31, which states that a child has a right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child, and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts. In some societies economic necessity drives children to employment at very young ages, in others the benefits of play may not be recognised. Initiatives to improve the lot of such children must be the priority but western society cannot assume that its own children's lifestyles are unproblematic. It is a popular assumption that because schooling is compulsory, then children will not be burdened with other responsibilities in our society. This is not necessarily true and some children have been found to be working long hours outside school time whilst others have had to shoulder adult responsibilities as carers of sick parents or siblings (Katz, 1986, 1996, Valentine 1996a, Robson 2000, Robson and Ansell 2000). In addition, as has already been shown, there is growing concern about the quality of play experiences of children today. The importance of freedom of mobility to a child's development has not been reviewed in a multi-discipline context. By drawing together the

recent work of a variety of writers in child related areas, I have been able to demonstrate in my research the widespread nature of the concern. On the basis of the quantitative and qualitative research I have undertaken, I am able to offer some suggestions to improve the environmental experiences of children in the future.

In their conclusion Matthews and Limb stress that they consider their agenda only a partial one. They have raised important issues concerning the recognition of different childhoods, the lack of public space provision for children and the loss of spaces important to the child. The writers demonstrate that children's lack of influence in the processes of decision-making and management of the environment results in their needs being neglected or misinterpreted. I have argued that the complexity of children's lives make it impossible to describe them without reference to the type of society in which they live, their position within that society and the cultural values which surround them. In my discussion of their propositions I have drawn attention to issues where these considerations are too important to disregard. The danger of an over deconstructing of childhood, the neglect of younger children excluded from the environment altogether, and assumptions made by deterministic models, all concern me. Despite these reservations, Matthews and Limb have put forward seven propositions which provide excellent prompts for discussion of the issues surrounding research into the geography of children. It is now up to those working in the field to continue the lead taken by these writers and further the debates, in order to clarify further the most important and valid directions of inquiry.

Chapter Two

Methodology and the Process of Research

Introduction

This chapter explores the debates surrounding contemporary fieldwork, with particular consideration of the positionality of the researcher in relation to those researched. It considers the specific challenge of representing the lives of children and the ethical issues involved in working with young people. Explanations are given as to why particular methods used in the research were selected, with details of practical aspects of the research such as: selection of locations, gaining access to the children and parents, and ensuring parental approval. The actual research process is then described, including a pilot study which was devised to aid the planning of the research structure. Problems that were encountered in the field are described and the solutions that were evolved to deal with them.

The emergence of cultural geography, with its emphasis on the recognition of difference, has brought with it new epistemological notions. It has questioned the validity of past truths, and sought recognition for alternative ways of knowing. Past failure to acknowledge the power dynamics involved in the relationship between the researcher and the researched has been criticised. Notions of objectivity have been challenged and subjective experience validated as an alternative way of knowing (Harding 1987, Rose, 1993, Women and Geography Study Group 1997, Laurie et al 1999).

It has been the traditional orthodox practice to separate object and subject, thus requiring detachment during the research process and subsequent writing. Objectivity has been considered all important. Feminists have challenged this orderly and rational view of the world, showing that, in fact, the world is irrational and full of complexities and contradictions (Madge et al 1997, Laurie et al 1999). Whilst recognition of this complexity does not *preclude* the use of any specific method of research, it demands reflexivity in the structuring, practice and analysis of any research project.

The initial question that presents itself in the context of this research is "Should one be attempting the research at all?" One line of feminist thinking suggests that only insiders are able to relate with any excluded group sufficiently to reflect accurately that group's way of seeing the world (England 1994, Staeheli and Lawson 1994). It follows that woman must always conduct research into women's lives, but what if the woman is white and the participants black? What if a black European woman is researching the lives of black African women? Can a black Kenyan woman really appreciate the experiences of black South African women? There is always space between those conducting research and those participating, there is always some negotiation of difference. As Nast points out '*we can never not work with 'others' who are different from ourselves; difference is an essential aspect of social interactions in between or negotiating the worlds of me and not me*' (Nast 1994).

In some ways the issue is less problematic with research relating to children. Children have yet to acquire the skills and knowledge that would enable them to consider in any depth their position within society. They are not equipped to frame research questions, conduct field research and analyse findings *at a level that would satisfy the academy*. Whilst they can contribute in many ways, they cannot conduct all the stages of the research processes unaided. Within the present academic hegemony, it is necessary for an adult 'outsider' to be involved for the work to be valued. It is therefore up to 'others' to involve children as much as possible in a sympathetic representation of their lives

Challenges to past practice have not led to a clearly defined path which all cultural researchers feel obligated to follow, for debates continue around all the issues, not only within this field, but also within the wider academy. What is essential is that researchers who position their work in the context of the feminist approach must demonstrate reflexivity on their methods. In the words of England '*Reflexivity is the self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as researcher*' (England 1994:82). As my own research practice is explained in this chapter, I will indicate my reflections on the process in the context of the epistemological issues and ethical concerns relevant to the research.

Selection of Methods of Research

In order to understand the experiences of children within their environment I considered necessary to have an overview of their patterns of behaviour. This would identify any obvious patterns of difference and similarity in their mobility which could be further explored. The exploration of difference would be related to the identification and understanding of the children's fears about their environment. One important aim of the research was to understand how these fears were constructed.

The different nature of these questions suggested the need for more than one method of enquiry to be utilised to achieve the objectives. The first task, to establish an overview of childrens' activities in different lived environments, required a relatively large sample of participants and leading to some form of quantitative survey. My aim was far from the positivist ideal of creating a model whereby behaviour could be predicted (Comte, reprint 1986, Durkheim 1938) for the search for social facts using objective numerical data has been shown to be flawed (Douglas 1967, Atkinson 1978, McLafferty 1995). It was my intention, as Mattingley and Falconer-Al-Hindi suggest, to '*limit one's conclusions rather than make(ing) grand claims about their universal applicability*' (Mattingley and Falconer-Al-Hindi 1995:428). The intention of this research was to look for differences and similarities in the patterns of behaviour within the different environments I was studying: to establish, for example, if most of the boys demonstrated a higher degree of mobility than the girls or if there were identifiable differences in the behaviour of the children in the different lived environments and different social backgrounds.

The other aims of the project required a greater interaction with children and parents, and would be best achieved by a qualitative form of research such as interviews or group discussions. To use quantitative and qualitative research in a single research design brings together two forms which have their roots in very different research traditions (Bryman 1988, Pawson 1989). But, as Wolff et al (1994) state:

There is nothing inherent in the methods themselves that forbids their combination. In fact the particular strengths and limitations inherent in the different methods might suit them ideally to complement one another in a unified research design.

(Wolff et al 1994:199)

For the purpose of my research project the two objectives, identifying patterns of difference and similarity and seeking the meanings and explanations behind the patterns, could only be addressed by using complementary methods

Selection of Sample and Accessing the Participants

It was important that the children who took part in the study were willing participants and were interested in what I was doing. A significant number of children in different lived environments were required to participate and the most practical way to gain access to those children was through schools. I was concerned that if I gained access to schools the children would be denied the right *not* to participate, but an exploration of alternatives proved fruitless. Most activities outside the schools involved the children in active participation and were not easily interrupted, and the Guide and Scout movements were not well represented in all areas I wished to study. I therefore decided the only practical option was to make use of schools. My previous involvement in education in the Nottingham area made me confident that I could gain the support of local headteachers and negotiate access by exploiting my knowledge of local gatekeepers. The schools were selected either as a result of my own contacts or through representatives of the Education Authorities who suggested headteachers they considered would be sympathetic to the project. This proved satisfactory as the co-operation of the headteacher was of such vital import during the research process and the profiles of the schools involved were consistent with my research aims.

The research was aimed at children in their final years of primary education - Years 5 and 6 in current education notation. These children would be aged between 9 and 11, depending when their birth dates fell within the academic year. Between 50 and 60 children in each lived environment would provide a reasonable sample for analysis. Most primary schools have between 300-350 on the roll. Questioning all the children in the age group, in each school, would provide suitable numbers and would give a clear insight into the behaviour of the group. I was aware that the setting might influence the responses of those who took part in the research, and this issue will be addressed later in the chapter. However, practical issues such as the time available for research, potential cost and, most importantly in this instance, access to children and parents prepared to participate in the research have to be taken into account in any research process.

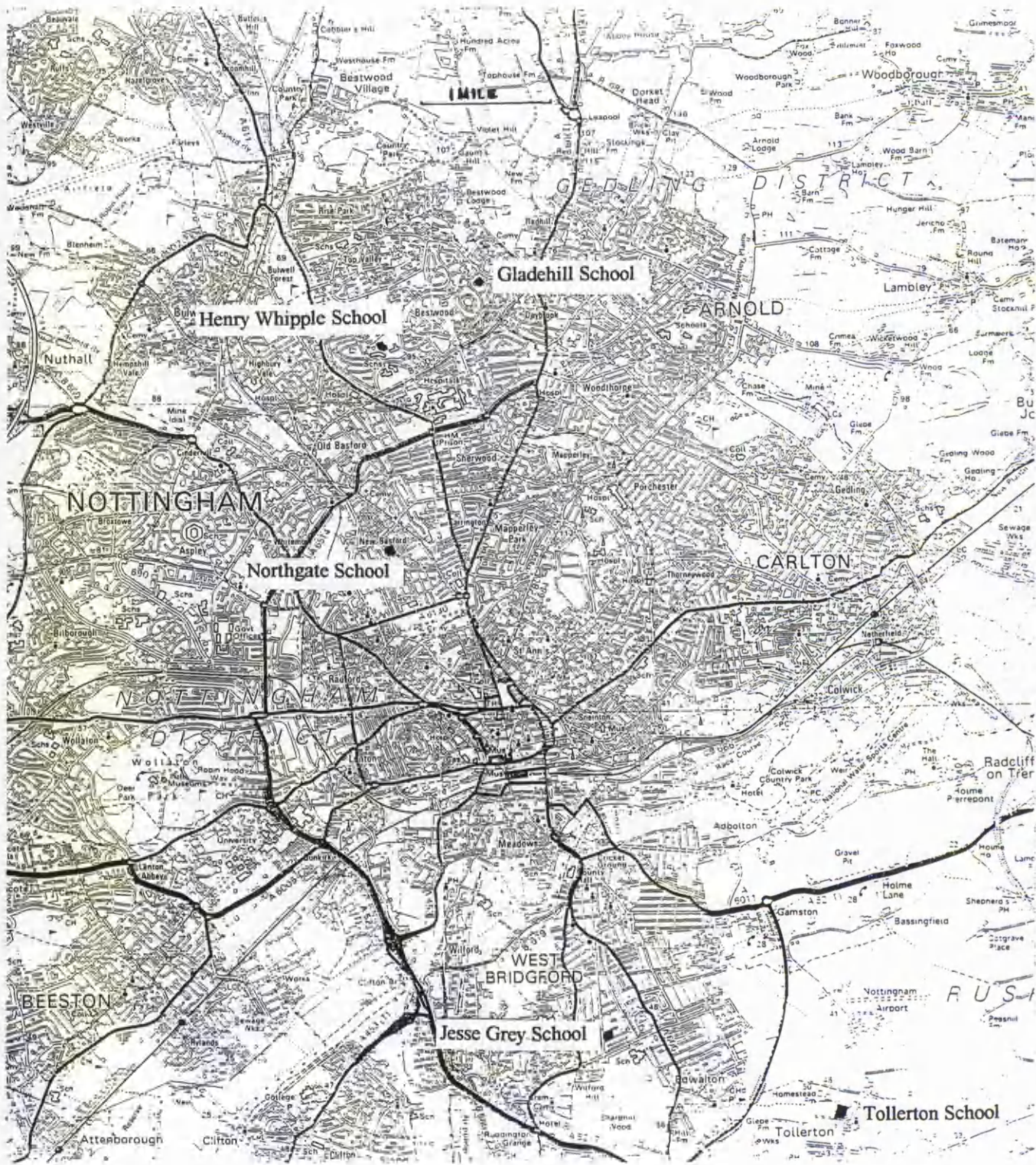
A primary aim of the research was to compare children's independent mobility in a variety of lived environments, and so the initial selection was directed by the three divisions of rural, suburban and urban, within which different socio-economic groups were represented where appropriate. All locations were to be in the Greater Nottingham area (see Map1). The school selected in the rural location was required to be near Nottingham so that access to the city was readily available to its inhabitants. Such a village would be an environmentally attractive location in which to live and demand for the housing would ensure that the cost confined the inhabitants to the middle class bracket. The village school selected was in Tollerton, a predominately post-war village development off the A606, five miles from the centre of Nottingham.

The choice of a school located in the suburbs of Nottingham highlighted differences in the areas surrounding the city. Much of areas such as West Bridgford, Beeston and Arnold consist of well-maintained owner-occupied housing, in 'leafy suburbs', built any time from the start of the century to the present day. Other areas are made up of municipal built estates, built mainly between 1919 and 1970. To choose one school as representative of the environment that these different type of housing represented would have been inappropriate, and so initially two were selected, Jesse Grey Primary School in the owner occupied area of West Bridgford and Gladehill Primary in Bestwood, an area of municipal housing to the north of the city. Gladehill had been suggested to me as a appropriate location by a contact in the teaching profession, but on my first visit there I realised its location was not as I had been led to believe. The school is situated on the edge of the Bestwood estate and much of the housing had passed from municipal hands. In addition an infill estate of small private houses was also within the catchment of the school. This represented an interesting additional type of environment, so I made the decision to include it in the study, and labelled the area 'transitional'. I located another school which more closely fitted the original profile. On the advice of the headteacher of Gladehill, I selected the nearby Henry Whipple Primary School, a school situated among council tenanted houses.

The final school in the study was Northgate Primary in New Basford. The area was 'new' in the late nineteenth century and the housing is terraced and privately rented. It is close to old gas storage tanks and bordered on one side by Victorian industrial development and with an ethnically mixed population.¹

¹ All headteachers were happy to allow their school's name to be included in the research.

Map 1: Location of Schools in Study
Source: Q.S.Landranger 129
(reduced).



Map 1: Location of Schools in Study
Source: O.S.Landranger 129
(reduced).

The five schools not only provided a cross section of lived environments but also reflected social divisions. Tollerton and Jesse Grey would be considered middle class schools and Henry Whipple and Northgate, working class. A wide variety of observations² suggested that Gladehill fell somewhat between the two - the affluent workers of Goldthorpe et al's (1968) Luton perhaps.³ Cross-tabulations based on these distinctions would add a further dimension to the analysis of the results of the questionnaire.

Before approaching the schools I made contact with the relevant education authorities to seek the support of the local directors of education. A week before the date fixed for the research to take place, I visited each school to meet the staff concerned and hand over letters for the parents of each child involved (see Appendix 1). The letter explained the nature of my research and included my home phone number for any parent to contact me who had queries about the study or did not wish their child to participate. The letter also asked for names of parents who would be willing to come into school to participate in a discussion group about children's safety in the environment. My concern with children's rights was not wholly comfortable with the idea that I had to seek parental permission. I felt it had parallels with a husband being asked by a researcher for permission to speak with his wife. However, as the previous chapter showed, parental rights over their child are all-powerful, and it was necessary to accommodate them.

² Examples of these include: house ownership and improvements, number of free school meals, headteachers and staff's observations on the catchment area.

³ The schools were initially selected based on intuitive knowledge of the area and practical issues of access. However, supporting statistical data provided confirmation of the socio-economic profile of the neighbourhoods. The 1991 Census 10% sample for Nottinghamshire county electoral districts showed that in the Tollerton and Melton (Jesse Grey catchment) wards over 50% of employed men and women were either professional (category 1) or managerial/technical (category 11). In Radford (Northgate catchment) and Bestwood Park (Gladehill and Henry Whipple catchment) the figures were under 20% for the same categories. (National Census 1991, Nottinghamshire 10% Sample by Electoral Area). Unemployment figures for September 1998 were 1.6% for Tollerton, 2.9 for Melton, 8.4 for Bestwood Park and 19.5% for Radford (Nottinghamshire County Council, Policy and Resources Bulletin September 1998). These two sets of figures demonstrate the difficulty in relying on statistics for the selection of research sites. The two schools in the Bestwood area are represented as having a catchment of similar mix whereas from actual experience of the schools, and the head teachers assessments, this was not the case. One particular set of statistics was located which demonstrated this.

The County Disadvantaged Area Study (1994) ranked the county electoral districts and the city council wards based on twenty percentage measures of deprivation. These included measures of income - such as car ownership, free school meals and unemployment - alongside housing, health, family and educational difficulties and lack of skills. Tollerton and Melton both scored zero. Gladehill School is situated in the Bestwood Park East Ward, and was considered moderately deprived, scoring 8.59. Henry Whipple School is in the Bestwood Estate Ward and considered an area of high deprivation, scoring 24.53. This indicates the significant difference between these two neighbouring schools and supports the decision to make a distinction between them. The Radford Ward was also considered one of the extremely deprived areas in the county, scoring 30.7 and ranking second worst in the county. (Social Need in Nottingham, County Disadvantaged Area Study, 1994).

In each school approximately 60 letters were sent out. No parent contacted me to ask questions or to withdraw their child from the study. Since I did not wish any child to resent participating in the research or to feel coerced into taking part, I was careful to offer the children the opportunity to withdraw. Children's rights of choice can be easily overlooked as they are so often under the control of others, such as parents or teachers (Alderson 1995, Holmes 1998). I ensured as far as possible that all those involved in this research were happy to do so and that they understood the nature of the research. I also emphasised that their confidentiality would be totally respected. Alderson in her pamphlet *Listening to Children* (1995) provides a comprehensive summary of topics to be considered when conducting any form of research with children: purpose of the research, cost and hoped for benefits, privacy and confidentiality, selection, inclusion and exclusion, funding, information for children, parents etc., consent, dissemination and impact on children. For the survey all the class were chosen to be included. The selection of three boys and three girls from each class to participate in the focus group was left to the class teacher. The nature of the discussion was explained to the class together with the fact it would be taped. There was no shortage of volunteers. I was alert to any possible impact on the children due to their participation in the research. Whilst my research did not include any questions which might normally be considered sensitive, I was aware that my adult perception might be insensitive to issues important to children. In the event, no problems were observed or reported as a result of the children's participation, so I was satisfied that I done my best to my conform with the standards suggested and be alert to any potential difficulties arising as a result of the research.

Out of the 300 letters, I received 14 responses from parents interested in participating in discussions. This number was not adequate to assemble reasonable sized focus groups in each school and alternative strategies had to be adopted. In one school I asked the participants in an aerobic class if they would talk to me after the end of their session. In another school I attended a class assembly conducted by one of the classes and asked watching parents if they would participate. Parents evenings/afternoons provided opportunities in two other schools - in one I was able to be there, at another the head teacher kindly persuaded parents to support me. I managed to hold worthwhile discussions in all the schools, the group size ranging from 3 to 7. Although 3 might be considered a rather small number, Longhurst (1996) points out that small groups do have advantages in that the participants feel more relaxed and the moderator can assume a more inclusive role. The discussions in all the groups produced a quantity of interesting material.

Designing the Questionnaire Survey and Conducting the Questionnaire

Surveys have been criticised as being incapable of producing any information worth having (Deutscher 1977, Marsh 1988, Bryman 1988, Pratt 1993). Criticisms have included: variations in interpretation of questions by respondents, preconceptions and assumptions made by those designing the questions, limited validity of responses, inflexibility, and interpretation of data (Haralambos and Holborn 1991, McLafferty 1995). There are situations, however, where most researchers would accept that the use of the survey is necessary (Veal 1992, Mattingly and Falconer-Al-Hindi 1995) and I considered this was one.

The length of the questionnaire was a balance between the desire for information, the attention span of children in the age group and the time available in the classrooms. Fontana (1988) considered a rough rule for a class to sit and listen to a teacher to be a minute to a minute and a half for each year of the child's age. This would be 10-15 minutes for a class of ten-year-old children. Child said this time could be extended if the children were participating in the activity since '*variable or changing stimulus demands our attention*' (Child 1973:45). Eighteen questions were devised, which, I estimated, would take about 25 minutes to administer to each class. This estimate was based on my previous experience conducting questionnaires with similar aged children (Pugh 1996).

Developing clear unambiguous, useful questions requires considerable attention (de Vaus 1991) and when the respondents are children it is important to use language they will understand. The questions were not complex, but to ensure they would be understood they were tested on two younger children (aged 6 and 8) who had no problem with them. Previous experience suggested children found multiple choice format easiest to complete, so most were framed in this way. The three open questions included could, if necessary, be answered by a single word response: e.g. 'Can you name anywhere near your home where you think it is safe to play?' (See sample questionnaire, Appendix 2).

The survey undertaken for this research dealt in simple pieces of behaviour: how the children got to school, did they go to the local shop alone or the local swimming pool, did they go on buses? The choice of questions in a survey is always a subjective act on the part of the researcher (McLafferty 1995). I was obviously making assumptions concerning the

most likely journeys children might make, and the method of making those journeys, but these were based on my experience with children over many years in many settings. I chose journeys which would give an understanding of the permitted mobility of different groups. Other questions were selected to give an insight into the degree of autonomy the children felt they enjoyed with respect to their mobility. The questionnaire would allow estimations to be made as to the extent of children's containment which could be considered with reference to similar past studies. Any major changes in children's mobility would thus be identified.⁴ Questionnaires can provide useful information, for as McLafferty says, it is possible to know through numbers as well as through words (McLafferty 1995). I was confident this survey would enable me to 'know' more of the lives of the children I was working with.

The open-ended questions asked the children to name places they thought safe or unsafe for play. The responses to these questions could be one word if the child lacked literary confidence. These questions were included principally to aid the focus groups which followed. I was able to identify some of the places named and subsequently make reference to them in the discussions.

In all cases I presented the questionnaire to the children myself and this enabled me to read each question through with the children before they answered it, which helped children with reading difficulties. I was also able to check that the children had all understood what was required and was able to answer any queries. Some of the questions were made clearer to the class by the use of examples. For instance, when asking if they required parental permission to go on short journeys, I used my own children to demonstrate that my 17 year own son would just tell me he was going whilst his younger sister would seek permission.

The simplicity of the format and the method of presentation to the children ensured as far as possible that they could respond with ease. The school/classroom location placed the children in a situation where they were used to responding to questions and often took part in exercises where their aim was to produce the 'right' answer. This was likely to encourage the children to respond more accurately than if the survey had been conducted in a more informal setting, where it might be taken less seriously, and in this aspect of the research I

⁴ I had used a similar questionnaire in two of the schools three years previously which would allow a more direct comparison (Pugh 1997).

felt worked to my advantage. The children in all the schools I visited were interested and eager participants in the survey. This may have been because it was a break in their usual school routine, but it meant that most of them immersed themselves in the exercise. Those that did not I shall speak of later.

I introduced myself and the project to the children and by standing at the front and talking to them en masse I felt I immediately placed myself in similar role to that of a teacher. Asking the group to perform an written exercise for me was, again, the action of a teacher. The relationship between myself and the children was therefore effectively pre-defined by the role. For this aspect of the research there was no alternative and in the context of the requirements of the exercise I did not feel it was too problematic. Providing they saw me as a 'nice' teacher rather than a 'nasty' one I was sure they would complete the task in a satisfactory manner, the role of teacher being one that the children were familiar with and part of their everyday lives (Graue and Walsh 1998, Holmes 1998). My past experience with children enabled me, I felt, to approach them in a relaxed and amiable manner. As I shall explain later, my role actually presented more of a problem in relation to one of the class teachers.

I introduced the questionnaire to the class explaining: its purpose, the need for accuracy, that there were no 'right' or 'wrong' answers, and that it was totally confidential. I explained that as my research was related to their activities it was their answers that were most important. Their reactions to this indicated they felt empowered by the process. Children are rarely asked to participate in activities which demonstrably value their opinions. Practical issues in the questionnaire were addressed such as what was meant by 'friend': e.g. someone near their own age, and how several answers could be given for each question: e.g. if they sometimes walked, sometimes cycled to school, they should include both responses. I explained that we would go through the questions one at a time and they could ask me about any points they did not understand. I asked them not to rush ahead even if they felt they understood all the questions, as it was possible they might make mistakes.

In some classes the form teacher left the room, in others they stayed behind either to help some of the less able children (several of the classes included children with special needs) or because they felt the children might misbehave. Eight of the ten classes were no problem, but the children of the inner city school, Northgate, were very excitable and noisy. The first Northgate class took about ten minutes longer to complete the questionnaire because they

insisted on chattering. I was not in a position to do much more than ask them to be quiet when I wanted to speak and I had to rely on the teacher to intervene when they did not respond. The situation was more difficult in the second class. The teacher in this class had just returned to the school after a period of ill health due to stress. His relationship with the class was problematic; in fact the head teacher was called to intervene later in the afternoon. Working through the questionnaire with the children in this instance proved quite a difficult exercise. I found myself assuming, even more acutely, the role of teacher in order to complete the task. This brought home to me the ambivalence of my situation in the classroom. I felt the children were perceiving me as a teacher but to the member of staff, however, I was a visitor on his territory, with no authority and exposing his lack of proficiency. This made me aware of the sensitivity of one's role as researcher, not just in relation to those participating in the research, which is widely addressed, but also to others indirectly involved in the process. I do not consider that these issues had a significant effect on the way the children completed the questionnaires. I checked them afterwards to see if I could detect any flippancy in the responses as a result of the atmosphere in which the questionnaire was completed and could find none. The results were similar to those of the other class in the school.

The only real difficulty I encountered with the questionnaire work was a drop in the expected number of respondents in the village school. This was due to three factors. Firstly, in order to even out class numbers some children from Year 4 were included in one of the classes and, as they were not yet 9, I felt it inappropriate to include them in the study. Secondly one or two children travelled from the suburban area to attend the school and therefore also had to be excluded. Finally, the school was hit by an influenza bug the week I was working there so absenteeism was particularly high. To compensate for this I arranged to visit another village school lying a similar distance from Nottingham and one class of mixed Year 5 and 6 children completed the questionnaire for me.

I was satisfied that conducting a questionnaire with children in this manner was an effective form of research. The only concern I have is that there might be a tendency for the respondents to copy answers from each other in order to 'conform', but from watching the classes I think this behaviour was minimal. Children enjoy being consulted - it is a rare occurrence for them so in many ways they are better and more eager participants than adults.

Planning the Focus Group Research

The use of focus groups with children within the discipline of geography is an innovative method of research and little has been written on the topic. It has great potential as a way of helping to understand children's realities, and so this next section will give a detailed account of the process by which I selected the method, conducted preliminary trials and conducted the research.

Deciding how to investigate explanations and meanings required a careful consideration of the possible alternatives. The forms of qualitative research considered were: interviews (either one-to-one or group), focus or discussion groups, or observation. Observation was very speedily eliminated from the possibilities. Observing children's activities would not explain their actions or allow insights into their parents' thinking concerning the restrictions and boundaries they imposed on their children. Participant observation presented difficulties (Fine and Sandstrom 1988). This research technique has been most effective when the space between the researcher and the researched has been reduced or even, in the eyes of those researched, eliminated (see Patrick's work in Glasgow 1973). However it would be impossible, as a mature adult, to integrate with 9-11 year olds, and to 'hang round' with children in the streets or parks would be likely to arouse suspicion and possibly even prove dangerous. The ethical considerations involved in this type of research, such as the lack of respect it therefore affords the participants, particularly if the research is covert, also led me to reject it. However, throughout the research I was aware of the children and parents in the school setting and around the local area; and occasional observations in the thesis result from these informal observations.

The choice then lay between interviews and focus group discussion. Interviewing children individually would allow in-depth exploration of their attitudes and opinions. The interviewees would not be dominated by vociferous individuals or influenced by the views of other members of the group which Stewart and Shamdasani (1990 :19) suggest can happen in a group discussion They would be free to comment without fear of what others (interviewer apart) might think. It is possible that sensitive issues are more likely to be disclosed in a one-to-one setting. Set against this, the relationship of interviewer to interviewee is more significant in a one to one situation and when the interviewees are

children the dominant positioning of the interviewer is unavoidable. I was hopeful that for this qualitative section of the research I would be able to establish a relationship of a different nature with the children from the 'teacher' role I had to take for the questionnaire. Feminist writers have been concerned to explore the relationship between researcher and subject. The metaphor of 'betweenness' has been used by many to identify the meeting space between worlds within which we can situate our research (England 1994, Staeheli and Lawson 1994, Katz 1994, Nast 1994). When talking to the children it was my hope that by taking the role of 'least adult' (Mandell 1988) in which I exerted no authority over the children and approached in the role of 'adult friend' (Fine and Sandstrom 1988), the space between us would be less pre-defined.

I considered that in a one-to-one situation my 'adulthood' would be difficult to diminish in the short time available for each session. I was therefore likely to be given the responses that the children thought I expected or that they thought were acceptable or appropriate (Basch 1987). On a practical level individual interviewing would be time consuming and therefore the number of children involved in the research would have to be small.

Focus group research on the other hand would enable the views of a larger number to be explored. Based on what Morgan (1988 :54) called a 'human tendency' to discuss issues and ideas in groups, focus groups have become an ever more popular tool of research and in recent years geographers have made use of the technique (Goss 1996, Holbrook 1996, Burgess 1996, Zeigler 1996, Davies 1997). The dynamic verbal web of group discussion offers the advantage of the 'snowballing' of ideas, as an idea from one participant triggers a train of response from the others, and this synergy is thought to produce more than the cumulative responses of individuals (Stewart and Shamdasani 1990). Whilst the moderator of a focus group has an input to the proceedings, their role should not be dominant (Tynan and Drayton 1988). This is very empowering for children. Discussion in a group situation enables them to gain confidence from their peers and their shared experience creates a solidarity which can shift the balance of power away from the adult moderator. As a group the children can more effectively take control of the space between us, and therefore feel confident to explain their worlds, on their own terms. In a situation where they are not expected to answer every question, when they do contribute, it would be because there was something they wanted to say.

Central to the research was the desire to listen to the children's voices, and I considered the focus group would be the more 'child friendly' way of doing this and would therefore yield more interesting information. However, I felt this view required support from other academic research before I opted to use it and I also felt in need of practical guidance. It was here that I encountered problems. Fern writing in 1982 commented that '*focus groups have received little empirical study in the marketing literature and virtually no study in the literature of any other discipline*' (Fern 1982: 34). Most practical guidance for the social scientist contemplating focus group research derives therefore from the work of those involved with the commercial application of the method and even this is '*based on the common sense and preferred practices of a few researchers which have been reified into rules of thumb or myths*' (Goss 1996 :21). Many of the theoretical assumptions about size, gender, social status and life experience and personality of the moderator discussion have recently been challenged (Goss and Leinbach 1996, Longhurst 1996, Holbrook 1996). This fresh approach supported my own belief that many of the traditional practices and theoretical assumptions are inappropriate when the participants in the group are children.

References to children in focus group texts are extremely limited. Stewart and Shamdasani (1990:19) claim that '*children are outstanding participants in focus groups, but they pose special problems*'. Unfortunately the only problem they consider worthy of much attention is the sex of the moderator. Even those researchers who have made use of the method with children do not consider their methodology in detail (Boyle et al. 1989, Hoppe et al. 1995). Stevens, for example, used focus groups to discuss politics with young children - but the numbers in her groups depended on how many responded to her invitation to attend and were of variable time lengths (Stevens 1982). Such flexibility may be expedient but it is little help in providing guidelines to those contemplating the use of the method nor does her work discuss advantages and disadvantages of the approach. Stevens demonstrated that children have strongly held views on a wide range of subjects, but they are rarely asked to voice them. They are just as willing as adults to contribute to discussions concerning topics they can relate to, providing the arrangements are unthreatening and tailored to their needs. Krueger offers some useful comments on conducting youth focus groups. He suggests normal procedures must be amended when working with young people and that the size of group, length of session, venue and moderator should all be reassessed (Kreugar 1994). This confirmed my concerns over the appropriate procedures to use with children, and so, faced with a lack of information, I decided to conduct a pilot study. This would enable me to assess the feasibility of using the method in my research. I would be able to, evaluate how

children felt about taking part, reflect on the position of the moderator within the group, and, at the same time, assess any constraints imposed by the school environment. The study could also be used to identify the size of group, setting, and length of session most appropriate to use with this age group of children. It would also allow me to gain valuable experience of acting as a focus group moderator.

Focus Group Trial

The trial took place in Edwalton Primary School. This school was not one selected for the main research project. Groups, of mixed gender, were chosen by the teachers from children of years 5 and 6 who volunteered to take part. Nine focus groups were held in sets of three. In the first set, the group size was varied, in the next the location and in the final set the length of session. The experience of each set determined the constants for the next: for example, as a result of Set One, the size of group which worked best was determined and used for the rest of the study.

The trial identified those options in which the children felt most confident and expressed most enthusiasm at the end of the session. Where possible I have demonstrated this with examples and evidence from the transcripts. My preconceptions concerning the most effective way to conduct focus groups with children were in part confirmed, although several factors emerged that I had not considered. Some aspects about which I had no preconceived opinion were clarified as a result of the children's comments.

The children were enthusiastic participants in the research and said they had enjoyed the discussion. All those who took part were willing to express their views, some more volubly than others, but even the quieter children talked confidently when given the opportunity. When the alternative of one-to-one interviews was discussed at the end of the session a large majority said they would rather be in a group. One child said *'Well I suppose you could say more, but it's more fun when there are more of you'*.

The first issue considered was that of group size. Many texts indicate the preferred adult group size is 8-12: any less is thought not to generate interesting discussion, any more may prove difficult for the moderator to control (Folch-Lyon and Trost 1981, Krueger 1994). Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) suggest that in a group of less than eight adults the power and status of particular individuals can lead to one or two members dominating the rest. This can become an issue likely to inhibit discussion. However, since children have different

skills and experience in conversation, I was concerned that these guidelines might be inappropriate. Research had shown for schoolwork groups 4-8 is the preferred size (Barnes and Todd 1977, Kerry and Sands 1982) so groups of this size would provide a more familiar milieu for the children. The issues of power and status are not as determining for children provided they are of similar ages, so the dominance of a smaller group by one or two may not be such a problem. Hoppe et al. (1995) preferred to use small groups in their discussion of sensitive topics with children and found one or two orally confident children encouraged rather than inhibited the rest.

The first set of trials, therefore, increased the number of children in the group whilst keeping all other variables as constant as possible. I found that size was of more significance in the way that the group related to me, as moderator, than in any problems of interaction between the children. The smallest group of four children was the least comfortable. The focus on each individual was more intense and there was only a little laughter and limited discussion between the children. The balance of power definitely favoured the moderator with this particular group. It is possible a more forceful foursome might have been more comfortable with the situation, but the session suggested the advisability of using larger group numbers in order to allow a stronger group dynamic to develop.

The largest group of eight children demonstrated the other side of this balancing act. Too many in a group allows the focus of attention to be shifted from the issues with which the moderator is addressing and fragmentation of the group can take place. The size of the group empowered the children and they felt less pressure to conform to the group activity. For example, Kerry and Hannah, who lived close to each other, were describing where they were allowed to play. Four members of the group were listening, but Stephen and John started a separate, quite noisy, conversation about a football match they had been involved in. Interrupting the flow of conversation twice to ask them to wait their turn to speak caused momentary awkwardness among the rest of the group and forced me into a role I had not wished to take. It demonstrated that, with children, even a slight shift towards an authoritarian role can shift the boundaries of the meeting space - and this is probably true in other research relationships too.

The group containing six children was the most successful, and I concluded that for this age group this number would most often achieve the right balance between children and moderator. Each child had had plenty of opportunities to speak and they had all been very

involved in the discussion. It had been a very enjoyable experience for all of us, and I felt the children were most relaxed. Although the sample was a small one, I felt it sufficient to act as a guide in my subsequent research.

The nature and ambience of the venue was another variable which deserved consideration. It is recommended that adults meet in as informal setting as possible in order to put the participants at their ease. However, surroundings that are considered informal from an adult perspective may be intimidating for children, perhaps less used to adapting to new spaces. I was conducting the research in schools and was alert to '*what the physical structure connotes*' (Kreuger 1994:69). School cultures reflect society's values but also maintain their own distinct culture and character (Holmes 1998). Roles within a school are prescribed by the traditional relationships between teachers and children, from which it might prove extremely difficult to break free. The space within a school would all be characterised in specific ways, unique to each establishment. My familiarity with the trial school made it possible to arrange 'formal' and 'informal' locations within the school environment. In the formal location the children were seated round a table either in the headteacher's study or the staff room. In the school where the research took place the children had very free access to these rooms and often used them as quiet study areas, so the surroundings were not as intimidating as they might have been elsewhere. The informal setting was dependent on the weather. If fine, the discussion was held on the school field; if inclement, on the floor on cushions in the 'quiet area' of the classroom, while the rest of the class were elsewhere.

The children participated with enthusiasm in both locations but the informal setting did generate more questions before and after the discussions such as '*What are you doing this for?*' and '*Did your children go to this school?*' I concluded that the groups felt more relaxed and confident in their approach to me when we were sprawled on the floor because it made the session appear less official (Holmes 1998). When asked, the children expressed a preference for the outside location. During the whole trial only two children confessed to transgressing the boundaries laid down by their parents and in both cases the discussions were being held outside on the field. The number is too small to be of real significance, but it demonstrates that in at least two groups a degree of trust had developed which allowed such confidences.

As a moderator I also felt more comfortable in the less formal setting, but that may have been because when in the staff room I was conscious of monopolising space to which the

staff wanted access. For one child, though, the outside surroundings were perhaps rather too informal as he behaved in a manner which upset the other children. I had been warned that he might create difficulties and he constantly interrupted the others in an affected baby voice which the whole group found annoying.

Mark I tum to 'chool wid my Mumm.

Sarah Oh, stop being so stupid Mark.

Josh Shut up Mark.

He might have been less likely to act the fool in more formal surroundings, but I would be reluctant to sacrifice the relaxed atmosphere for the sake of one individual and his behaviour and the way the children responded to him did demonstrate they did not feel themselves in a formal situation.

In all the locations the discussions were frequently interrupted. The telephone and staff requiring access to the rooms we occupied were a problem inside, and outside the mowing machine and class rounders proved to be noisy distractions. My initial concern was abated by the ease with which the children coped. On reflection I came to appreciate that such interruptions reflected their normal school day and that they were probably more at ease because of them. To spend up to an hour with no interruptions would have been very intimidating in the context of a school day. I concluded from this analysis that I would wish to choose as informal location as possible for any focus groups with children I undertook as part of my research. The exception might be if the children taking part were behaving in a way which made the discussion difficult, in which case a more formal setting might be more effective. However, such a situation might also indicate that the children were not interested in the project or that I had failed to establish a suitable relationship with them. If this happened on more than one occasion a major rethink of the project would be required.

The final variable to be incorporated into the research was the length of time spent in discussion. Focus groups with adult participants may be scheduled to last two hours or more in order to explore a topic in reasonable depth. Many children do not have the concentration span which would enable them to participate in a two hour discussion and an individual whose attention wanders is liable to make it difficult for the rest of the group. The problem facing me was to choose a length of time which would maximise the usefulness without reaching a point where the children become disinterested. Conducting focus groups of various lengths, I hoped, would indicate the likely attention span of children in this situation. My plan was to keep the first two sets of trials to the same length and then run groups of

differing lengths in the final trial. This plan was found to be flawed for two reasons. Firstly, it was impossible to cover the same questions and topics with groups of differing sizes in the same time. Secondly, I found that even when the groups were the same size one set of children had more to say than another and it seemed inappropriate to censor their contributions by cutting them short. In a research situation one would ideally continue the discussion as long as someone had something to say, but in practice it is useful to have some idea of how long the sessions will last. The class teacher require some idea of how long the children would be involved in the research, and it would be essential for planning ahead. I therefore changed the objective of the final trial as a result of the earlier experience. Rather than run each session for a specific length of time, each group of six children was allowed to continue as long as someone had something relevant to say. The session stopped when either they all stopped talking or they started to discuss other topics: e.g. one group digressed into a conversation about their pets. The three sessions conducted in this way lasted 25, 32 and 39 minutes. This suggested that children of this age might talk about a topic for between 30 and 45 minutes. This gave me some guidelines which would help inform the staff in the schools about the time the research was likely to take.

Several researchers (Morgan and Spanish 1984, Kreuger 1994) have indicated that participants in focus groups are more at ease and participate more fully if the group is single sex. This is particularly recommended if the issue to be discussed is a sensitive one: e.g. Hoppe et al used single sex groups to research children's attitudes to AIDS and sexual behaviour. I made the decision before the trial that I would *not* use single sex groups for the following reasons. Firstly, as the school was mixed (as are all state primary schools) the children were used to working in mixed groups. Secondly, previous experience in discussing the topic I am researching - children's independent mobility - indicated the children did not find it a sensitive issue to discuss (Pugh 1996). Finally, I was keen to encourage the children to discuss gender differences in their freedom of movement and I felt this would be more stimulating in mixed groups.

Morgan and Kruegar (1993: 6) cite as one of the myths of focus group research the notion that the group must consist of strangers. They suggest that good preparation on the part of the moderator can overcome any difficulties that may arise from acquaintanceship among the group. It is inevitable when using a school as a research base that the children who take part in the trial will be acquainted. I do not see this as a problem, in fact I see it as an advantage. Like Holmes I believe children are more likely to be relaxed and forthcoming

among children they know (Holmes 1998). Some children are confident in any situation, but many have not had wide experience and practice in social interaction. It often takes children longer to feel comfortable in the presence of strangers and in this situation it is enough that they have to get used to the moderator!

The role of moderator is seen as of prime importance in the success of focus group research. I was experienced in interacting and working with children, but these trials presented an opportunity to explore the role of a moderator and develop the appropriate techniques before undertaking the main body of my research.

In negotiating a relationship with the children I found it useful to use humour early on. This helped create a relaxed atmosphere and demonstrated a willingness on my part to establish an informal relationship. Having met on this middle-ground, however, it is very difficult to deal with a uncooperative member of the group. To reprimand or remove the offender affirms the moderator as one with a position of authority and can disrupt the relationship with the rest of the group. This happened when I eventually felt it necessary to tell Mark (of the baby voice) that if he was going to continue to annoy the others I would have to send him back to the class. I felt forced to do this as he did not respond to the repeated requests of the rest of the children and I felt they wanted me to take action. The rest of the group showed signs of embarrassment - looking away, squirming, shaking their heads - and it took a little while before they were talking freely again. Such a situation is difficult, as to do nothing might lead to the disruption or complete breakdown of the discussion. After reflecting on this dilemma, I planned strategies which might be used if such a situation should arise whilst I was conducting the main research. The first aim would be to get the group to encourage the individual to participate more fully. If all else failed, then I would ask the child to take a message back to the teacher and suggest it was 'because the group was too large', which might have less impact than acting in a disciplinary way.

An important skill of a successful moderator is to direct the conversation towards the relevant issues without the use of leading questions (Kruegar 1994). Leading questions encourage the group to give the answers they think are required rather than express their own opinions. Listening to tapes of the trial highlighted how frequently the things I said could be construed as biased. For example:

What do you think of the way newspapers write about these things?

No response from the children.

Do you think they make too much fuss about them?

Reflection led me to two conclusions. Firstly, in the course of an animated discussion it is difficult, if not impossible, to remain neutral at all times and expressing no opinions at all would place me even further from discussion. If I was to encourage the exchange of views as I wished, then to remain neutral would be to appear to remain 'outside'. If, as researchers, it is important to make our position *known* rather than invisible (Mattingley and Falconer-Al-Hindi 1995), then should this position be hidden from the subjects of our research? Secondly, if I only used open, unbiased questions it was likely that I would be given answers which conformed to the dominant discourse. It would be assumed that my concern was children's safety rather than unnecessary constraints on their freedom. Only by introducing questions which challenged these dominant assumptions would I expose conflict and discord. For example, I wished to find out if the children felt they had less freedom than their parents did and if they resented this. Asking if they thought it was fair might be considered a leading question, but one which could prompt interesting discussion.

The content of the responses of the children was of such quantity and quality that I was confident that such groups would be an appropriate method for my investigation. As a result of the trials I was able to clarify my role as moderator and structure the discussion questions in a way which I felt would be effective for the research. The trials also enabled me to plan with confidence the size, venue and duration of the group discussions and equipped me, in part, to deal with some of the problems I was likely to encounter.

Childrens' Focus Groups

This aspect of the research was the most innovative and also reflected the epistemological standpoint of the work outlined in Chapter One, so I regarded it as the most important. Talking to the children in a semi-structured setting would give them opportunity to talk about the issues that were most important to them. It would allow me to interpret their experience of their environments and the way that their everyday lives within the environment operated.

In setting up the discussions I faced the problem that in most schools space was extremely limited and I had little control over where the group discussions were to be held. In the event the venues were: a carpeted corridor, music storeroom, science store, empty

classroom, and staff room. The lack of flexibility made it difficult to select settings that were as informal as I would have liked. I overcame this by asking the children to sit with me on the floor, round the tape recorder. This had two practical advantages: firstly they were able to use the floor to rest their maps on (see later) and secondly they were closer to the tape recorder. The main advantage, though, was the impression of informality that it gave the proceedings. Not only did it put me on their level and but it was behaviour they might not have expected from a teacher. This helped to define my role as 'different'. The exception to this approach was the second Northgate group. Having experienced some difficulties of concentration with the first group at this school, I reluctantly decided it would be more constructive to sit round a table and chairs for the second session.

The children were given large sticky labels on which to write their names in order to help me identify them throughout the discussion.⁵ For each group I produced an enlarged street map of their local area and their first task was to locate their home, school and other local landmarks. This activity served as an icebreaker and gave me the opportunity of locating the childrens' homes in the local environment. The session started with each child in turn talking about the places they were allowed to go. This gave them each an opportunity to speak and helped overcome initial inhibitions about talking into the tape recorder. It also gave me the opportunity to 'label' their voices by ensuring that I used their names when asking them to speak. In all the groups only one child had a problem about being taped (he confessed not to have been listening to the details of what was to take place), and all the others said at the end of the session that they had forgotten about the machine once they had started talking. Here, I would disagree with Graue and Walsh (1998) that the use of a a tape reorder affects what is being said and how its being said. The machine caused very little comment or concern among the children.

The general areas of discussion I aimed to cover were as follows:

Why were their movements restricted?

What were they/their parents worried about?

Was there a gender difference in the restriction?

Which areas were safe/unsafe

⁵ The use of their forenames in quotations in the text was discussed with the children. None of them requested that their names to be changed, they wanted to 'own' their words themselves.

Why were the areas unsafe?

How did they know about danger?

What did the papers or TV say?

Had they visited a place that was safer than their home area?

Why was it safer?

What could be done to make their lived environment safer?

I had planned an activity for use if the discussion waned or the children showed signs of losing concentration. I did not need to use this in any of the sessions. The engagement with and interest in the discussion, in all but one of the groups, was very good to satisfactory. The one exception was Focus Group 1 at Northgate school. This group exposed the vulnerability of a researcher working in the school situation.

I did not have knowledge of school procedures or individual children's behaviour. The children became aware of this during the session and it had a significant affect on their behaviour. The session was held in the staff room and the conditions were not ideal - the space was cramped - which meant the group was fidgety. Scott and Yvette asked to go to the toilet. In having to make such a request to me they reinforced the group perception of me as a figure in authority and my hopes of a more informal relationship were damaged. That the request was necessary was partly as a result of the school location. In this situation it would be expected for a child in the presence of an adult to have to seek permission to leave the room.

The children were very keen to make use of the staff cloakroom and I was uncertain whether I let them as I did not know if the children were allowed in the cloakroom or what property the staff kept there. I felt very uncomfortable in that I was labelling a child as a potential thief, but also felt that the school would consider I had some responsibility for the children while they were with me. When Yvette suggested they should go to the nearest children's toilet I then became worried than they might disappear from school altogether. These worries had been fuelled by conversations I had had with the staff about petty theft in the school and the high frequency of absconding by the children. My uncertainty was read by the children and the group became gradually more unruly. I decided Scott should go but he took a long time, adding to my concern.

Yvette Can someone go and see if Scott's finished? (Giggles)
PP You can't go in and see can you? (all laugh)
Yvette Just shout 'Scott are you finished.'
Katy Can't she just go quickly 'cos she's getting on my nerves... ..

The discussion broke down and one of the children pretended that she was broadcasting for a radio station and the other children joined in.

Katy This is Trent F.M.
All sing Trent F.M.
Katy Trent F.M. Two people have been drowned, I don't know whereabouts or who they were. (all laugh)

We eventually resumed the discussion but I stopped the session soon after. With the next group I sought a different location and asked them to make sure they had been to the toilet before they came! I do not think that Group 1 were 'out to get me', but they sensed the ambivalence of my situation and they could not resist taking advantage of it. The transcript revealed the session had not been as much of a disaster as I thought and contained many interesting observations, but I felt uncomfortable about it.

I have recounted this incident in some detail as I feel it illustrates that the relationship between researcher and children is ultimately concerned with power. No matter how at ease the children are and, no matter how confident we are that we have reached a space of betweenness, we can never know if this is how the subject views us. As an adult in a school situation it would always be difficult to occupy the space I wished - but as an adult working with children it would be difficult anywhere.

Another consequence of this power differential is the children's desire to please me and to represent themselves in a positive way. One child told such exaggerated stories of kidnaps and haunted houses that I came to believe that she was doing just that. The expression on the other children's faces when she told her tales was another indication that she might be prone to exaggeration.

My brother he was coming once with John when we used to live in Sherwood and John took us and Graham (the brother) was only about 5 right and I was holding Graham's hand but this man, right, he put his hand out and said 'do you want to get in the car' and Graham got in the car. And we were shouting and shouting and then we found him...He was on the other side of Sherwood on this street...And on our street there was this girl and she was only about five and this man said do you want some sweets and he said get in this car and she did and she hasn't been found yet.

(Cindy working class suburb)

One other instance demonstrating the way material may be presented in alternative ways was an exchange between Gary and his friend David about their interaction with some older youths.

David Sometimes these boys keep bullying me and Gary.

Gary Well not bullying.

David No, just picking on us.

Gary It's not picking on us they just want to spoil stuff when we are having a good game.

(working class suburb group children)

Gary changed what was initially presented as bullying to interference, shifting it from unacceptable to acceptable. This may be a real reflection of how he interpreted the situation or he perhaps did not wish to be perceived as a victim. The subtleties of the situation demonstrate how perceptions of the same situation may be different and how the way a story is told is as important as its content.

It has been suggested that children are more likely to fabricate stories or manipulate their real interpretation of events than are adults. One advantage of the children in the focus group knowing each other is that they are less likely to lie in front of their classmates. If they do lie, the reaction of the others can expose this. Walsh reports children responding to one of their number embellishing a tale with "You lie, you lie" (Graue and Walsh 1998: 114). I am not convinced that the behaviour of the children is going to vary significantly from that of adults, who are just as likely to portray themselves in the most favourable light possible.

The Adult Groups

The basic problem with organising the adult focus groups was, as has already been mentioned, securing volunteers. Not only was it initially difficult to recruit parents, but there was a high drop out rate from those who did agree to attend. The result was that in three of the schools only three participants turned up for the focus group. My concern that such groups did not meet criteria set down in the market research context was alleviated by the comments of practitioners such as Morgan and Spanish (1984) and Gamson (1992), who said that group size was not necessarily critical. Longhurst (1996: 134) concluded that her 'failed' focus groups (of only two participants) provided her with yet another option in the effort to match research questions to appropriate data collection strategies. Adopting

this approach to the sessions I found it particularly enjoyable to participate in the smaller groups as moderator. The discussion took the form of a conversation (Longhurst 1996) and I was able to participate not merely as moderator but also as a mother. Oakley (1994) discusses issues around active participation in interviews between women. The shared experiences of parenthood can also form a basis for discussion and the use of participant friendly methods developed by feminist researchers need not be confined to one group.

Like Davies in her work with cross-community focus groups, I was confronted with ethical questions relating to my relationship with the participants (Davies 1997). As she said;

..the positionality of the moderator and the research participants' perception of that positionality can dramatically influence not only access to, and acceptance from, social groups but also the nature of the information that is gleaned from them.

(Davies 1997: 2)

I was not as self-conscious as Davies about changes in the manner of my presentation to the different groups despite their spanning socio-economic boundaries, but I accept that inevitably differences in approach and language must have existed. I was, however, very conscious of the way the groups perceived me and my work. Some groups understood far better the nature and aim of my research than did others. Those who had had experience of higher education, either personally or through friends, accepted that they were contributing to a doctoral thesis and seemed willing and interested to do so. On the other hand, when the group of 'aerobic' mothers enquired about the purpose of the research at the end of the discussion, they were contemptuous to discover that it was destined for the shelves of the University Library. It had always been my intention to send summary reports of the work to the local authorities and I found that with subsequent similar groups I was emphasising this - although I did also make it clear that my status was not official. It did appear in two of the groups that the participants had misconstrued my status and were under the impression I was working either for the Council or the school. In one instance this impression may have originated with the headteacher and I had no wish to embarrass him by making a fuss about denying it. My disclosures in this instance were honest but evasive.

The importance of these observations is the degree to which the discourses were affected by the participants' perception of their audience, i.e. me. As the analysis of the transcriptions will demonstrate (see Chapter Four), it was my conclusion that the way groups 'placed' me did have an effect on the direction of the discussion. The discussions with participants who made false assumptions about my position were more political, addressing issues such as

failed initiatives and barriers to improvement. Those who better understood my status were more introspective in their observations and talked of their feelings about their childrens' freedom. Both kinds of contribution are of value to the research but must be read in context, as should any 'silences' or gaps in the dialogues.

Analysing and Interpreting the Research Results

The statistical software programme *Statistical Processing for the Social Services X* was used to aid the analysis of the questionnaire. Multiple classification of the data enabled access to the total numbers and percentages according to gender, school, and combinations of schools. Cross-tabulations between these categories were produced so that it was possible, for instance, to consider the numbers of boys from the rural, suburban and city areas who rode their bikes to school or to consider if the children from the working class suburbs travelled on the bus more often than those from the middle class suburbs. Once the statistical information had been collected it was analysed to identify any significant similarities and differences. This was done by comparing percentage figures and noting instances where the differences were notably greater. Since the aim was to uncover tendencies and not to execute a mathematical analysis, the application of significance testing was considered inappropriate to the theoretical position of the thesis.

The tapes of all the interviews were transcribed as accurately as possible using the participants' own words. Since the participants had felt strongly about the ownership of their words and wished to be credited with their comments their actual forenames were used in the transcriptions. Only a few comments were indecipherable or drowned by other voices.

The main themes of the discussions were identified, and sections of the transcriptions relating to these themes were coded. These themes included: specific dangers such as traffic, 'strangers' and known others, and also recurring topics such as the media and holiday behaviour. The passages identified as relating to each theme were copied and pasted to form new files, each a collection of comments on a particular theme. This enabled easy comparison of comments made by each group and facilitated the analysis of the findings. Through the reading of the collected comments on specific topics, ideas and theories were generated, then explored through further reading and finally elaborated to form the substance of the thesis.

Considerable attention has been paid in recent times, particularly by feminist writers, to the positionality of the researcher (Women and Geography Study Group 1997, Laurie et al. 1999, *Professional Geographer* Vol:46 No.1 1994). This relationship continues into the interpretation and writing up of the project. The researcher's representation and interpretation of the material gathered is always a subjective one. Madge et al. (1997) suggest:

We should evaluate our research critically and attempt to interpret it in its full cultural, social, political and economic context, otherwise we will be guilty of false representations. We have to allow the multiple interpretations that come through the research to be acknowledged and presented.

Madge et al. (1997: 106).

This work makes considerable use of the words of the children and their parents. This allows them to speak directly to the reader, and support, in their own words, the suggestions I make about their experiences and their attitudes. I appreciate that even in this I have the power of selection. The use of multiple quotes, I hope, demonstrates that some ideas were shared by many of the participants and, when there was disagreement, I have acknowledged it. My aim has been to provide as accurate as possible a representation of the lives of the children I talked to, but I am aware that it is inevitably influenced by my own reading of their stories.

Other Research

Informal interviews were conducted with police from each area, safety officers, headteachers, teachers and friends. These provided supplementary information which aided the research in terms of context.

In order to understand the media impact on the question of children's safety, literary analysis of relevant news articles was undertaken. These were mainly taken from broadsheet publications since the articles expressed views in a more detailed, discursive form. However, in certain case studies a spectrum of news reports from tabloids and broadsheets was examined in order to understand whether the representation of a particular incident differed between newspapers.

The various methods of research provided a rich variety of information about the lives of the children. The focus groups were particularly successful in allowing the children the chance

to give voice to their own experiences. Their eagerness to participate, gratitude for an audience and pleasure in being allowed to speak about their lives was touching. It was apparent that they had rarely been in a position where their views were solicited and valued by the adult world, and I was pleased that I was able to provide one such opportunity.

Chapter Three

Who Goes Where

The introductory chapter demonstrated that our society is increasingly excluding children from the streets. (Hillman 1988, Hillman et al 1990, Hillman 1993, Matthews 1992, 1999, Satterthwaite et al. 1996, Valentine 1996a, 1996b, 1997a, 1997b). Valentine¹ identified two paradoxical discourses which both seek to justify this. Children are either menaces who must be contained or they are victims who must be protected. They are menaces because they are seen as unruly, undisciplined and lacking respect for authority. Increases in juvenile crime figures are seen as convincing evidence and highly publicised tragedies such as the Jamie Bulger² murder in 1993 reinforce this perception. The response from those in authority is to attempt to exclude children and young people from the streets. In 1998 the Home Secretary, Jack Straw, suggested a curfew be imposed on unaccompanied children at night. Doubts about the practicality of such a measure have caused various amendments to the scheme to be made but few have seen it as a human rights issue. On a local level the following extracts from the community paper of a middle class suburb of Nottingham demonstrate the attitude of society. The author was the community police officer.

*So if your children are among those hanging about, get them off the streets before we do.*³

This article identifies groups of children as a hostile element on the streets. A few weeks later in the *same* paper the *same* policeman wrote in an article entitled "Children Beware - Stranger Danger":

*Play in groups with friends, in places where you can easily be seen.*⁴

¹ Valentine supported by a grant from the Economic and Social Research, project headed a team conducting research into children's geographies between 1993 and 1995. Many of the topics covered are highly relevant to this research. As a result of her research four papers have been published which will be frequently referred to in this work.

² Jamie Bulger was murdered by two boys aged 9 and 10 in Liverpool in 1993. The public trial and subsequent sentencing of the boys was controversial.

³ Neighbourhood News Paper, 'Whatswhat' Feb 1995

⁴ Neighbourhood News Paper 'Whatswhat' April 1995

The police officer might argue that there would be a difference in the age of young person he was referring to, although no particular age group is mentioned in either article. It is difficult for children to anticipate at what point in their life they are transformed from vulnerable victims, who should stick together, into menacing delinquents, who must get off the streets. Why should one group be permitted to collect in groups and another not? Why is one group is seen as vulnerable and the other threatening? Is such discrimination on the basis of age acceptable? It is easy to appreciate how children and young people can be confused. The Children "Beware - Stranger Danger" article takes examples of everyday places - outside school, the park, shopping - and imagines the child in each of these locations confronted by a stranger. This transmits the message; strangers can "get" you anywhere, demonising the whole of the child's lived environment and in thus implying safety is only found off the streets.

Getting About

The first objective of my research was to measure the effect of these messages on children and parents by asking questions about the children's independent mobility. Since I also wished to identify levels of mobility within different groups of children, I had decided a questionnaire was the most appropriate method by which to investigate these issues. The questionnaire I devised asked the children about journeys they made alone or with friends, to various locations - some near their home, some a bus ride away. It asked about the form of transportation used to make these journeys. Other questions related to their attitudes to going out by themselves and their reaction to constraints placed upon them. The relationship between the child and their minder was investigated by asking two questions about the procedure they followed if they wished to go out alone. The final section of the questionnaire asked them about places near their home which they thought were safe or unsafe to play in.⁵ This chapter will consider the issues which the questionnaire identified as significant to a child's mobility, initially by considering the combined responses of all the children. It will then contrast groups of children based on the determinants which have already been identified as possible influences on mobility: lived environment, socio-economic background and gender. Issues arising from the questionnaire results will be illustrated and expanded by use of the comments of the children in the focus groups.

There is a wide variation in the way that different parents treat their children. The Baumrind model discussed in Chapter One proposes the different styles of parenting which can result at

one extreme in 'neglectful' care taking which provides imprecise guidance and at the other in the 'dictated' care which imposes rigidly enforced rules, narrow territorial limits and low patterns of acceptance (Matthews and Limb 1999:71). The questionnaire research results demonstrates that at the extremes 6% of the 283 children asked were allowed to make the journey from their home into Central Nottingham by themselves whilst 6% were not allowed to visit their nearest local shop - even in the company of friends. Cindy and Sara, from the same school, lived within half a mile of each other and represented the two extremes:

I can go to the parks, swimming pool and town (Central Nottingham). I only just started going in (to town) two months ago and you are so excited you don't know if you really want to go there.
(Cindy transitional)⁶

Miss, I don't know much about these parks and that lot 'cos my Mum won't let me. And on my street I'm only allowed to go about a little bit up and back.
(Sara transitional)

The two girls may be of the same age and live in a similar area but they would have very different experience and knowledge of their lived environment. Sara certainly felt frustrated and Cindy was unsure of the privileges she was allowed.

I miss going like these places with my friends 'cos at school you hear people and they are talking about going to the cinema and they ask you and you have to say "No, my Mum won't let me."
(Sara transitional)

The first time (I was a bit scared) 'cos I used to get lost in town and the first time you get so excited you don't know if you want to go or not and then when you are there you just want to go back home so it's a waste of time.
(Cindy transitional).

Both girls demonstrate discomfort in their positions at the extremes of the territorial ranges. Most children prefer to be treated in a similar way to the rest of their contemporaries (Meadows 1986). Many of the children did experience similar constraints, an indication that the majority of parents conformed to similar guidelines. However it is important to be aware that just as there is no 'universal child', there is no universal model of parenting and each family's experience will be individual, whatever the social and cultural pressures to conform to a recognised norm (Aitkin and Herman 1997, Sibley 1995, Valentine 1997a, 1997b).

⁵ A sample questionnaire and results summary can be found in the appendix.

⁶ Transitional indicates children from the Gladehill School. An explanation of the term appears in chapter 2.

Children may be allowed access to the environment either to make a purposeful journey to a specified destination or to "play outside", socialising with their peers. The types of journeys they make and how they make them is an indication of the boundaries and constraints controlling their experiences of the environment. The questionnaire was constructed to identify these issues. Using questions on the questionnaire concerned with specific journeys enabled the questions to be specific and therefore easier for the children to understand and respond to. Talking about where they were allowed to play was better addressed in the discussion groups. As well as *which* journeys they were allowed to make unaccompanied, the children were asked *how* they made the journey: by foot, by bike or by bus.

A major factor affecting children's ability to move around their environment is their access to transport. Adult mobility is dominated by access to the motor car, but for children to make a journey independently they must either walk, use roller blades or skate board, ride a bicycle, or make use of public transport. Walking is used the most by children of this age, but it was considered by the children and parents in the study to be the form in which children were most vulnerable. When walking they were open to assault by older, stronger, faster individuals. They were therefore encouraged to make such journeys in the company of friends rather than alone or systems of signalling were arranged to confirm arrival or announce departure.

They are allowed to walk if they are all together to friends who live the pavement way, but then, like Sue says there is always a sort of signalling system that they have got there or they are setting off back.
(Judith mother village)

Kirsty, I only let her go to her friends because once she's arrived there I can phone and say "Has she arrived yet?" She's arrived and I know she'll ring when she is on her way back so I know when to expect her.
(Linda mother transitional)

With these sort of safeguards in place, 71% of the children were allowed to walk to their local shops and 80% to friend's houses. Others made the journey on their bike or with friends so it was a very small number who were not permitted to leave the house unescorted.

I'm allowed a lot further on my bike than I am walking.
(Sian village)

There is some security in riding a bike. The advantage of speed gives children a sense of protection. After the initial investment it is an extremely cheap form of transport, and for children, financially dependent on others, this is important. Southworth (1990) pointed out that on a bicycle a child not only plans his or her route but is a master of the vehicle and completely responsible for him or herself. In the past the use of the bicycle has allowed children great freedom. It has enabled the exploration of the wider environment, the development of independence and social interaction. Several of the parents made comments illustrating this:

*I mean we used to bike ride from Netherfield down to Stoke Bardolph. We used to go out and she would never see us till tea time.
(Teresa mother inner city)*

*I borrowed a friend's bicycle one time and cycled three miles up the equivalent of Melton Road, where I was living at the time and it's the sort of thing I did regularly.
(Mike father village)*

Cycling now-a-days is seen as more hazardous. The increased volume of traffic means that many parents are not prepared to allow their children out unsupervised on bicycles. Although all but six of the 283 children questioned owned or part-owned a bike, the use they were allowed to make of them varied greatly. A small number were not allowed to ride their bike outside their own garden without supervision and only half the children used their bikes to visit friends or go to the local shop. Many were restricted to the immediate vicinity of their house.⁷

*I'm only allowed to cycle on Melton Road when my Mum and Dad go there.
(Paul village)*

Parents considered the roads too dangerous and also saw the bike as a possible cause of conflict.

*My son's bike been stolen and I'm not going to replace it. The roads are just too dangerous.
(middle class suburb mother overheard during school visit)*

⁷ The National travel survey 1987 showed that only 2% of all children's journeys and 1% of their total mileage are made by cycle. From Hillman (1988)

My next door neighbour's boy was on his paper round, he is thirteen and he had a BMX bike and two boys threatened to beat him up if he didn't give them the bike and it was £300 and silver. I've always thought when my kids had their bikes that I'm amazed they've still got them.
(Gwen mother transitional)

A bike can be a mixed blessing for a child. It may provide cheap and easy transport and an increased sense of security but it is also a responsibility and the burden of taking sufficient care can diminish its value in terms of mobility.

I'd taken my bike with my friend Kimberley and I said you just look after my bike while I go in 'cos my Mum wants me to get some bread.
(Katy working class suburbs)

If parents consider cycling as too dangerous a mode of transport for their children, an alternative is to make use of the public transport system. Southworth (1990) considered mastery of a subway or bus systems an education in itself for young people. Travelling by public transport for the first time is a significant event in a child's life marking a new step in independence. Kayleigh's first trip on a bus was well planned;

She is going to have to go to school on her own next year (comprehensive) so she has been doing more things on her own. My Mum lives a bus ride away so we have done "being on a bus on her own" we did that this year, ringing each other when she arrives.
(Dianne mother inner city)

Parental concern can make it difficult for children to take such steps, and when things go wrong the child's confidence is undermined and the parents have an excuse for postponing any repetition of the trip:

I let her go to Arnold on her birthday and I think me and Carol must have sat for the two hours they were gone at the bus stop. I waited at the bus stop and the bus went past the stop with them on the bus and there was like these faces on the bus just waving to me. They missed the stop and had gone round the corner. But their faces! I was going "Carol they'll end up in Clifton and not know where they are going."
(Linda mother working class suburbs)

This rite of passage, a significant move from dependency towards autonomy, had been undertaken by more than half the children in the survey, a higher proportion than in Hillman's 1990 study which found 32% of 10 year olds used buses. This may be a reflection of the high standard of public transport in the Greater Nottingham region. The children who made use of the buses certainly were confident and happy about making use of it. A story

from one of the schools not only demonstrates this confidence but also highlights the adult perception that children of this age lack the competence to take care of themselves.

Derek (age 10) not only had to catch two buses to get to school but also had to take responsibility for his younger brother who accompanied him. I was told of one occasion when the younger boy was sick on the bus and the driver turned them off, leaving the boys stranded in the centre of Nottingham. Derek coped with the situation by contacting his grandmother who came to their assistance. It was obvious the teachers disapproved of the travel arrangement, feeling it was too much to expect of a child his age. When I later talked to Derek's class, he proudly explained what he had to do to get to school and said that although it took a long time it was "OK" and he did not mind doing it. There was clear conflict here between the parental perception of the child's competence and that of the school. In her paper "*'Oh yes I can.' 'Oh no you can't': Children's and parents understanding of kids' competence to negotiate public space safely,*" Valentine explores this issue. She concludes that there is a danger in presuming an adult-child binary in terms of competence, maturity, self awareness and so on and thus underestimating the abilities of children to manage their own personal safety (Valentine 1997b :83).

It may be concluded that all potential means of transportation are seen as problematic in some way by those with control or influence over children's mobility. This negative approach is symptomatic of the attitude to children being out alone. As Valentine (1996b) suggests, public space has undergone a production process by which it has become an adult space in which unaccompanied youngsters do not belong. The journeys that children are allowed to undertake unaccompanied have decreased accordingly. Some of these journeys will now be considered in greater depth.

Most Frequently made Journeys

One of the most regular journeys made by all children is to and from school. The fall in the number of children walking to school has been well documented and well publicised (Hillman 1988, 1993, Tranter and Whitelegg 1994, Brian Mawhinney, Transport Secretary in the Telegraph April 8th 1995, Frances Lawrence in the The Guardian 1996 Oct 29th, Dixey 1998). The result of this is an increase in the number of cars around schools which in turn is responsible for increased pollution, road wear and potential danger of traffic accidents. This increases the problems for those children who continue to make the journey on foot; whilst those children who are driven to school miss out on the exercise, the experience of the

environment and the social interaction with other children. Successive governments have encouraged parents to find ways not to drive children to school and schemes have been implemented by local authorities and schools to provide safe routes or "walking buses".⁸ The issue is one of interest to many, and there are some aspects of the topic which have not been addressed by any previous research. The studies which have produced the most quoted statistics have asked the children how they usually get to school (Department of Transport National Travel Surveys 1987-99) or how they got to school that morning (PSI 1971, 1989 in Hillman et al 1990). What has not been asked is if they *ever* walk to school and I was particularly interested to ascertain if they ever made the journey independently. The National Travel Survey (1994) noted that '*in the last twenty years the number of 7-8 year olds allowed to travel to school without adult supervision has fallen from 80% to 10%*'. Did similar statistics apply to the slightly older children in this study? From observation I suspected that many children made the occasional journey to school on foot unaccompanied even if they normally travelled by car or with parents. This then raises the question why do the parents accompany their children the rest of the time?

Of the children I questioned 73% had, at some time, walked, biked or bussed to or from school by themselves or with friends, which is a significantly higher number than the 50% of 9-11 year olds in the PSI study. Whilst some made the journey independently on a regular basis, the discussion groups demonstrated that many did so because it suited their parents for them to do so on that particular day.

Lindsey When my Mum is in a rush she just chucks me out but when she is not she walks with me.

*Sian Same with me
(Children village)*

*Yeah, my Dad's hurt his back so I had to come up on my own.
(Neil village)*

*I mean yesterday I locked myself out of the car and the house in one fell swoop, one of the coldest mornings of the year.... you'd think I had done it on purpose because he had to walk to school.
(Yvonne mother middle class suburbs)*

*She had to come up on her own the other morning 'cos I had her brother ill in bed.
(Mother in conversation working class suburb)*

⁸ Sustran is a charity running a 'Safe Routes to School' Programme and publishes advice on creating safe routes, the use of bicycles and supervised groups walking together.

Many of the parents allow their children to walk to school occasionally but do not seem prepared to allow it to be a regular occurrence. Some children, like Yvonne's son say they do not wish to walk. In her opinion he was too lazy to walk. She said he made excuses about not knowing the way. Children used to being transported around may develop such an attitude. Others may be put off by the traffic, or the possibility of encountering verbal or physical abuse en route. Some children are prepared to walk or are allowed to walk sometimes, but their parents continued to accompany them on most occasions. It seems likely that other determinants are influencing the parents in addition to concern for the safety of the child.

For many mothers confined to the house for most of the day the gathering at the school gate is a social event. For some mothers with young children at home this may be the only adult conversation they encounter outside the home. The time waiting for the children is used to meet and talk - problems are shared, arrangements made, new friendships formed. Parents enjoy the interaction with others and this provides motivation to make the journey. However, it is also a time when parenting practices are under the spotlight. The public nature of the event focuses the gaze of the assembly on individual parenting and judgements are passed based on the actions of a parent and the behaviour of the children. Accompanying one's child not only reinforces one's image as a caring parent but enables the parent to control the behaviour of the child. Valentine (1997a) suggests that it is the 'moral consensus group' which forces parents to be ever vigilant and join in the ritual of chaperoning children to and from school. The problem of the school journey is not therefore a simple one of potential risk to the child. The highly public nature of this aspect of the parenting result in social pressures significantly impacting on behaviour. The introduction of safe routes and a reduction of traffic volume are not panaceas which will reverse the process, and the first step must be to understand thoroughly those determinants which influence parental behaviour, both environmental and social.

The path towards independent mobility for children is marked by significant first events: the first walk alone to a friend's house, the first trip to a local shop, the first walk to school or the first visit alone to the city centre. To gain permission to make such a journey is to be granted a 'licence' (Hillman 1990), and the children through negotiation with their minders acquire such licences. They must first demonstrate their competence to make the journey and

this requires knowledge of their local environment, an awareness of the potential risk, and a level of responsible behaviour which the parents think appropriate for the venture. The level

of such demands varies between parents and, naturally, increases as the distance involved grows (Hillman 1990). Depending on the geography of their lived environment there may be one particular licence which is of particular significance in that it is indicative of a new level of independence for the child. In the area of the study the journey to the centre of Nottingham was such a landmark. Of all the destinations we discussed, Central Nottingham was the place that was most important to the children. It represented all that was exciting and glamorous about growing up: shops, pubs and a dynamic nightlife, but it was also a frightening place, a place of strangers, drugs and crime. Cindy's comments quoted earlier in the chapter, "*You are so excited you don't really know if you want to go there,*" encapsulates this feeling. Sixty-one percent of the children had not been allowed to make the journey and of those that had, the majority had made the trip on the bus with friends. It was the much desired unknown and many of those children who had not yet been granted licence to go had negotiated the age at which they would be allowed to start.

*My Mum says I can go when I am thirteen 'cos I can look after myself
when I am in my teens.
(Kay transitional suburb)*

*My Mum said that my brother is nearly allowed to go into Nottingham,
and he is twelve.
(Martin village)*

For several of the children and parents it seemed impossible to imagine and when asked at what age they thought permission would be given they resorted to jokes to answer. Christian said he thought he would have to be able to drive before he could go, Gary said he thought he would be fifty. Parents' responses included "when he is twenty" or "never". The use of humour avoided the issue: the children did not have to contemplate the struggle they faced with their parents to gain permission and the parents did not have to face the thought of their child venturing into this 'place of danger'. For this age group this was the significant journey, a breakthrough in independence which represented a move forward to another stage of their life. It was closely associated with the move to secondary education, another landmark in growing up. Such stages can be the cause of stress for the individual and tension between parent and child. Children are most comfortable with these transitions when they

	walk alone	walk with friends	cycle alone	cycle with friends	bus alone	bus with friends
Swimming pool	46 (16%)	149 (52%)	24 (8%)	36 (13%)	12 (4%)	61 (21%)
Central Notting'm	18 (6%)	34 (12%)	5 (1.5%)	11 (4%)	9 (3%)	91 (32%)

Table 1. How children travelled to more distant destination.

make them alongside their peers and those held back can feel isolated and excluded as Sara's comments demonstrate (page74).

It's Safer with Friends

Studies that have plotted children's home ranges have shown that many children have two sets of boundaries: one which delineates where they are allowed if they are by themselves and one which is related to journeys made with friends (Hart 1979, Matthews 1992). For the children in this study the journey into Nottingham was invariably made with friends, as were other more adventurous trips such as to the cinema or the swimming pool (see Table 1). This was partly a social phenomenon as such destinations are considered more enjoyable in company but many parents said they considered a companion as essential on such a trip. Some children were not allowed out at all unless they were with friends. The lone child is seen as more vulnerable and children and parents supported the notion that there is safety in numbers. When they are with friends children feel more able to negotiate their way, they feel less threatened by 'others' and together they can 'look out' for each other. 42% of the children in the study had either never been out alone or only made very short journeys to a neighbour's house. Only a quarter had ventured outside their immediate locality by themselves. One group gave an account of how being with friends could be helpful:

Phillipa Do you remember the time I was with you and Sophie and I fell off?

Neil Oh, yeah, we were cycling to the Post Office to get some sweets and me and Sophie heard this "aaaah" and she, she'd hit the kerb, fell off, hurt her knee and she's sitting there saying "It's not funny" and Sophie's going "he-he"

and she starts laughing then crying and we realise it is not funny...

Phillippa And he races off to...

Neil I race off to her house and I say "Mrs Kern, Mrs Kern, your daughter has fallen over."

Moderator It shows its useful to have someone with you

Neil She could have died.

Phillipa Yeah, great chance of dying!

(Village group)

Whilst children enjoy the company of others they may not be as dependent on having friends with them as the figures suggest. Parental insistence that they have company when out is an important factor. Only 10% of the children asked said they did not like going out alone and two thirds of them wished to be allowed to go further than they were presently allowed. This further reinforces the ideas already introduced that children have more confidence in their own competence than their parents do. Despite being surrounded by messages which demonise the environment as a place to dangerous for them and despite the constant reminders that the public space is '*naturally or normally an adult space*' (Valentine 1996b:209), children still demonstrate an eagerness to be 'out there'.

Permission to Go

Real freedom of mobility involves not only the licence to travel but also the freedom to make the decision to do so. Children's mobility is limited spatially but it is also limited by those who control their movements within the imposed boundaries. Boundaries are not always consistent: what may be allowed one day may be forbidden the next, what may be permitted by one parent may be forbidden by the other, what may be allowed one child at a particular age may be forbidden a sibling at the same age. The way that control is exercised and the manoeuvrability available to the child within the parameters of control are significant determinants of individual liberty. To investigate this the questionnaire included questions designed to assess the extent to which children were able to make their own decisions. (See question 17/18 appendix 3.)

The children were asked what steps they were required to take if they were going on a journey somewhere nearby, and similarly if they were going somewhere further away. Half the children said they would have to ask permission to make even a short journey outside the home. Thirty nine percent said they would just have to let someone know and under 10% that they could "just go". Thus although the children may have independent mobility they do not necessarily have the choice of when to use it. They do not perceive themselves as having

autonomy over their movements but are controlled by their parents' decisions. Longer journeys were even more controlled, only five children claimed they could go swimming without letting anyone know.

Most parents recognise that they exercise greater control over their children's movements that they themselves experienced, as these quotes from the discussion groups illustrate:

*I mean we used to bike ride from Netherfield down to Stoke Bardolph. We used to go out and she didn't see us till tea time and she never used to be running round fretting whereas I, I mean an hour and I haven't seen him for a bit ,I haven't heard him for a bit I'm "where are they" You know what I mean.
(Carole mother transitional)*

*I don't remember having always to tell me Mam were we were. I mean we just used to go out but now I'd flip if I didn't know where they were.
(Yvonne middle class suburb)*

*We always had to tell me Mum where we were but she never worried unless of course we were hours late for lunch. But if any of mine are out they have to check in. They have to check in sort of every half-hour. Which is sad really.
(Sue middle class suburb)*

There is real regret that they have to monitor their children's lives so closely but the anxiety expressed in the first quote demonstrates that there is a real fear for their children's safety. They see the constraints they place upon their children as vital to keep them from harm. The issues that this raises are central to this thesis. Has the environment become as unsafe as these parents perceive? How is the shared perception of the environment constructed? Which determinants are involved in forming such a negative view? Are there other pressures on parents to contain their children? Subsequent chapters will consider these issues in depth.

City, Suburbs, and Countryside

One objective of this research was to identify differences and/or similarities in the behaviour and attitudes of the children and parents in different lived environments. A traditional geographical categorisation of the residential built environment would identify urban, suburban and rural as the three basic forms. Such categorisation is largely based on a 'distance from the centre model' (Mumford 1966, Walker 1981) but would also be supported by a wider public perception of living space. Such a division is strictly spatial, ignoring the socio-economic characteristics of the area and this was one basis upon which

the schools taking part in this research were selected. For the purposes of analysis in this section, the responses from the three suburban schools were combined in order to contrast them with those from the inner city and rural children.

Stereotypical images abound when discussions of childhood experiences are located in particular environment. Philo (1992) suggests notions exist of an idyllic rural past in which children were healthy, happy and honest members of close-knit communities contrasted with a savage urban present in which children are diseased, despondent and delinquent outcasts from an anomic and conflictual society. Then paradoxically there is the 'ignorant' rural childhood contrasted with the 'sophisticated, knowing' urban dwellers. The suburbs were seen by planners in the nineteenth century to offer the best of both worlds: the conducive living conditions of the rural with easy access to the employment, services and facilities of the city. Patterns of children's mobility within the three environments might indicate the extent to which some of these stereotypical perceptions were part of the everyday lives of the children. The Romantic vision of the evil city contrasted with the pastoral idyll⁹ has not disappeared from everyday discourses of the children (Jones 1997, 1999). It is reinforced for them when drug abuse and crime are represented as city centre phenomenon. During the focus groups the children often reiterated such stereotypical perceptions:

- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| <i>PP</i> | <i>What about Nottingham?</i> |
| <i>Neil</i> | <i>City?</i> |
| <i>All</i> | <i>I hate that.</i> |
| <i>Philippa</i> | <i>It's big and ugly.</i> |
| <i>Paul</i> | <i>Too much traffic.</i> |
| <i>Jenny</i> | <i>You've got clean air, in the city they have got horrible polluted air.</i> |
| <i>Paul</i> | <i>You die early.</i> |
| <i>Philippa</i> | <i>Factories!</i> |
| <i>Sian</i> | <i>I wouldn't like to live in the middle of Nottingham 'cos they have lots of bullies and things.</i> |
| <i>Tom</i> | <i>They have loads of things. Tollerton is a quiet place.</i> |
| <i>(village group)</i> | |

Tollerton is a mere three miles (and closing) from the nearest suburb of Nottingham and yet the children had a very clear perception of their identity as village dwellers and for most part this was a positive part of their lives. The children talked of having considerable

⁹ This is exemplified in works by nineteenth century writers such as Charles Dickens, Mrs Gaskell and George Gissings.

	Rural	Suburban	Inner City
Visiting friends	66	50	36
Out of school activities	15	7	7
Local shops	58	43	46

Table 2. Percentage of children from different lived environments cycling alone to near destinations.

freedom around the village and this was born out by the responses to the questionnaires which showed that children in the villages are more likely to travel alone and are more likely to make use of their bikes for such journeys than children in the other areas (see Table 2). This gives them greater flexibility of movement for they do not have to organise friends to go with them every time they want to go out and they are also able to make use of their time more efficiently as they can use their bike to make journeys around the village. Since the principal reason given by the parents

and children for travelling with friends was that it minimised a child's vulnerability to the threat of the 'stranger', the higher percentage of children allowed to make completely unaccompanied journeys in the village suggests that strangers are not perceived as such a threat in this environment. A strong sense of community emerged from the village groups. Indications of this were the shared knowledge of people from the village, knowledge of locations, including each other's address and the shared awareness of incidents and local stories. This community culture provided the children with definite feelings of security. The village space was available to them and they had a strong feeling of ownership and belonging.

Neil Our village is more quiet.

Nick We know most of the people in the village

Paul It's a very nice village

Neil I wouldn't like to live in the city

Paul Everyone knows everyone else

Neil Like in my street when anyone goes away we check up on their house.

*Paul I even know people in the Post Office.
(village group)*

In practical terms, strange vehicles and people were more readily identified and could be avoided and familiar people were readily available to help if needed. The restrictions placed

on the use of bicycles are a consequence of the perceived danger from traffic and the possibility of theft. The greater use of bikes in the village suggests that these are not of such concern here as in other areas. The children certainly perceived their local environment as having a low traffic volume and therefore safe for cycling.

If these observations support the notion of the rural idyll, a place of freedom and safety where children have freedom to roam and be close to the natural world, then this would be considerably over stating the case. The differences between the village children and the others were marked but not substantial and, as the next chapter will demonstrate, the parents in the village had considerable anxiety about their children's safety.

There may be some advantage for children in a rural community in that they enjoy greater freedom within their immediate locality but do they have the same access to the facilities available to urban communities? If children wish to access amenities only available in the urban setting then they are usually dependent on public transport or the significant impact on some rural communities, but in Tollerton, the village in the study, availability of a car driving adult. The withdrawal of rural transport services has had a the bus service was considered good.¹⁰ The bus could take the children directly to the nearest swimming pool and on to the centre of Nottingham where the nearest cinemas were located. The access to these facilities was as readily available to these children as to most of the others in the study. The centre of Nottingham was a bus ride away for all of them, it would just require a slightly longer, slightly more expensive, ride for the village children. Access was possible, but it was not used. Only 6% of the children from the village had travelled on a bus alone, compared with 31% and 30% from the suburbs and the inner city respectively. When asked if they had ever been on a bus with friends, one third of the rural area children said they had compared with half the suburban and two thirds of the inner city group.

These results demonstrate a significant difference in the potential of the children from the village to travel beyond their immediate home area. Their isolation from the bright urban lights may contribute to the reinforcement of their negative perception of the city, if only to justify in their own minds their lack of access to it. "We may not be allowed into town, but it's OK because we don't like it there" might sum up this attitude. However, despite how disparaging they might be about the world outside their village, they still express a desire to go and explore it. More of the village children wished to extend their existing range than

either of the other two groups, 75% as compared with 62% and 64 % in the suburbs and inner city.

The village environment provides a clearly demarcated boundary within which the security of the known community supports the children and allows more of them to be independently mobile. Beyond these confines the world is dangerous, but nevertheless inviting. The sense of containment, which they are beginning to express, may increase as they get older. The attractions offered in the urban centres may become more alluring and the centres themselves less frightening, or they may, as Ward (1990) suggests, wish to take advantage of certain opportunities and potentials of the modern urban area whilst remaining living in their rural homes. The enthusiastic support the children expressed for their village life suggests that some at least are already highly motivated to take this latter route.

The mass suburb was developed in the nineteenth century when large-scale building developers emerged to take advantage of the advances in transportation and increase in financial institutions. They were seen as the answer to urban overcrowding and the rediscovery of the rural idyll. This century the growth of middle class suburbs and public housing has led to the loss of this ideal (Johnston 1986). In 1979 Hart wrote that

Modern suburban housing tracts with spacious, uncluttered landscapes, when compared with more urban environments, offer better visual and auditory access between parent and child and reduced perceived dangers of traffic crime and socially bad influences.

(Hart 1979 :339)

If any remnant of this ideal existed, then the children in the suburbs might enjoy a similar degree of mobility to those in the rural areas. If, as Mumford (1966) suggested, there is no escape from the city, then their patterns of behaviour might match those of the inner city children.

An initial consideration of the results shows that the responses of the children from the suburb correspond closely with those from the inner city for almost all respects. It could therefore be assumed that the perception of the built environment of Greater Nottingham is similar in all areas. This is not the case. Take for example the question which asked the children whether they had ever been to the centre of Nottingham with friends. Of the rural children, 8% said they had, 35% of the suburban children and 61% of the inner city group.

¹⁰ Based on conversations with several residents and the children themselves.

This would suggest that the nearer to the centre the more likely the children are to have been allowed to visit it unsupervised. However, if the suburban results are broken down to the three schools only 12% of the children from the school located in private housing had made the trip, compared with 36% in the transitional area and 63% from the council estate. The middle class suburb score is therefore very similar to that of the middle class village and the working class suburb similar to the inner city, also a working class area. Other results show a similar wide variation between the middle class and the working class suburbs. This pattern reflects a socio-economic rather than spatial influence, which the next section of the chapter will consider more closely.

Social Grouping

The type of housing and nature of tenure in the catchment areas of the five schools I visited give strong indications of the socio-economic status of the families in the area. The rural school and the school in West Bridgford (Jesse Grey) were both in an area of privately built detached and semi-detached houses of various ages. Gladehill school was set in an area of publicly built houses, most of which had been bought by their tenants, as was evident from the number advertised for sale. It lies on the edge of the extensive Bestwood Council estate and the catchment area also included an area of small, new, privately built houses. Henry Whipple was set among public housing, not far from Gladehill. Fewer of the houses had been purchased, many were poorly maintained and several had boarded up windows. Nearby was a row of derelict shops which had been destroyed by arson (see Plate 1). It was not perceived as a good place in which to live. The headteacher of the school told me he had a falling roll because everybody was trying to move out of the area.

Now if you go to the council and tell them you want a house on Bestwood, the next day they will give you the keys for that house, because nobody wants to come here.

(Jason working class suburb)

Northgate School was located in an inner city area with some public housing but a predominance of older, terraced, privately rented property. It was close to an area of factory buildings, many of which had fallen into disuse. The school was frequently vandalised (see Plate 2). If the percentage of free school meals is an indicator of the level



Plate 1
Showing the burnt out
Boarded-up shops close to
Henry Whipple School. In
the foreground is one of the
security cameras installed
throughout the estate



Plate 2. Northgate School showing the vicious spikes which have been installed to deter unwelcome visitors

of deprivation among the children in the five schools, Tollerton and Jesse Grey had less than 5%, Gladehill 15% and Henry Whipple and Northgate over 30%.¹¹

The questionnaire results for Tollerton and Jesse Grey were combined as were those for Northgate and Henry Whipple to consider if socio-economic background had an effect on mobility. If the perception of safety on the streets relates to the crime rate in the area then Northgate and Henry Whipple Schools are located in neighbourhood considered by the police to be high risk and Tollerton and West Brompton to be relatively safe.¹²

The mixed nature of Gladehill's catchment led to it being treated as a separate case. For ease of reference, and as these are labels which the residents themselves used, the group was referred to as middle class and the second as working class. Gladehill does not easily fit either of these two categories. This area has affinities with Goldthorpe et al's 1968 Luton based affluent worker. The families are those that have weathered the depressions of the 1980s and have benefited from the home ownership policies of the Thatcher years. Many of them have their roots in the area, but have moved to this location on the fringe of the public housing to improve their status. One family had moved across the trunk road which formed the eastern boundary to a middle class area. The children continued to attend the school and the mother retained her friendships with the local mothers. As explained earlier the Gladehill area had been allocated the label 'transitional'.

I was interested to discover if differences were apparent in the behaviour of the children from the middle class and working class areas and with which group the children from Gladehill conformed. Did middle class aspirations override working class traditions? (Goldthorpe et al 1980). If there were cultural differences in parenting practices among the groups to which did the Gladehill parents conform? Goldthorpe's work showed that among the affluent Luton workers in the 1960's many retained working class culture. This study might indicate if this was true of Gladehill in the Bestwood Estate in the 1990s. Hillman et al in their 1990 study found no discernible difference with regard to the level of restriction imposed by the parents from different social classes. They draw the conclusion that the

¹¹ Like many other social categories, socio-economic status varies over time and space. Not only this, but it is subject to a complexity of claims and counter claims. In the context of this study, the terms middle class and working class are used in the everyday understanding of the terms in Britain in the 1990s.

¹² This was based on the perception of police officers in conversations with the author at the local police stations.

		Village	M/C suburb	Transitional	W/C suburb	Inner City
Visiting friends	cycle alone	66	53	31	45	36
	cycle with friends	27	44	18	43	34
Local shops	cycle alone	58	50	31	47	46
	cycle with friends	52	49	25	45	41

Table 3. Percentage of children from each school making short cycle journeys.

differing levels of car ownership explained the patterns of travel. However they also admit that car ownership was closely tied to social class so it is difficult to understand how any link between class and the children's mobility could be ignored. This research also found that for the shorter journeys such to friend's houses, school, or the local shops the results in all socio-economic groups were broadly similar. The one area in which there was a difference worthy of note was the mode of transport used. There was a greater likelihood that the middle class children would use their bikes to make these journeys. It has already been demonstrated that the children from the rural area made more use of their bikes than those from the urban locations, but as the break down of figures for each school shows (see table 3) this is also true of the middle class suburb. These figures show that the children least likely to make use of their bikes are those from Bestwood the transitional area. The groups of parents and children from this area expressed great concern about the theft of bikes:

You're scared to death letting them out on bikes, 'cos you buy them one , I mean my son had a small bike when he was about three stolen from the back garden, it was out, we had forgotten to put it away and it was actually stolen out of the garden. So we then bought a second hand one 'cos he wanted to play out on a bike and we thought we're not going to have a brand new one pinched again. Now he has got a brand new one but all the time we're nagging him saying make sure you don't leave your bike somewhere.

(Linda mother transitional)

The parents blamed the problem on the ease of access to their area from other, more deprived areas of Bestwood, whose residents were perceived as being actively involved in crime.

I mean at the moment up here it is getting worse. I mean up all Bestwood they've wrecked all the shops, the shops are closing down, they've put

cameras in front of the shops that are there, so they don't hang around about in front of them they come up here and bring all the trouble up here.

(Dot mother transitional)

The use of bicycles does appear to be influenced by the risk of theft. For those on lower incomes the loss is inevitably more significant and the discussions suggested that in the transitional and working class areas the incidence of theft is higher. Surprisingly this is not borne out for by the crime statistics for the areas, for the middle class suburb shows the highest numbers of bicycles reported missing. When this was queried with the police in the areas concerned it was suggested that there was a high incidence of non-reporting in some areas. This was explained by the fact that the recovery rate for bicycles is extremely low and only those who had the bikes insured bothered to report the matter. The policeman in the Bestwood station said in his opinion few owners in his area had their bikes insured. Lack of insurance and therefore the impossibility of any compensation if the bike is stolen may also be a factor in limiting use.

Car ownership and particularly multiple car ownership within a family can generate different attitude to transportation. Children for whom transport is always readily available are less likely to make use of the bus and will not expect to have to walk. The mothers from the middle class suburb guiltily discussed their reliance on the car:

Yvonne I mean I'm just as much a culprit as anybody, I've got a car sitting outside now, but I don't know...somehow try...to get people to use the car less. It's no use appealing to their better natures...

Sue Yes, I would have walked to school, but its raining, so I'm as guilty as everyone else.

(middle class suburb parents' group)

Their reliance on the car means their children lack experience of other forms of transport and parents then doubt their competence to make unaccompanied journeys. Children from families with limited access to car travel will be more familiar with the alternative modes of transport. Their parents will therefore feel more confident that their children can cope with such journeys alone. The research results showed that children from the middle class areas were much less likely to make longer journeys. For example the destinations which all the children required a bus ride to reach were Central Nottingham and the cinema. The journey was most often made in company of friends and 61% of the children from the working class areas had made such a trip, whilst 36% from the transitional zone had done so and only 10% from the middle class areas.

These figures show a very significant difference between the social groups. The distance the children would be required to travel to reach the centre could have an influence, but if just the working class suburb and the middle class suburb are compared they show the same wide variation. These two areas are a similar distance from the centre of Nottingham - just one bus ride away. The significance of this particular journey has already been discussed and there is obviously a difference in the parenting policy in operation. The working class parents demonstrate more faith in their children's competence than the parents from the middle class areas. The teachers from the schools concerned were not surprised at this difference. The headteacher from Henry Whipple described his pupils as "*very street wise*" and said most were "*more than able to take care of themselves*". Valentine (1997a) noted a less protectionist local parenting culture in the metropolitan local authority housing area, which was of concern to some parents who felt it invested a greater level of competence than they understood their children to have. The parents I talked to from all the schools all talked of being protectionist in their parenting. These groups were perhaps not representative of the parents as a whole since they were made up from volunteers who were prepared to come and discuss child safety. It is likely they would be parents who were already concerned about the issue and more likely to belong to the 40% of working class parents who did not allow their children to travel into Nottingham unaccompanied.

This early advantage of the working class youth in gaining knowledge and confidence of the central entertainment area may be significant in later class related confrontations among young people. Watt and Stenson (1998) reported that the middle class male youths they interviewed reported they had to take security measures in relation to fears about intimidation from the working class 'kevs'. The earlier occupation of the streets suggests a notion of working class ownership and the late arriving middle class youths are seen as challengers to this. The lack of experience of the latter increases their vulnerability and so they feel '*wary about moving around town*' (Watt and Stenson 1998).

The transitional area in the study could be said to have similar characteristics to the area of affluent workers in Luton studied by Goldthorpe et al. They concluded that, whilst most workers in the group retained their working class cultural roots, there was convergence with the middle class in one respect. This was the move towards a home-centred, 'privatised' life style, socialising with their immediate family. The focus on the family implies a more child-centred relationship with their offspring, which it has been argued (James and Prout 1990)

has been influential in the increasingly protectionist attitudes of parents. Thirty-six percent of the children in this group had visited the centre of Nottingham with friends, halfway between the other two results. More parents in this group are containing their children within the local area than in the nearby working class school, but there are still a significant group operating a more lenient policy consistent with their roots.

The granting of licences to go into Nottingham demonstrates a virtually united approach from middle class parents. They do not allow their children to travel outside the local area unaccompanied at this age. The working class parents show a wider range of behaviour with some operating in a highly protective manner, whilst some allow their children considerably more freedom. This was also shown in the responses to the questions dealing with autonomy of mobility. The children from the working class areas were marginally more able to make their own decisions about going out. Only 3% of the middle class children said they would 'just go' without letting anyone know compared to 13% and 19% of the working class and transitional children respectively. For those that made longer journeys all the middle class children said they would require permission, whilst 24% of the working class children felt they were just required to inform someone. Hillman et al (1990) imply that car ownership is more influential than class in the granting of licences but the cultural attitudes to parenting within a group does appear to play a part. The influence of peers on children and parents is an issue which will be explored further in other chapters.

Many inner city and the poorer working class suburbs are perceived as places of high risk. The physical surroundings give clues as to the levels of incivility experienced in the area. Vandalism and graffiti, littered streets and unkempt buildings are all symbols which are 'read' and conclusions then drawn about the inherent risk level (Maxfield 1984). The areas in which two of the schools were located contained many indications of wanton destruction and negligence. The stories the children and parents from the areas told demonstrated the kind of experiences they confronted in their daily lives.

They just nick everything, burn loads of stuff down, nick tellies.

Anthony Sharp got broken into by a car, ram raided.

It's like my Dad says "Bumps in the road are made for joyriders" They love them. They jump over and crash into other cars.

We had somebody arrested in the front garden. He was waving his arms around and somebody had to sit on top of him he were that violent.

There is two derelict garages and you have got needles all over the place.

(Parents and children inner city)

These people were kicking in our door and my dad went out and they beat him up and now he's got a broken arm.

And the police car pulled into the middle of the road and while the police were chasing the joy rider, the people on the road smashed the police car.

I mean there is raids on the estate and all sorts...

Every day - on your street mostly.

...yeah, I mean you can be in bed at seven o'clock in the morning and the next minute you look out of the bedroom window and somebody's house has been raided for drugs. Its awful.

(Parents and children working class suburb)

The children from the middle class areas had no such stories. They talked of stolen bikes and one or two had been burgled, but they had little experience of the type of behaviour described in the quotes.

Despite the differences in the environments the attitudes of the children to going out alone was remarkably similar. In all three areas very few children said they actively disliked doing so, approximately 10% in each area. Of the rest 40 % in all the areas said they enjoyed it, the others, half all the children, that they 'didn't mind'. It might be expected that children from the areas reporting more social disorder would be more fearful of going out alone. It is significant that so few children said they actually disliked going out alone and it suggests that in each area the children have developed strategies to cope with any problems they may encounter. Such strategies are highly significant factors in children's potential mobility and will be considered in depth in the other chapters.

Gender

Hillman et al wrote in 1990:

There are marked differences in the independent mobility and pattern of travel of junior boys and girls ...without exception junior boys enjoy far more independence than junior girls. This can be seen in relation to each of the 'licence holding' variables that we examine.

(Hillman 1990:30)

Studies of children's mobility have observed that boys are allowed a wider range and are required to conform to a more flexible set of rules than girls (Hart 1979, van Vliet 1983, Bjorklid 1985, Matthews 1987, Katz 1993, Pugh 1996). Reasons given in the earlier studies suggest that girls were considered more vulnerable than boys, less able to defend themselves against assailants and they were also expected to be at home in order to help with domestic chores (Hart 1979, Newson and Newson 1977). As the feminist debate gathered pace in the 1960s and 1970s the gendered behaviour felt to be socialising girls to specific roles was challenged (Oakley 1976, Sharpe 1976). These issues were not merely addressed in academic circles but became part of a wider public debate concerning the role of women in society. The parents of the children in the study cannot but be aware of the issues and the children themselves were highly sensitive to questions which they felt contained a 'sexist' dimension. The following extract demonstrates the difficulties one group had when discussing the issue of female vulnerability. At the start they demonstrate extreme indignation at the idea of discrimination between the sexes but the conversation develops in confused and contradictory manner as stereotypes are introduced and refuted by different members of the group.

PP Boys and girls... there is a difference?

(Indignant cries) Pippa & Jenna That's discrimination!

PP Hang on, do you think there is a difference in the way some parents, not necessarily yours, a difference in the way they treat boys and girls.

Jenny Maybe they have to because there are rapists out there.

Nick Perhaps it's they think the boys can beat them up.

Paul It's so sexist though.

All I know.

Nick Girls can do judo.

Jenny There are rapists out there.

Neil There was one girl in the woods, she was walking alone in the woods.

Jenny Its always girls isn't it.

PP Well yes, but do you realise that when you were talking in class about being mugged in Nottingham, everybody mentioned was a boy that had been mugged. I didn't hear anybody mention a girl and if you look at the crime figures it's the boys that are mugged more than girls.¹³

Jenny But not rape.

PP What about you boys, do you think the girls are protected more, are allowed to do less?

Jenna I don't think so.

Jenny Well the girls are protected more because...

¹³ Nottingham Constabulary victim statistics for 1995/7 for robberies on children 9-12: female 26 male 236.

- Pippa* Girls are protected more because they are not as careful as boys.
- PP* Do you think so?
- Pippa* Well the boys know how to fight don't they? And we don't go around...
- Neil* I don't walk around with knives!
- Paul* Yes but girls can do judo...
- Nick* My sister's got a belt in judo.
- Neil* What's judo got to do with it Paul?
- Nick* Self defence.
- Pippa* The boys go round fighting in the playground, just play fighting, we don't do that do we? Because we're girls.
- Paul* Excuse me I do not do play fights.
- Jenny* It's easier to just drive past a girl in a car and just grab a girl in a car because boys will fight.
- Pippa* Boys will fight back. The girls will just scream.
(village children's group)

The group was aware that specific threats to the female exist and found it difficult to disentangle this from discrimination on the basis of gender. The male stereotyping was forcefully objected to by Paul and shows for him at least there was no pressure to maintain a macho image. Several levels of appreciation of the debate are represented and this conversation show just how confusing a business gender is for children today.

Most of the parents felt that the maturity and competence of the child were the most important influences on their decisions but they too found it difficult to disregard issues of gender.

- Yvonne* She's always been mature, she's always been more sensible than her (brother)
- PP* So if anything she's done more than your son whereas quite often people seem more protective of their daughters than their sons.
- Sue* I've got a daughter of seven.. not at that.. I mean she's goes out on her bike but only outside the house.
- Viv* I'm glad I haven't got girls. Another thing to worry about.
- Sue* Her Grandma can have her when she becomes a teenager!
(middle class suburb parents' group)

Yvonne's comment echoes findings in Valentine's (1997a) work when she suggested that:

The evidence of this research however is that parents are equally concerned for their sons' and daughters' safety but whereas daughters (and girls in general) were commonly described as sensible, logical and therefore responsible enough to manage their own safety, boys were commonly represented as easily led, irrational, slow to mature and

consequently less able of negotiating their own safety than girls.
(Valentine 1997a: 71)

This view was not shared by all the parents I spoke to. Several felt that it was necessary to take a more protective stance with their daughters than with their sons.

I've got a son aged twelve, he's a big boy for his age, he's always been a big boy, he's looked older than he is, but I let him do far more than I let Kate, I don't know why 'cos I try to treat them equally, but I just didn't feel so concerned for Adam as I do for Kate.
(Sally mother transitional)

We were talking about the Open Space and we would never let a girl go there on her own.
(Judith mother village)

The children also showed that they were aware that they were treated differently on the basis of gender but appreciated the rationale for this as they accepted the greater vulnerability of girls. Jo-Anne's comments illustrate this:

I've got a brother and he's in the same class as me and he's allowed out more than I am. It's because, my Mum always says its because I'm a girl ... She says anything can happen to girls but can't happen to them.
(Jo-Anne working class suburbs)

For some of the children the traditional roles observed by the writers in the 1960s and 1970s were still part of their lives. Cindy, a very lively, chatty and friendly young 'lady' from the working class suburb, made this rather poignant comment:

My brother does more things than me because I normally stay in and help my Mum clean up and that.... Don't you?
(Cindy working class suburb)

Her question received puzzled looks and shakes of the head from the other girls. It would appear that not in all homes were such gendered expectations considered the norm.

The perceived greater vulnerability of girls was an issue with all the groups. The idea of discrimination on the basis of gender was identified and heatedly contested by the children from the two middle class groups. For them it was a recognisable discourse and one they had strong views about. The children from the other schools did not demonstrate a similar response but did talk of 'fairness' of treatment.

Previous studies had noted significant differences between boys and girls in the licenses granted for particular activities. In the Hillman et al study, although virtually all the children owned bikes, one third of the boys were allowed to use them on the road compared to one in nine of the girls (Hillman et al 1990: 32). A similar pattern was evident in this research. Although the boys and girls had equal ownership of bicycles, more of the boys claimed to be allowed to travel further. Forty-two percent of the boys said they were allowed to ride outside their local area compared to 28% of the girls. Fifteen of the boys said they had ridden into the centre of Nottingham compared with only two of the girls. Even in the village where there was more use made of bicycles than in any other area, when the figures were broken down on the basis of gender it became obvious that more of the boys enjoyed this privilege.

Girls did make some use of their bikes. They did not consider the use of cycles to be 'uncool' or unfeminine. In fact a local cycle store reported that it sold more bikes to girls between the ages of 7-11 than to boys. (For age 13+ the numbers dropped to one ladies' bike to 20 men's as cycling became less practical - skirts and heels - and uncool).¹⁴ The difference seems to lie in the adventurous use of the bike. Girls were allowed to make use of their bikes as a means of transport to get them from A to B. Boys were more likely to use it as a means to explore, even as an effective method by which to transgress boundaries as Paul confided in one group:

- PP* When you went to the airport Paul, how did you get there?
Paul Cycled. I went to the airport, I was just going to the park but I decided to go to the airport, just to see what it was like.
PP Did you tell anyone you were going?
Paul No, not till now.
PP Did you tell them afterwards?
Paul Nope.
PP So you were being a bit....
Paul I knew if I told them then I would get told off.
 (village children's group)

Gary had made use of his bike to visit a classmate who had moved house and now lived quite a distance away:

- Gary* The furthest I have been (by bike) is Chantelle's house but she weren't in. I got a flat tyre and had to walk all the way back up.
Lucy When she lived down Egypt Road?

¹⁴ Communication with the Manager of Graham Reads Cycles, Netherfield, Nottingham.

*Gary No. where she lives now... I know roughly where she lives and that's where I got a flat tyre.
(inner city children's group)*

I had previously conducted a study of mobility in two of the areas used for this research and the results of that showed a significant difference in the licence holding of boys and girls. The boys were more likely to be allowed to make journeys, use their bike or travel alone (Pugh 1996). The more recent results show that the numbers of boys and girls from all the areas allowed to make a *particular journey* are remarkably similar. That is, girls are now just as likely as boys to be allowed to travel to school, the shops, a friends house or even into the centre of Nottingham. There was, however, an overall decline in the percentage allowed to make such journeys. The difference between the genders is the likelihood that they will make the journey alone or use their bike as a means of transport. In these respects the boys still come out ahead. Valentine (1997a) suggests that parents may now be holding a more complex and contradictory attitude to children's safety than earlier studies suggested. Whilst some still held a 'traditional' view that girls are more vulnerable to sexual attack, half the parents in her study considered all children to be equally at risk of abduction. This would be consistent with this research. The equalising of licences suggests the increased concern of some parents for their sons whilst other parents implement a more lenient regime. Hart's study of children's activities suggested that boys visited a wider range of places than girls did and comments from the discussions in this study supported this. Girls talked of more purposeful journeys to specific destinations: the shops, friends or relatives houses' or the swimming pool. The boys also made such trips but they also talked of 'just going out'. As Neil put it:

*My Mum says like if she sees me being bored in the middle of summer, instead of seeing me bored she would say something like "Go and call on a few friends or go down the park" and she wouldn't mind me getting into a little trouble because... Because I'm an ordinary boy.
(Neil village)*

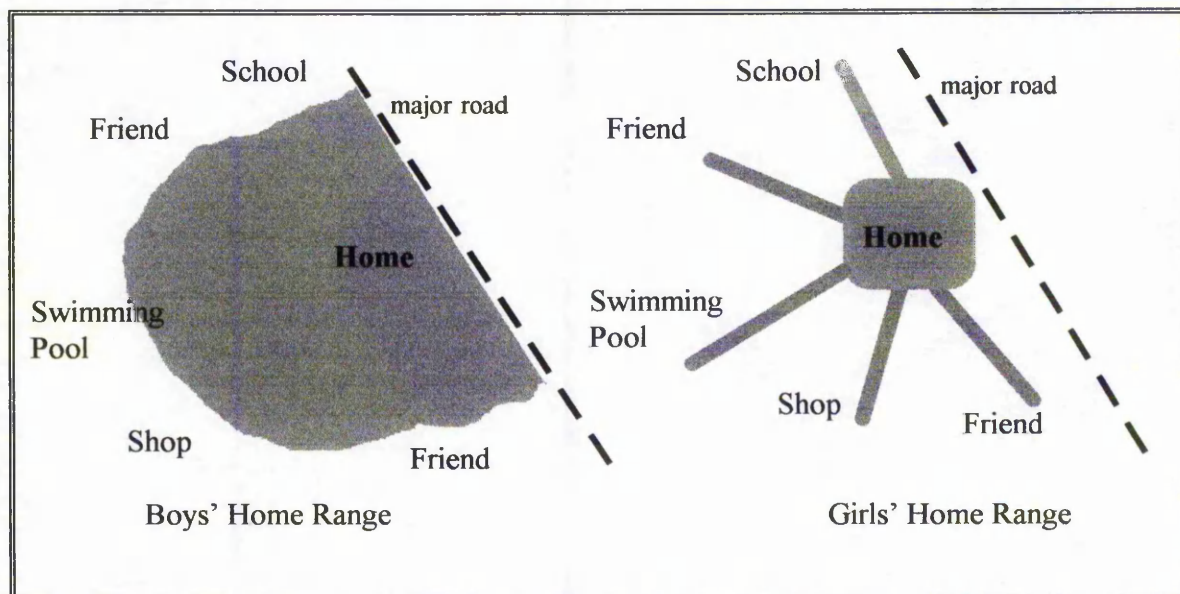


Diagram 2. Diagrammatic representation of the gendered nature of home ranges.

A model may be produced representing this gender difference in mobility: the girls' range starfish like with tentacles radiating out from the home base to a variety of destinations, the boys' an area bounded by specified boundaries (see Diagram 2).

The response to one question from the girls from the working class area produced a result different to that of the other groups. Almost all of them, over 90% were allowed to walk to the nearest shop by themselves, even though many did not walk to school or their friends alone. The girls from the other areas and the boys recorded between 50-65%. In the discussions several of the girls in this group mentioned going to the shops to "get stuff for my Mum". The expectation that girls might be expected to assist their mother in household duties has already been considered. Running errands to the local shop would appear to be one of the duties girls are expected to perform in working class households. Ward (1978) suggested that running an errand allowed the girls the opportunity to escape from the house and offered potential opportunity to meet with friends. Just as parents were prepared to allow their children to walk to school alone when the need arose, they appear to overcome their reluctance to allow children out on their own when it is useful to do so.

It is apparent that some boys may be allowed to make use of their lived environment in a different way from girls, however, they are exposed to the same representations of the 'outside' as a dangerous place. In a study of attitudes to danger, King et al.(1989) found that

older groups of boys, 11-13 and 14-16, exhibited a macho attitude to suggestions of danger, but boys of a younger age, 7-10, and girls were more likely to admit being afraid. The boys I talked to were certainly prepared to admit the environment was a risky place but they did not consider the risk sufficient to modify their behaviour in any way. They had a more positive attitude to going out alone than the girls, 45% saying they enjoyed it compared with 30% of the girls. Three quarters of the boys expressed a wish to be allowed to go further compared with half of the girls.

When the discussion concerned the risks that they might encounter when they were out alone, the boys were more positive about their ability to cope with the situation:

Mark *Yeah, like say if you cycling along the pavement and you turn into that road then they just walk where you're going to turn.*

PP *Do you get really worried about that?*

Mark *No.*

(village children's group)

Karl *At night they(teenagers) did but you were safe in the day.*

Kieran *I could go there anyway because I know them all.*

(transitional children's group)

Kieran was confident about mixing with the older youth that others saw as threatening. Many of the girls felt more intimidated by their confrontations with teenagers. These were the 'strangers' they felt most threatened by not the hypothetical kidnapper or rapist of the "stranger danger" publicity. This is a significant issue and will be considered further in the next chapter.

The girls from the middle class areas talked of their unease when walking past groups of children from the secondary schools.

Jenny *When I walk home with Michaela there are some big people who walk down the road, people in bunches and you see them, people who are out of the ordinary and you just think what are they up to...*

Michelle *What's going to happen.*

Jenny *What's going to happen yeah.*

PP *But none of you have had any experiences where they have done anything to or you had to get help?.*

Both *No.*

(middle class suburb children's group)

When we go to school near the shops there's these teenagers ready to go to school. Me and Fiona, we're always nervous and we have to go through them, in and out and one time we went through we were nearly at the end of the queue and one of them said "Boo" and they were laughing and I thought "What weirdos."

(Lucy village)

The girls from the working class and transitional areas reported experiences of more direct harassment.

Once me and my cousin, Emma, Gemma and Jodie, once this boy went "Why don't you get down from this climbing frame and come and fight". And my cousin she thinks she's hard she likes fighting a lot and she goes "Why should I 'cos you know I'd beat you up" and he goes "Do you want me to get my dog 'cos he likes ginger nuts" 'cos she's got ginger hair and she said "Go on if you dare" and it was a massive dog and it was barking at us and everything and he tried to jump up the slide.

(Sapphire inner City)

When I went to Ken Martins with my Mum and my Mum's friend Donna, I call her me Aunty Donna, a group of lads, when me Mum was having a shower, a group of lads came up and tried to push me into the water.

(Joanna transitional)

And we were going down me and David 'cos my Mum wanted some electricity cards, and this lad he didn't want people to go in and he made up a reason that we couldn't go in cos we had our roller blades on and we had our shoes but he kept pushing and he wouldn't let us in and we ended up walking down to the other shop where they sell drugs and everything, And umm...

(Sarah transitional)

And there was these youths hanging around and we know who they are and every time they come round they always chase us like.

(Kay working class suburb)

The experiences of the girls in these areas may present more of a threat, but within the cultural context of their own neighbourhoods all the girls were intimidated at times by their contact with older youths. The effect for nearly all the groups was that the girls were less enthusiastic about going out alone and fewer were interested in going further beyond their present range. The one group that was an exception to this was the girls from the middle class suburbs, with 82% wishing that they could go further. Of all the sub groups this was the one which was most constrained. Only a very few were allowed to go anywhere alone and none had licence to go on longer journeys such as to the centre of Nottingham or the cinema - even with friends.

Conclusion

In summary children are being increasingly more restricted in their independent mobility. Parents see this as regretful but necessary. It would be wrong, however, to conclude that it is only the perceived increase in risk that has caused this. It has been shown that various environmental, social and cultural pressures also play a part in this process.

Children experience different forms of containment depending on their lived environment and socio-economic background. The children in the village setting have freedom within their immediate environment but are less likely to venture out outside it. The children in the middle class suburbs are likely to have the most limited lifestyle. The children in the working class suburbs and inner city are most likely to have greater freedom.

Girls and boys continue to have different access to the environment, although there have been changes in recent times. Factors influential in these changes have been the children's demand for equal opportunity and a shift in the parental belief that girls are more vulnerable than boys. However the overall effect has been to increase the containment of boys to match that of girls rather than allow the girls to do what the boys have done in the past. Some comments indicate that parents are assessing their children on grounds of responsibility and maturity when considering the independence they may be allowed and girls are often thought more sensible than boys. There remain, though, some parents who exercise a more traditional approach, allowing their 'more adventurous' boys freedom to explore their environment that they would not grant to their daughters.

A complex picture emerges of traditional parenting patterns alongside a less gendered approach to decision making but dominated by ever increasing fears for children's safety. The result is a wide range of culturally influenced sets of regulations that the children have to negotiate their way through. The next chapter will explore the perceptions of dangers in the environment, which are influential in the formation of parental policy and which also impact upon the children's sense of security.

Chapter Four

If You Go Out of the House Today....

Perceptions of Danger

This chapter explores the particular fears that are seen as causes for concern by both children and their parents and considers how they are located within the environment. It is concerned with the risk as perceived by the children and their parents rather than the probability of risk as interpreted from statistical information. It will examine how the children articulate their ability to negotiate their own safety in the environment at the same time showing an appreciation of potential danger and parental concern. It demonstrates that parents do not appear to share their children's confidence and demonstrate a universal anxiety about allowing their children out at all.

Children are most at risk in their own home, where they may be harmed by people they know (Elliot 1989, Cream, 1993, Kitzinger 1990) or suffer accidental injury (Garling and Vaalsiner 1984, Rice, Roberts, Smith and Bryce, 1994, Roberts, Smith and Bryce 1995). Despite this, most of parents' fears for their children are located outside the home, with the home perceived as the haven of safety that children should be confined to if at all possible (Blakely 1994, Valentine 1997b). When the children are out of the home environment they are exposed to dangers over which the parents feel they have little control. Danger from traffic and fear of some form of attack on the child are perceived as the greatest threats to children's safety (Sell 1985, Hillman et al 1990, McNeish and Roberts 1995, Pugh 1996, Valentine 1996a 1997b). In 1990, Hillman, Adams and Whitelegg conducted surveys in a variety of settings in England which showed the greatest cause of parental concern for junior age children was the traffic. Nearly half the parents in their study gave fear of traffic danger as the reason they would not allow their child to walk home from school.¹⁵ Child mortality statistics confirm that, in the public space, motor traffic represents the biggest risk to a child's life, and has done so for most of this century (see Table 4). This decade has seen parents' main concern about their children's safety shifting from *worry* about traffic to *fear* about the threat of 'others', despite the fact that the number of children murdered by a

¹⁵ One False Move 1994:24.

	Age 5-9		Age 10-14		Total	
	Pedestrian	Homicide	Pedestrian	Homicide	Pedestrian	Homicide
1993	52	4	51	7	103	11
1994	53	10	57	5	110	15
1995	26	17	44	7	70	24
1996	30	13	51	10	81	26

Table 4. Child mortality statistics for death as a pedestrian in a traffic accident and death by homicide. The homicide statistics include children who died at the hands of their parents which account for the majority of child killings.

Source: Mortality Statistics 1993-6, Childhood, Infant and Perinatal, Government Statistical Service.

stranger has remained almost constant over the period and the numbers have been extremely small (Valentine 1997b, Pugh 1996, McNeish and Roberts 1995). The words 'worry' and 'fear' have been chosen with care as the way in which these threats are felt and expressed by both the children and their parents will be shown to differ. In the recent studies, where children have been involved, they have echoed their parents anxieties about 'stranger danger' (Pugh 1996, Valentine 1997b). Evidence from this research will demonstrate that in a few cases the fear is founded or reinforced through the children's own experience, but the stories of most other children suggested they had learned their fear from agencies around them.

Past research into the perception of danger has most often used questionnaires which have asked participants to rank a list of possible threats (Hillman et al 1990, Tranter and Whitelegg 1994). Such research makes *a priori* assumptions about those things that are perceived as dangerous in order to offer participants examples to rank. An alternative would be to use open-ended questions - 'What do you think are the dangers you face when you go out?' This can be problematic if the respondents are young children for it would discriminate against children with poor writing skills. In this research I therefore chose not to raise the issue of the children's perceptions of danger in the questionnaires and instead used the focus groups to investigate their concerns. During the discussions when asked about their worries when out alone, the children showed a pre-occupation with 'others' and 'strangers'. This response came as a result of open-ended questions in the groups such as 'Why do you think your parents will not let you go further?' or 'What problems do you have when you go out alone?'

From the evidence of the children's stories, the popular representation of 'stranger danger' as a predatory lone male did not often match the children's lived experience. Whilst they demonstrated familiarity with the 'stranger danger' discourse and discussed it with me, their talk of encounters with intimidating others centred on what would, from an adultist perspective, be labelled bullying. Most of the intimidating others they had encountered were other children and teenagers. I therefore made a distinction between the way children perceived the threat of the imagined other and the way they experienced and coped with others in their everyday lives. The first section of this chapter will examine these ideas through a critical analysis of the popular 'stranger danger' discourse and the way this relates to the children's perception of strangers. It will then go on to also consider how children perceive and respond to other dangers they encounter in the public space.

The Imagined Other

'You don't know what they will do to you'

I first heard the term 'stranger danger' ten years ago when the Nottinghamshire Police conducted an education campaign in primary schools. The local policeman talked to all the children. They were given packs to take home which included a booklet for parents and badges showing the shadowy figure of a lurking male and bearing the motto 'Beware Stranger Danger'.¹⁶ The term now stands alongside 'Road Safety' and 'The Green Cross Code' as signifying the codification of appropriate rules for children's behaviour. The approach has been criticised for the lack of real information given the children (Kitzinger 1990) and parents have considered it confusing and flawed. As Sue, a mother in the rural area, commented:

*I mean I bring the children up to not speak to strangers but equally you are not rude to an adult and where do you draw the line if somebody stops and says 'Where is so-and-so?' They are actually going to be able to direct them to that place and you say 'Don't go near the car' and it's one of those things.
(Sue mother village)*

Predating 'stranger danger' was the warning 'Don't take sweets from a stranger' and children were 'prepared' for the possibility of being enticed away with confectionery. This

¹⁶ Current educational literature and videos are distributed through Kidscape under the title 'Keep yourself Safe' and include promotion of the Never, Never Club.

Children beware – Stranger Danger

AND, now one for the children. – Stranger Danger. – Do you know what a stranger is? Well I would describe a stranger as somebody who you don't know. Could a stranger be a man? Could a stranger be a woman? Could a stranger be a teenager? Or could a stranger be someone who is just a little bit older than you are, a boy or a girl?

Well the answer to all these questions is Yes. A stranger is someone who you don't know, anybody, young or old, man or woman.

There is a simple message that you have to remember:-

SAY NO TO STRANGERS.

If a stranger asks you "Would you like a ride in my car? What would you say? If a stranger asks "Would you like some sweets or would you like to come with me to see some kittens or puppies?" What would you say? Your answer should always be NO!

REMEMBER SAY NO TO STRANGERS.

So now that you know what a stranger is and what you should say if you are approached by a stranger, let's go on a little bit further. Supposing you're waiting outside school for mum or dad to collect you and perhaps they are a little bit late, what would you do if a stranger said to you that he or she would take you home.

What would you say?

SAY NO TO STRANGERS

Of course you would know what to do wouldn't you? You could go back



into school and explain to a teacher that your mum or dad had not come to collect you and they would then arrange to get you home safe.

Supposing you are in the town or somewhere else with mum and dad or someone else who is looking after you, and you get separated from them, you suddenly find yourself alone and lost. What would you do?

REMEMBER SAY NO TO STRANGERS.

But what could you do!

Well how about going into the nearest shop and telling a shopkeeper

or another member of the shop staff what's happened. You can identify people who work in shops most times because they wear badges or uniforms. If it's a big shop with lots of people serving customers, then I am sure this would be the right thing to do, and you would be safe. You would soon be reunited with mum and dad.

Approached

So what would you do if you were approached by a stranger, who would you tell? Well of course, you would tell mum or dad, or another member of the family or you could tell a policeman or a teacher, or even a neighbour. Make sure you tell someone, straight away and don't be afraid to say exactly what happened, especially if someone wanted you to do something that you didn't want to do!

REMEMBER SAY NO TO STRANGERS.

Remember these points and keep safe. Always

1. Let mum or dad know where you are going. Where you are playing and who you are with.
2. Remember to play in groups with friends, in places where you can easily be seen.
3. Never play in out of the way places on your own.
4. If mum and dad say you must be home for a certain time - don't be late. Be Safe.

REMEMBER SAY NO TO

STRANGERS.

Parents if you would like me to take the stranger danger message further, then I have an excellent video and will gladly show it to groups of young children. Please contact me at the West Bridgford Police Station 945 5999. – Pc Clare.

BOOST your business and protect a child for £25.

Wot's Wot!?, West Bridgford Police and The Crime Prevention Panel are hoping to team up shortly with Rushcliffe Borough Council with a view to fixing colourful, triangular, metal signs to the railings or gates of every children's play area in West Bridgford. These signs made by the Royal British Legion cost just under £25 each including VAT and it will almost certainly be possible to have a small, engraved plaque attached to them, inscribed with the name of the group, business or organisation who donated the cash for them. Photos of all those concerned will appear in a future issue of *Wot's Wot!?*

So if your company, firm or group would like some extra publicity as well as the chance maybe to prevent a local child from having an unpleasant experience or even worse, then please contact Cassie on 0115 981 6376 as soon as possible.

We should need approximately 8-10 signs and we've already had some interest shown.

Figure 3. Excerpt from 'Whatswot'.
Rushcliffe Local Newspaper.

approach proved too simplistic, as any potential child molester would learn to avoid the 'Smartie' approach. Sue's example illustrates a situation where the stranger who asks directions actually empowers the child by acknowledging greater local knowledge. Such an approach appears plausible to the child and in fact usually is genuine. The 'stranger danger' discourse has resulted in warnings that are now so eclectic that children are told to consider all unknown adults as threatening and adults are discouraged from any contact with children they do not know. The child feels confused about which adults are to be trusted, which to be feared and how to differentiate between the two.

Figure 3 shows extracts from an article that appeared in a local magazine written by the local police and obviously addressed to children. The great emphasis placed on the threat from the unknown stranger deflects from the more likely site of abuse which is the home. The message to the child in the article is that people 'known' are always to be trusted, but those involved in child welfare know this is not true. P.C. Clare suggests people in working in shops can be turned to if they require help and people in uniforms and wearing badges are

trustworthy. Such categorisation places some groups above suspicion and this trust can be made use of. Kevin, from the transitional suburbs, told of a situation he had encountered:

I seen this strange man walking, Miss, walking like, and this lady come with her dog came up and said " Stay by me 'cos I think that strange man is going to do something." So we went over.
(Kevin transitional)

Kevin and his friend placed their trust in the woman, but what if it were she who was the potential miscreant, making use of the 'stranger danger' myth? Warning children about particular categories of people can be a no win situation. It is more effective to warn of unusual behaviour but this would necessitate confronting in more specific terms the nature of the threat. The apparent reluctance to do this is demonstrated in the publicity material intended to help children deal with the threat of the others.

*Think Bubble*¹⁷ is a package produced by the Home Office as a teaching aid. The pack contains video, tapes and teacher's notes (see excerpt page 111). The story line tells the children not to play with strangers, not to take sweets or go in a car with someone they do not know. It clearly explains that you cannot tell who is a bad person by their appearance, but it does not address *why* they should not go or *in what way* the person might be 'bad'. The message is unconvincing as it presents no clear reason why the child should behave in a particular way but creates a climate of fear of some unknown threat connected to the 'unknownness' of the stranger. The second story on the tape tells of two cartoon children getting lost. They are told to find a stranger 'they trust' to help them. The first problem is they are not told how they are to identify this trustworthy adult. Secondly, even if they knew whom to trust a lost child may not always have access to such a person. He or she may have to seek help from one of the strangers they have been warned so forcefully to stay away from.

The fourth story of the set deals with potential sexual abuse. Set in a swimming pool, the dialogue is abrupt and puzzling.

Man Hello Michael
Michael Hello Mr Brown (it is established Michael knows the man)
Man Do you want me to help you on the slide? Can I give you a big hug? It would be our little secret' (in the pool? with his mother sitting nearby?)

¹⁷ *Think Bubble*. Issued by the Home Office 1992. A pack including video and handouts for police use in school.

STORY ONE

TOYS

**THINK BUBBLE
SHOWS THE WAY**

Michael, Annie and Rheem are having fun in the adventure playground. Rheem is approached by a man who asks him to come and play football away from the other children. He is about to go with the man when Think Bubble appears. Rheem doesn't realise that he is in a potentially dangerous situation because the man "looks ordinary – he doesn't look like a bad person." Think Bubble freezes the action to explore Rheem's perception of what a 'bad' person looks like. He tells Rheem that "badness is on the inside, not the outside" and that "you can't tell who's nice and who's nasty just by looking at them." Think Bubble then advises Rheem that if someone he doesn't know asks him to do something – or even just wants to talk to him – he should say 'NO!' and quickly walk away.

In the second part of the story, Annie is approached by a man in a car and he offers her some sweets. Think Bubble appears and repeats the advice just given to Rheem. Annie is reminded that she should say 'NO!' and go and tell her mum.



STORY TWO

**THINK BUBBLE
SAVES THE DAY**

Michael is in a shopping centre with his dad and sister Annie. He is distracted by a toy-shop window display and finds himself alone. Michael starts to panic – he doesn't know what to do. Think Bubble appears and tells Michael that if he gets lost or finds himself alone, he must find and tell a grown-up he can trust (a shop assistant or someone behind a cash till, a policeman/security guard or a woman with children). Michael is soon reunited with his dad and Annie.

In the second part of this story, Rheem is waiting for his mum outside school. She is late and Rheem is about to start walking home on his own when Think Bubble appears. He tells Rheem "When you find you're on your own, never wander off alone." Rheem asks Think Bubble what he should do and is told that he should go back into school and tell a teacher. Rheem's mum soon arrives to take him home.

The odd scenario does not give a clear picture of Mr. Brown's intentions. Most children, used to physical demonstrations of affection would fail to understand that the situation held any threat. There are male adults with whom it is normal to share physical affection. Fathers, step-fathers and other relations are not mentioned and yet they are most often the perpetrators of abuse. The tape goes on to tell the child 'If someone tries to touch your body in a way you don't like, say no, get away quickly', making the assumption that children will always dislike intimate touching. A child in a close relationship with an adult who then initiates sexual activity may be responsive. Children will be empowered to resist abuse only if it is made clear to them what it is, that such behaviour is unacceptable and is always the responsibility of the initiating adult (Maher 1989, Stainton-Rogers et al 1989, Kitzinger 1990).

A stranger making unusual suggestions is far more likely to be greeted with suspicion by young people and yet it is the stranger that they are continually warned against. A commercially produced video 'Say no to Strangers' continually emphasises the stranger aspect but slips in a single brief comment indicating people the children know may also be suspect. In it, three scenarios are played out with three pigs as the potential victims and a wolf as the villain trying to abduct them. Since no motivation is given for the wolf's actions one wonders if the very young children this video is aimed at will conclude that 'stranger danger' is the threat of being eaten! Such evasive treatment of the subject stems from the reluctance to address issues considered inappropriate for such young children. It is inappropriate to sully their innocence until absolutely necessary. This is at odds with a society which is highly engaged with sexuality in a commercial and entertainment context. The next chapter will consider the impact of these issues on the construction of the 'stranger danger' discourse.

The fears of the children are centred on the way they perceive the stranger. If the threat is not clearly explained to them, its unspoken nature may make it seem even more menacing. What does 'stranger danger' actually mean to children and parents? The children in the focus groups used a wide variety of terms to describe the threat from strangers:

Take me away

Slugged me

Take my things (possessions) off me

If I was taken

There are rapists out there

People that grab you

Pick you up in a car

Beat up

Kidnapped × 2

Anything could happen

Don't know what they might do to you

Loads of kids have been going missing

A man with only a coat on, nothing on underneath.

Just two of the 60 children made reference to the threat in explicitly sexual terms, one mentioning rapists and the other talking of a flasher. Three used terms relating to violence or theft. Most used a range of euphemisms about being 'taken', 'got' or 'grabbed', expressions suggesting that somebody else is taking possession of the victim but not specifying the purpose. An adult would assume possible violence, theft, and/or sexual assault, and all these may be implied by the children's language, but it is possible that some of the children were unclear as to the exact nature of the threat. What is clear is that they understand that the threat would be from someone who could overpower and control them.

Jeni Harden, conducting research on risk as part of the 'Children 5-16: Growing in the 21st Century' programme, has found children in the 9-12 age range unable or reluctant to specify the nature of the risk they face from strangers.¹⁸ They particularly did not wish to discuss sexual risk. This is not surprising when adults involved with children appear inhibited about discussing the specific nature of the threat and pass on to children uncertainty and embarrassment particularly about its possible sexual nature.

This coyness was apparent in articles, educational campaigns and in the way the parents in the focus groups spoke of the problem. The parents talked about 'abduction' 'taking him away' and 'men trying to drag them into cars'. Only one participant, Dot from the transitional area, used a sexually explicit term:

There is more violence, more rape and everything else than when I was little.

(Dot mother transitional)

¹⁸ Personal communication in the early stages of the research.

Parent groups justified differences in the licence allowed to girls and boys because the girls were at greater risk than the boys, the assumption being that girls are subject to greater risk of sexual assault than boys. This does not mean that the boys not considered at risk. Vikki was very concerned about her son Luke:

*I always have and I think rightly or wrongly I'm not sure whether it is right or wrong I've made him aware of that from being very young. That he shouldn't go off and he shouldn't speak to strangers, from a very young age and like I say rightly or wrongly I don't know if I'm right or wrong 'cos sometimes they can be too clingy and not be more independent by a certain age, but I don't know if it is right or wrong but at the time it was right and I feel it was right for him at the age he was for him to be aware that there are strangers about and strangers will go off and take him away or what ever.
(Vikki middle class suburb)*

But whether it was girls or boys the parents were discussing the nature of the risk was rarely spoken. There is a double meaning of the quote from Lucy used in the section heading 'You don't know what they will do to you'. For some children this statement is true in both senses.

The spatial representations of 'stranger danger' are complex. Valentine (1989) demonstrates that for women there were distinct locations such as parks and underpasses where the greatest fear of others was located. Burgess (1995) finds that woodlands hold significant fears of attack, particularly for city dwellers unused to such environments. For the children and the parents in this study the fear appeared to be ubiquitous rather than located in specific places. The media had made both parents and children aware of everyday situations from which children had been snatched or 'last seen'. In this context, locations such as, on the way to the shops, in the local park, their own garden, were mentioned by the groups. Both children and parents felt that unaccompanied children were always vulnerable to this particular danger. Particular locations, mentioned by the children, that were seen as 'hot spots' were associated with known or familiar others rather than strangers as the subsequent section will show. Chapter Three demonstrated that many of the parents saw central Nottingham as a dangerous place. Deconstructing this fear indicated that fear of attack and robbery by strangers was a major factor but parents were also concerned about the traffic, their childrens' lack of familiarity with the place and their inability to negotiate the journeys to and from the city centre.

Problems with the 'stranger danger' approach to keeping safe have been identified. Firstly children may be unsure of the danger they are trying to avoid and certainly lack confidence in discussing it in unambiguous terms. Secondly, the eclectic nature of the warning makes it difficult for children to trust anyone they do not know and, finally, problems arise if the warnings focus on strangers and are directed away from those most likely to harm children. While it is easy to warn children about strangers, it is very difficult to suggest that someone close to them may violate their trust.

Jenny Kitzinger's writing on child abuse suggests that children are denied sexual knowledge to preserve their innocence, an aspect of the construct of childhood innocence considered in Chapter One (Kitzinger 1990). Kitzinger says preserving innocence allows dangers to go unrecognised by the children, whilst knowledge empowers them to respond in an appropriate way. Without the correct knowledge, children, she suggests, are denied the opportunity to develop their own strategies for dealing with potential abusers. This is perhaps particularly applicable when the approaches are made by someone known to the child. A stranger making unusual suggestions is more likely to be greeted with suspicion by young people.

The children I talked to may not have articulated the exact nature of 'stranger danger' but this does not necessarily mean they did not appreciate its meaning. The embarrassed sniggers in one or two of the groups when the subject was raised were an indication that they recognised it has sexual connotations. Whatever their understanding of the term they were still able to describe strategies for dealing with the eventuality. Some children reiterated advice they had been given by their parents, others explained the evasive action they would take (in some cases, had taken) if confronted by unwelcome attention from a stranger. The children demonstrated a self-assurance in their ability to deal with the situation and their specific plans of action and the confidence they exhibited will be discussed in depth in Chapter Seven.

The Known or Familiar Other

Children between 9-11 are nearing a major change in their lives. The switch from primary to secondary school changes their status and involves familiarisation with a new environment, a new way of learning and a new community. It is viewed as exciting by some and frightening by others, but most approach it with a degree of apprehension. Children's apprehension about the community they are about to join can be reflected in their feelings about its members. Inkson (1988) reports many hearsay out-of-school tales of older children 'nicking

your lunch', 'sticking your head down the loo,' 'taking your bags' from children about to make the transfer. She suggests that the credence the children give such stories is part of a psychological coping strategy adopted to avoid facing other concerns such as the wider curriculum. Such a suggestion underestimates the concern they feel. The children in this study frequently mentioned groups of secondary school children, teenagers, youths, or gangs and they were perceived as intimidating, potential bullies who were likely to 'hassle' them. The primary school children were self-conscious in their presence, acutely aware that the teenagers could make them feel uncomfortable and embarrassed.

The power differential between the groups results in the subordinate younger group feeling insecure in the presence of the dominant older youths. The ability of a dominant group to make others feel vulnerable is a well-recognised social phenomenon (Sherif and Sherif 1953). The children talked of a sense of discomfort when they walked past a group of teenagers. I was conscious that I had felt a similar discomfort walking through the male dominated environment of a factory I worked in during one vacation. The children perceived the teenagers as a powerful group who had the potential to humiliate and harass, and were likely to make use of opportunities to impose their superiority. This is exactly how I viewed the factory workers (Oakley 1994).

Actual encounters with older children showed marked differences depending on the nature of the lived environment. The children from the predominately middle class areas encountered very minor harassment:

Andreas *These people kept calling us names and things and we decided not to go to the Boundary Road shops anymore.*

PP *The people calling you names are they...?*

Andreas *They are year tens at the Comp.*

(middle class suburb children's group)

When I walk down to the shops with my friends you see people who you just don't normally see who...just a bit... just don't know what's going to happen so you just move to the side a bit and let them pass and I usually stop talking.

(James middle class suburb)

Keyworth is quite dangerous 'cos the people from Southwolds always meet there and they smoke...

At the school it's so crowded there are thousands and thousands of people, and its quite difficult to find someone, and the cafés are very

squashed so when my sister goes there she thinks it's terrible.
(Sarah village)

Quoted on page 90, Sian and Fiona disliked walking through groups of young people at the bus stop. The teenagers' awareness of the younger children's discomfort is obvious in their response - but yelling "Boo" at them only harms their dignity. Similarly, Sarah's concept of 'terrible' ranks somewhat tame when compared with the children from the working class and transitional area who had experienced more threatening behaviour and some physical attacks.

Yeah, and then they said to me quiet like 'You'd better not tell on us 'cos they were going to steal a C.D.
(Katy transitional)

Lucy And they kicked a ball in my face and it nearly knocked Shannon off the boom when she was sitting on it..

PP Do you think they meant to?

Lucy Yeah, they were kicking it right at us.
(inner city children's group)

..and they get fag ash and make it into wads and they go chasing you all the way round the woods. They try to burn you with fag ash.
(Martin working class suburb)

PP Whereabouts?

Toni At the shops, they hang about the shops.

Jo-Anne They take your money off you.

John If you leave your bike outside then it gets nicked. My cousin's got nicked outside the shop.
(working class suburb children's group)

Even more contrasting were the accounts of the activities of the teenagers in the different lived environments. For the children in the rural area and the middle class suburb the main cause of concern was broken glass in the parks. The most destructive act they described was the breaking of the fence which led to the Open Area in the village. Children from the less affluent areas also mentioned broken glass, but they talked of acts of arson in the parks and one shopping parade had been destroyed by petrol bombs. Michael had seen youths showing off knives they were carrying, Kate and her mother had witnessed drug deals taking place near the shops and Donna's garden shed had been burnt to the ground as a result of arson. Dot's daughter had been present in the local shop when youths had robbed the shopkeeper at knifepoint and Linda's son had been mugged. During the week I was working in the inner city school the nursery section was badly vandalised, windows smashed and panels ripped off

	Violence	Sexual	Robbery
Tollerton Beat	2	0	1
Musters Beat (West Bridgford)	16	0	1
Bestwood Beat	194	16	30
Basford Beat	71	4	10

Table 5. Nottinghamshire Constabulary crime statistics for the beats in which the participant schools lie. The figures are not strictly comparable.¹⁹
Source: Statistics Department, Nottinghamshire Constabulary

the walls. Strict security measures had been installed at the schools located in the working class areas as a result of numerous past incidents of damage and burglary. The experiences of the children are borne out by the crime figures from the Nottingham Constabulary which indicate a higher reported incidence of most types of crime in the Bestwood and New Basford areas where these children lived (see Table 5). The only category where numbers are broadly equal is in bicycle thefts and as has been explained in Chapter Three, in the opinion of the local police this is due to the low level of incidents reported in the working class area.

The children knew that they could encounter groups of teenagers anywhere but they knew of particular locations where it was likely those groups of older children were likely to be present or appear (Matthews et al 1998). As some of the quotes in this section demonstrate, the vicinity of the local comprehensive school was avoided if possible, particularly just before and just after school-time as were bus stops where teenagers gathered en route to school. Some of the local shopping parades were popular hang outs with groups of young people and so were some of the play areas and parks. The children's movements were certainly constrained by their local knowledge which identified these places as locations to avoid. The exclusion of some groups from places within their lived environment by others is a form of territoriality (Sack 1986) and the issue which will be explored further in Chapter Seven.

For all the children, the 'kids from the comp' affected their sense of security when they were out and about. For most of them it was just a sense of discomfort when encountering groups of teenagers for only the children in the suburban working class area reported cases of actual

¹⁹ The police define the beats by area and do not hold records of the population or geographical size of each beat. The figures are therefore not comparable but give some indication of the experience of living within the area.

harm inflicted by the older children. The strength of these feelings highlights the traumatic nature of the transition from primary to secondary education. It must be daunting to face the prospect of being incarcerated all day with the very people you find most intimidating.

The other group that the children reported encountering were individuals in the community that were known, suspected or mythologised to be threatening, the kind of characters that have always inhabited children's lived environment. These characters may have never been seen and the fear becomes located in a particular place where they are thought to be. My children when young had labelled a small cottage at the end of strip of woodland, 'the witches' cottage', and always ran quickly past, even though they had never laid eyes on its inhabitants. Hart (1979) explained *'It is no doubt through ancient stories and myths, and more recently books and films, that attics, caves and abandoned buildings have become the archetypal places to fear.'* Hart and Newson and Newson (1968) and Matthews (1992) all discuss how places, particularly dark places become the location of fear. They do not, however, extend the notion to include individuals who may be similarly demonised by children. One negative contact with an individual may be communicated to others, amplified and become part of the children's local lore. This notion is frequently reflected in children's literature in stories such as E. E Nesbit's *The Treasure Seekers* and Nina Bawden's *Carrie's War*.

The Tollerton children all knew of a particular farmer who was thought likely to become abusive if they strayed onto his land. Running the risk of angering him was a frightening but exciting game and, although Neil claimed if he saw you, you had to 'leg it or you're dead' and described how he and Paul hid in a ditch to escape, he added, 'he's not that bad'.

Another character was described by Sian:

Sian If I'm walking home from John's who lives just there, usually when I go back because there's this man and he has a gun and he just comes out and bullies you, like he threatens you, not with the gun.

PP Really, do people know about that? I mean does your Mum know about that?

Sian Yeah, he goes out shooting all the time and he's just really horrible to you.

PP What does he say then?

Sian He just like teases you and gets in your way and stuff (village children's group)

This character was known to most of the children and was said to belong to a 'weird family'.

The children from the inner city school discussed one character they knew:

Katy This very old man.

Scot Mac, everybody calls him a murderer.

Katy Everybody calls him a murderer but he isn't a murderer. He just comes out and tries to throw milk jar and tin openers at you. He's mad. He is mad.

PP People annoy him do they?

Yvette Yeah people knock on his door and shout through his letter box and bangs on his windows he comes out and tries to throw milk bottles at them and then they realise that he is going to do something to them so they don't do it any more.

*David He don't do anything, just hits people an' all.
(inner city children's group)*

The children's description of Mac seemed to switch from one perspective to another. They all knew the myths surrounding him, but were old enough to appreciate that these were not true. They even seemed somewhat sympathetic to his persecution and they were not fearful of him although his reported actions appeared quite intimidating.

It seems these local characters form part of the mythology attached to place and as such may figure in the children's fantasies. The children may exaggerate their menace to add excitement to their games and enable them to flirt with danger. If pressed they recognise the possible consequences of 'being caught' are usually not as severe as they pretend. The individuals are not considered dangerous in the 'stranger danger' sense: 'he's not that bad', 'it's just a weird family' 'he don't do nothing really'. This trust in the familiar can be problematic, for incidents in the past have shown that such misfits within the community can occasionally prove to be extremely dangerous (Hungerford in 1992, Dunblane in 1996).

Traffic

Road traffic accidents are the greatest cause of child mortality and injury in this country, and therefore much research has been conducted into children's perception of danger, their ability to see traffic and estimate its speed and consequently the best way to instil road safety (O.E.C.D. Group 1983).

Sheeley and Chapman's 1995 research into children's and adults' perception of hazard on the roads and demonstrated that groups of 7 and 9 year old children more often labelled particular road situations as being dangerous than did adults. This led the writers to criticise

educational campaigns, which they suggest are the result of the presumed ability of the adult to empathise with children and to comprehend their perspective. The results of their study questions the validity of safety measures based on untested assumptions of children's ability.

The identification of hazards dominated much of the focus group children's discussion about road safety. They specified risk situations based on their personal experience. They were not worried by the roads in general but had concerns about particular problems they encountered on the roads. Some of these concerns were spatial, particular roads or locations that were perceived as hazardous, and some concerned with behaviour of the drivers. The most frequently mentioned was the volume of traffic on particular roads. Busy roads were perceived as a problem, and many of the children reported being nervous about crossing them. For the children in Tollerton this was only one road, the A606 Nottingham to Melton road, along the north of which the village of Tollerton has developed. They described this road as 'dangerous' and the 'busiest road in Tollerton'. None of the children were allowed to cycle on it and several said they were forbidden to cross it alone.

In West Bridgford several main roads fan out from Trent Bridge, dissecting the residential area. They lead from Nottingham to Leicester, Loughborough, Melton Mowbray and Grantham and the A1 and carry high traffic flows. The children from the area were nervous of these roads. Neil pointed out that when they moved on to the comprehensive school they would all have to cross the busiest of these, Loughborough Road, and the group admitted being anxious about it. In the past two years two young pedestrians and one young cyclist have been killed on these roads and the children I talked to had all heard about at least one of these incidents.

Hugh *Someone I know has just died in a car crash so its got me all worried about the roads and everything. He was fourteen going on fifteen.*

Michelle *That boy on Melton Road...*

Andreas *They left flowers there.*

(middle class suburb children's group)

These close encounters with tragedy made these groups particularly conscious of the danger. Their descriptions of the problem and their concern was expressed the vividly. They talked of '*having to wait a quarter of an hour to cross the road*', of '*cars wizzing past them*' and of it being '*really dangerous*' and '*very, very busy*'.

Similarly the children from the other schools mentioned the local trunk roads as dangerous. A few were allowed to cross these roads with friends, but for many they formed the boundaries of their independent range.

The children associated danger with the busiest roads and yet more than half the pedestrian accidents involving children take place on minor roads. Accident figures for Nottingham show that the under-16 pedestrian casualty rate has been between 350 and 400 per annum for the past five years and of these each year over 55% (nearly 70% in 1993) of the accidents have occurred on minor roads. There would seem to be a need to raise the children's awareness of this fact. The volume of traffic on busy roads demands caution but the quieter roads prove to be just as dangerous and the children seemed unaware of this.

*I'm only scared of main roads.
(Kylie middle class suburbs)*

*You can play out where I live and sometimes not see a car for two hours.
(Paul village)*

*PP What about the traffic?
Lucy It's not a problem in our roads
(working class suburb children's group)*

*It's quite quiet round my end.
(Katy inner city)*

The highest proportion of accidents which occur in the 9-11 age group is among unaccompanied pedestrians (see Table 6). The children's descriptions of their free movements indicated that most of them only went out alone to make a particular journey: to the shops, to a friend's house, to meet someone or for some recreational activity. Very few were allowed out to roam freely alone. This suggests that on such journeys they are either lacking in attention and or make wrong decisions about traffic or that as a young child alone they are less visible to drivers who do not make sufficient allowances for their presence. Figures published by Nottinghamshire County Council give accident statistics for differing road layout locations. These indicate that in the past five years at least 40% of the accidents involving child pedestrians have occurred at T-junctions. The children confirmed the problematic nature of junctions:

Going up Devonshire you're like stopping because you've got to look four ways. Like up and down and cars coming this way and cars going that way. And I tried to tell her (her friend), I said 'I'll look that way and you

Age	Pedestrians		Cyclists		Car users	
	1997	1998	1997	1998	1997	1998
9	1,545	1,510	585	567	1,081	1,113
10	1,541	1,486	764	658	1,153	1,221
11	1,873	1,855	835	683	1,040	1,101

Table 6: Casualty figures for children aged 9/11 involved in traffic accidents.
Source: Road accidents Great Britain. 1997/8. Department of Transport.

*look that way and ... we just try to keep each other safe'.
(Jenny middle class suburb)*

*It's really dangerous near Boundary Road, where the playground is,
because you're like crossing near a junction just where you can turn off.
(Hugh middle class suburb) (See Plate 3)*

The policy of the County Council Accident Investigation Unit²⁰ is to investigate and treat problem sites. Any location where four or more injury accidents have occurred in one year or more than twelve over a three-year period is inspected and any sites with treatable problems are dealt with. The Council claims that the full cost of the investigations and remedies can be recovered through accident savings within twelve months, but this can only be achieved by giving priority to sites where accidents are occurring most frequently. This reactive approach has been criticised by local communities who have identified danger spots in their area. The phrase 'somebody has to be killed before they will do anything about it' is often quoted in local newspaper articles. The difficulties in attempting to implement a proactive policy can be appreciated, for example prioritising sites, demonstrating cost effectiveness, but a more flexible approach might allow particular exceptions to be addressed. If near misses were taken into account and comparisons made with the safety record of similar locations, then some sites identified as potentially dangerous could be modified *before* the four required injury accidents had occurred.

Hillman et al. (1990) question the assumptions made by the public and the road safety organisations that a child's safety in traffic is the responsibility of the child or its parents. They demonstrate that in the statistics apportioning blame, the motorists cite the child as

²⁰ This information was obtained from the County Traffic Department.

responsible in 75% of cases while the police quote an even higher figure of 93.1%. Hillman argues that children are considered immature, impulsive, unpredictable, lacking in skill and experience, unable to judge distance and speed and not always obedient, by the road safety literature. The fact that they behave in any of these ways in traffic should not then come as a surprise to anyone. He supports an idea put forward in 1981 by Howarth and Lightburn that a motorist injuring a child on a residential road should be presumed negligent unless they are able to prove otherwise, the assumption being that children are entitled to behave in a childlike manner in residential streets. Hillman reported that over 50% of children hurt in accidents took some responsibility for the accident in which they were involved and 40% felt it was all their fault. He considered this unsurprising as they are educated to be deferential to traffic at all times even when on zebra or pelican crossings, since drivers might not respect their right of way.

It is essential that children be taught to exercise extreme caution in traffic since in any contact between a vehicle and the human body the vehicle will always win. What should be challenged is the attitude of the drivers who assume the right of priority over pedestrians. 'Car culture' gives all the rights to the drivers who are physically the most protected in any impact.

Although in an 'accident situation' children are likely to take the blame, several of the children raised the issue of bad driving. They were critical of drivers who they felt acted irresponsibly, putting other's lives at risk. The children, particularly those in the middle class areas, were critical of the speed drivers travelled in the residential areas;

*Once I looked three times and ..um ..a car came whizzing by me and I nearly got run over on my bike.
(Michelle middle class suburb)*

*Sometimes the cars come down really fast, like.. jummmm.
(Andreas middle class suburb)*

*Me and my brother were playing football on the road, because we live on a really quiet road, there wasn't any cars for three hours then these motor bike-ists came along and they were breaking the speed limit for the road by about FIFTY times!
(Paul village)*

Around the Bestwood Estate and the inner city area joy riders were seen as a major problem. Most of the area had been 'traffic calmed' either by humps in the road or the narrowing of streets with barriers. Parents and children from these areas felt that, whilst the locals drove

slowly if only to protect their vehicle's suspension, the humps actually attracted joy riders who posed a considerable danger to the residents.

PP What about the humps in the road?

Lauren It don't stop the joy riders.

John It just makes them go faster.

Toni They ruin all the cars exhaust and.... Um

PP Suspension?

Toni Suspension, yeah. They don't care if they are not their cars.

(working class suburb children's group)

Andrew There are those bumps in the road and they are supposed to slow cars down but it just makes them jump over. It makes them have more fun.

Marc Its stupid really because if it's not their car they are not really bothered.

Andrew And they are not bothered about safety.

Marc They are not bothered if it's not their car.

PP Do you have lots of people pinching cars?

Donna We have lots of joy riders on our street, I do, you can hear it all the time.

(transitional children's group)

Linda I mean they have bumps in the road to stop joy riders. That doesn't stop the joy riders. Makes 'em go faster.

PP How often does it happen?

Linda Well, in the last two weeks there have been five cars pinched on one road, and that's in two weeks!

(working class suburb mother)

It's true that it attracts joy riders. My Mum didn't have any around her way until they put the humps in.

(Diane inner city Mother)

The perception that things had actually become *more* dangerous on the roads since the humps had been in place must be of interest to those who are attempting to improve the safety of the environment. A spokesman for the Nottinghamshire County Council said they were aware of the problem and where possible used road narrowings rather than humps. However he pointed out that even these could prove dangerous, as drivers had been known to increase their speed in order to reach the constriction in the road before an on-coming vehicle.

Drivers who failed to give clear signals or failed to stop at zebra or pelican crossings were also condemned by the children and parents. This did not stop the children suggesting an increase in crossings as one solution to the traffic problem. Philippa pointed out that it was a lot safer on one road since they had built new two new refuges in the middle. (She actually

used a delightful malapropism. She said, 'there are two new refugees in the middle of Boundary Road.')

Fear of traffic has meant tighter and tighter constraints are being placed upon children. Few children are able to indulge in 'playing out'. By the time their parents allow them out alone their interests have moved on and it becomes a less appealing activity. It has become socially unacceptable and is referred to as 'hanging about the streets' (Valentine 1996a, Lucas 1998, Massey 1998, Matthews 1999). Sweden has considerably reduced the incidence of accidents involving children by a deliberate policy of providing traffic free play areas in every housing development (Björklid 1985). In this country since children are not allowed to play outside for reasons apart from traffic risk the demand for such zones has not been so vociferous.

Statistically children are more at risk from traffic when out on the streets than any other danger. The comments of the children indicate that present road safety education may not emphasise all the risks. The children's own experience of the roads highlights some but not all the dangerous situations. Parents fearful for their children protect them by keeping them away from the roads rather than educating them to use the roads safely. Accident statistics indicate when at the age of 11 and 12 when they are allowed out more alone they are at the most risk (see Chart 1).

There are ways in which children can be better educated about and protected from the traffic. Accompanied safety walks alert the children on site to road dangers and train them in situ to respond to the road circumstances. The introduction of 'safe routes' can help children to become street wise gradually in controlled situations. Sustrans, the charity devoted to promoting sustainable transport systems, has a well supported 'Safe Routes to Schools' scheme which will assist parents and schools in setting up routes on which children can cycle or walk to school with confidence. Such initiatives are a more positive way forward than increasing the pressure on parents to confine and transport their children even more.

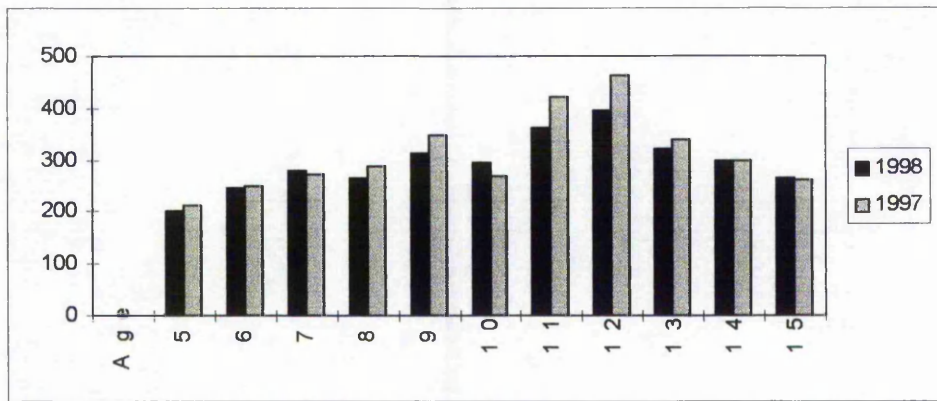


Chart 1. Pedestrian children killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents 1997/8.
Source: Table 33. Road Accidents Great Britain. Department of Transport

Other Problems - drugs, dogs, deaths and the dark.

At least one person, in every discussion group, mentioned drugs as a danger that the children were exposed to outside the home. The use of illegal drugs is widespread in Britain. Attitudes towards drug taking would appear to have undergone some change in the past decade with a majority of the population now in favour of the legalisation of 'soft drugs' according to several opinion polls. This leads to confusion in the way children of primary age should be educated or informed about drug use, and various positions can be identified. Some parents and teachers think that educating children of this age encourages the use of drugs by providing the children with too much information (Dorn et al 1987). Others want the education to be based on the 'just say no' message. They are not happy about discussion of the pleasurable aspects of drug taking or approaches to harm minimisation or harm reduction. More recently the introduction of the DARE programme from The United States and the work of the Home Office Drug Prevention initiative have recognised various issues in relation to the drug education of upper primary school children. The first is that these children are already familiar with the concept of drug taking and most have a fair knowledge of the official and street names of a variety of drugs (Baker and Caraher 1995). Secondly that information and education are not enough to alter the future behaviour of children (Dorn et al 1987). The information that children are given must be located in the social context of the recipient. Finally the information must be honest about risks to health and potential addiction. Campaigns in the past have often been misleading and their message become completely undermined once inaccuracies are exposed.

Children in two of the schools I visited had already participated in the DARE²¹ anti-drugs campaign and the other schools have all participated since. The school in the middle class suburb had been the last to participate because of reluctance of the parents and governors.²² The children who had participated in the scheme appeared more informed about drug habits, but they did live in the inner city and council suburb areas where, according to police figures, the use of drugs was more widespread. This was supported by the views expressed by the parents who perceived their environment as one where drugs were openly in use. It is therefore difficult to know to what extent their knowledge and attitudes had been influenced by the scheme. The children in these areas talked of having seen drug deals taking place at the local shops and Kate had been forced by a bullying youth to give up an attempt to shop at her nearest parade and go to the shops where they 'sell drugs and everything'. She knew this happened at these shops because 'me and my Mum saw them selling drugs to each other'. Cindy knew the local road where 'all the people who take drugs and smoke round each others houses'. Parents talked of the regular police raids on certain houses and 'empty garages full of needles and things.' They were aware that their children were likely to come into contact with drugs and were concerned about it.

Drug abuse was another unpleasant, but familiar, aspect of their environment which they had to protect their children from. The concern was immediate - contact with those using drugs and the accessories of drugs was possible. In the working class suburban school the head confirmed children had been found in possession of illegal substances - he would not elaborate further. The parents were very supportive of the DARE programme which they felt was educating the children in the 'right way'. Linda said:

DARE has been really good. Toni knows more than I do about drugs now and she was really interested in it. She comes home and says 'Mum did you know...?' and she says 'I'm never going to be that stupid.'
(Linda mother working class suburb)

Drug abuse may be an activity that crosses class boundaries but among the children and parents I talked to in the middle class areas there was a lack of information and knowledge. Unlike the working class groups, it was outside the experience of the children and some of the parents and was perceived as an unknown evil. The danger was not perceived as immediate. Like the children in the Baker and Caraher (1994) study it was assumed by the

²¹ Drug Abuse Resistance Education is a registered charity operating in forty countries. It was piloted in Los Angeles in 1983 and in the U.K. operates from Mansfield, Notts. Trained police officers conduct a 17 week course in school for children aged 9-11.

²² Communication from Community police officer.

children and their parents that the contact with drug users would occur when they reached secondary school. They were worried about it and several of the discussion group children mentioned drugs in the context of the secondary school they were going to. Jenny had been told 'there are all these drug dealers' at the school she was going to and Neil's brother's friend had been 'offered drugs' at their local comprehensive. The following extract shows the suburban parents' attempts to maintain the children's 'innocence' and also illustrates the inaccuracies in the children's knowledge as a result.

Jenny When there are things on the telly about teenagers Mum turns over because she doesn't want me to know 'cos she never knows if I might do it. But things like taking drugs it's silly and Mum says that teenagers don't think that when they are older.

Andreas And my Mum says 'Don't think about it.

Kylie It gets you very worried.

Sharpe People say it will con you into getting drugs because so many people in the world do.

Andreas There are these tattoos. If you touch it gets on your skin and then you start ..and then you start doing it.

Michelle If you take one cigarette you get addicted, its just like drugs, the same, you just take them.

(middle class suburb children's group)

The children see their parents as attempting to shield them from the issues. This is consistent with the difficulties the police had in persuading the school to host the DARE programme. They see innocence as some form of protection. The conversation between the children also clearly demonstrates their need for clearer information about drugs. Drugs that touch your skin and cause instant addiction are the myths that make such children very vulnerable when they are confronted with more accurate knowledge. Scorning naiveté is a powerfully coercive weapon in the hands of those encouraging transgression.

The parents too were unfamiliar with the drug scene.

Suzanne I'm sure there were drugs around when I was a teenager but I just never heard of them. I must have had my head in the clouds.

Vikki The only time I heard of drugs being around.. I never heard of them at school like you hear they are now...when I started work, I worked for a dentist and his son was only a year younger than me and he used to come in and say how readily available drugs were in his school, you know, and I was horrified then at seventeen and it's like twenty years ago. There are different kinds of drugs now aren't there? Back then it was probably just a case of smoking dope, I mean they probably

still are now but it's pop a tablet here or there. It's different now.

Yvonne High tech. Yeah one of our students (Yvonne took in students on a B and B basis) who was up with the fairies more often than not he reckoned 95% of people, if not regularly using something had tried it - George and I just couldn't believe it - I mean his generation.

Vikki That's just how they see it.

Yvonne Yes, but I was still horrified to think that he thought it was that high - I mean he obviously did take things himself so maybe that coloured his judgement a bit but even allowing for that it seemed high.

*Vikki Very high
(middle class suburb parents' group)*

Although the parents perceive a risk to the children from contact with others involved in drugs, it is something they see as happening in the future rather than at present.

The risk from drugs was located in their lived environment for the working class parents and children. For the middle class group it was to be found in 'other' places that the children had yet to encounter. Perhaps fear of their children wandering into these 'other' places contributes to the greater constraint imposed on the middle class children. For the working class parents drug abuse is something that has to be confronted and lived with.

1990 was the year of the dog scare. The panic aroused by the wide publicity given to injuries as a result of attacks by dogs led to 'knee jerk' legislation from the Government which came into force in 1991. Since then it appears the incidence of dog attacks has fallen; either that or the press coverage has been considerably reduced. Cynics would say that the story has run its time and is no longer of interest to the public who are bored by it all. In the 1995 Bernardo's survey²³ parents, on a scale of 1 (a slight worry) to 5 (a big worry), 20% rated dogs 4 and 25% at 5. None of the parents I talked to mentioned dogs at all in the course of the discussions and it was not forefront in their minds when they considered the problems relating to their children in the environment. This suggests that the prompting of the Barnardo questionnaire may have raised a subject which was not of primary concern to parents. Alternatively the media campaign would have been fresh in the memory in 1995 and faded somewhat in 1997, and this may account for the difference.

²³ Survey conducted by McNeish and Roberts on behalf of Barnardo's. Published in McNeish and Roberts (1995)

The children in Nottingham in 1997 did not appear to place dogs high on the list of their concerns. Kate and Lucy had both had experiences where a dog had been involved in bullying attacks. A friend of Kate's had used her dog to scare off a group of boys who were kicking footballs at the girls - but it had then 'tried to get' Kate. Lucy and her red-headed cousin and friends had been taunted whilst at a park:

...and he goes 'Do you want me to get my dog 'cos he likes ginger nuts?' 'cos she's got ginger hair and she said 'Go on if you dare' and it was a massive dog and it was barking at us and everything and he tried to jump up the slide.

(Lucy, inner city)

Heroically, Lucy made sure all the other children got off the slide whilst the dog barked at her:

...and I goes 'No, Denise I'm not afraid of dogs, I like them so you go with Gemma and I'll go down myself,' the dog was jumping up the slide to me and everything. In the end, so now the boy was round the back 'cos everybody else had got off, so I got on the top of the climbing frame. It's not that high so I jumped off and ran to my friends.

(Lucy inner city)

Both these tales were told as examples of bullying and the dogs were incidental to the main theme. Neither girl expressed a fear of dogs in general and the stories did not give rise to any other horror stories. In fact Kate's story led to Kay telling us how the family acquired their much loved dog - her father, a pizza delivery man, had taken it in part exchange for one of his deliveries!

The children did show concern about the fouling by dogs of the areas in which they played. In Tollerton it was the footpath leading to the Open Space that particularly concerned them. Nicholas lived next door to the path and his father often had to go out and clear it. The Northgate (inner city) children also found it a problem:

Ben I think they should clamp down on letting dogs in.

Chantelle Yeah, cos of the droppings.

Gary A park's a place you want to have fun...not watch.

Lucy They have signs saying 'No dogs' and stuff...

Ben There is.

Lucy ...like that. And they still bring them in

(inner city children's group)

As well as dogs the children recognised other ways in which the environment around them was polluted. The dumping of rubbish in areas they liked to play, pollution of streams and

litter in the parks was all reported by children in the two Bestwood schools and Northgate. One wooded area near Gladehill School where the children occasionally played had been found by Donna to be littered with *'porn pictures of nude women and everything'*. Environmental issues were only mentioned by the children in the middle class schools in the context of the groups of teenagers who frequented the public spaces and left cigarettes, cans and broken bottles behind them.

The socio-economic difference was highlighted in how the children described other areas they thought better and safer than their own environment. The children from the working class and transition area invariably mentioned that other better areas were cleaner, less rubbish, less broken down and graffiti free.

Miss, in Derbyshire, 'cos my Nanny Bethal lives in Derbyshire and it's a really quiet place and there is just a big field and there's no graffiti, there's nothing and it's just nice and clean.

(Kate transitional)

People don't... like here... out there they don't wreck everything.

(Michael working class suburb)

Well my Grandma lives in Bilborough. That's a nicer place because there is no drawing on the wall and there's bottle banks and people put them in the thing and don't draw on them.

(Andrew transitional)

The village children were so satisfied with their environment that they could not name anywhere they considered safer or more pleasant, although they enjoyed greater freedom in holiday places. For the children in the middle class suburb, safer places were identified by their lack of traffic and better play facilities rather than cleanliness or lack of vandalism.

Just as local characters were absorbed into the children's mythologies, so too were happenings and places. Tales of suicides and murder were retold with enthusiastic horror and graveyards and haunted houses (see Photograph 4) were discussed with relish. Kara described the local wood as a site where *'there's been lots of hangings, people hanging themselves from trees'* and Jenny told of the lady who *'murdered herself in her own kids' bed*. Two stories involved family or close friends:

I've got a story Miss. My Dad when he was quite young, in his teens, he used to live up Clifton and at Bestwood Lodge this lad had murdered his friend's lad, he was a bit... he was a bit... um silly, and he got his head



Plate 3; Boundary Road junction showing the playground on the right located in an area of busy traffic.



Plate 4:
The 'haunted house'
near Henry Whipple
school - boarded up
and overgrown for
several years.

and he kept banging his head on the wall and my Dad went on the murder hunt for him. He told me.

(Marc transitional)

My Mum's friend Donna, her nephew went down the shops and a big gang of people, 15 and 16, took him up and chucked him off the bridge and he was found dead...He was unconscious before he was thrown off the bridge, he would be twenty-three now. He was about ten or eleven when he got thrown off the bridge. So we're not allowed to go anywhere near the river or lakes.

(Jo-Anne working class suburb)

Tragic happenings such as these engage the children's imagination but do not necessarily promote fear. They are so beyond the life experiences of the children that they seem to belong with the everyday fictions that are encountered in books and on the television. Only when a tragedy touches the child's life directly, as with the school children of Dunblane, does the fear become real.²⁴

Spates of bomb attacks and alerts have been part of the nation's life for the whole of the children's lives. Only Kayley mentioned them and her comments appeared to be a reflection of views she had heard her father express:

I don't like going into town because you know on the news there was that place they planted a bomb and my dad he don't like going into town either 'cos you never know where they will plant them.

(Kayley inner city)

The rest of the group did not share her concern. They felt you would be warned if it happened and that anyway most bombs were planted in London. The wide coverage in the media to such events has failed to have any impact on the children and there is no evidence to indicate it has altered their behaviour in any way.

The hours of daylight are an important constraint on children's mobility. Hillman et al (1990) found that only 2% of the English junior children in their study were allowed out independently after dark and it was only at the age of 15 that the figure reached 50%. Going out alone after dark was described as an intimidating experience by many of children I talked to.

Miss, the scariest place for me Miss, is when I'm in the dark you don't know whose going to attack or what.

(Gary transitional)

²⁴ See the reactions of children involved in the tragedy as reported in the Guardian March 14th 1996 and the Times of the same date.

Neil I always look behind me when I turn a corner, just in case.
PP This is interesting. You were saying how safe it is in Tollerton but now you say you look behind you.
Neil Oh, only at night.
Sian Yes, that is the problem, I think that it is in winter that most of the burglars do their burgling because it is dark by four o'clock in winter.
 (village children's group)

Jamie My Mum and Dad don't like me going out in the dark so I can't go out after school in the winter, when it gets dark.
PP Why is it that the dark stops you going out?
David Because that's when most of the teenagers are at... what-do-you call it... night clubs and they get drunk and they get silly.
PP So you think its other people that are the problem?
Natalie People can't see you because...with the traffic.
PP So it's more dangerous with the traffic?
Jamie Because it's dark you may get a bit lost.
 (middle class suburb children's group)

Katy Because at night time, if I asked to go to town I wouldn't be allowed because it's dangerous, there are men hanging around.
David Cars and lorries. You can't see when it's dark can you?
 (inner city children's group)

The quotes show that the fears of the daytime; fears of traffic, teenagers and strangers become amplified at night. The final quote from David 'you can't see when its dark can you', explains the problem - at night it is harder to see what is going on about you and therefore you feel less in control and more vulnerable.

The comment from David in the middle class suburban group was interesting. He was the only child who mentioned the possibility of getting lost. The absence of concern about finding their way demonstrates the children's confidence in their knowledge of their environment and their competence in putting that knowledge into practice. Children's knowledge of their environment has been tested using a variety of methodologies such as map drawing, photographic interpretation, verbal description and accompanied walks (Matthews 1985, 1992, Spenser et al 1989) All these methods rely on adult input or interpretation in some form and can be criticised because they require the children to be competent in skills unrelated to their local knowledge (Brown 1977).

Matthews (1992:93) tested children's environmental awareness using various methodologies and concludes '*Young children's lack of verbal and graphical skills severely limits their ability to describe places.*' Participant observation conducted within the children's range environment shows they have good knowledge of their surroundings and are competent at navigating their way around. Parents are likely to base their perception of their children's ability to *navigate* on the children's ability to *communicate* their knowledge of their environment. This may lead to an underestimation of the children's true capability to find their way around their locality. One parent in the discussion group was sure her son would not be able to find his way around and used two examples to illustrate he was too unreliable to be allowed out alone. On one occasion he had got lost in a wood that the family occasionally visited and the other was during a trip to London. It could hardly be expected that the child would be competent to find his way around in strange circumstances and this story demonstrates the way parents may negotiate containment, justifying it by reference to events unrelated to the child's true competence.

The problem that it is most likely children will encounter playing away from their home is some sort of minor accident - a fall in a playground or off a bike, for example - a chance event which results in personal injury (Rice et al 1994, Roberts et al 1995). Roberts et al found in their study of accidental injuries to children on a Glasgow housing estate that 89% of the injuries to 8-11 year olds occurred outside the home. Six accidents were due to traffic and 144 to the outside fabric of the area, 4 of the traffic accidents required hospitalisation and 28 of the other category. The high proportion of traffic accidents requiring hospitalisation indicates their serious nature. They do not occur as often as other accidents but when they do they are more likely to result in serious injury. This is one reason why concern about traffic dominates concern about accidental injury. It is also an easily identifiable danger whereas other accidents occur as a result of varied causes, some of which may be anticipated, like falls from skate boards, whilst others are unexpected. These other accidents are far more likely to occur and more likely to be the cause of a child being admitted to hospital - but they are less feared.

Garling (1984) insists that 'chance' is not taken too literally since it implies accidents are not caused and are always unavoidable. His view was also taken by the professionals - police, fire service, health educationalists - interviewed by Roberts et al (1995). They consider accidents to be '*incidents produced by people*' (their italics) rather than things. Parents put greater emphasis on the risk embedded in the quality and design and characteristics of the

environment rather than the culpability of the child. Roberts et al were investigating children's accidents and the parents questioned expressed great concern when they were consulted about their fears. When Valentine (1992) asked parents about their concerns for their children, their fear relating to accidents was confined to traffic injuries and this study produced similar responses - only two mothers mentioned the possibility of the child being hurt accidentally whilst playing out. Parents recognise the possibility of the child suffering accidental injuries and will address the subject if it is raised but it is not a *dominant* concern.

When considering accidents, Garling (1984) suggests the definition should include the near accidents which children and parents use as learning situations. There was mention of near accidents by several of the children, usually involving vehicles. Cars not stopping at zebra crossings, travelling at high speed (in the children's perception) and pulling out from drives without looking, were mentioned. In most cases the children's tone implied that they considered the driver to be at fault. The impact of these near misses was apparent in the clarity of the children's recall of the event and had in some cases modified their behaviour. Dani, who had had a near miss on a zebra crossing with her brother, said she now waited till the cars had actually stopped - rather than anticipating they would stop.

Phillipa and Neil had been out on their bikes together when Phillipa fell off and hurt her leg. Neil cycled back to alert her mother. They used this incident to illustrate the advantage of being with friends and explained '*My Mum lets me go out longer if she knows I've got a friend with me*'. Several of the parents said they insisted that their children always went out with friends so that there would be someone to raise the alarm if anything untoward occurred. Accidents such as these were viewed with equanimity by the children and their parents. These were the every day bumps and bruises of childhood which were still accepted as inevitable in contrast to their main concerns, strangers and traffic.

Conclusion

This chapter has considered in depth the various hazards identified by parents and children which give cause for concern. Those that have been prioritised are the ones to which the participants gave greatest emphasis. The children demonstrated less fear for their own safety than demonstrated by their parents. Most were confident that they could cope with any problems they came across when out unaccompanied, although they all felt more comfortable if they were in the company of friends. They had strategies which they could implement if they did encounter any problems and also strategies for reassuring their parents

about their safety. The children's concerns did not always relate directly to the concerns of their parents and this issue will be considered further at a later point.

The most significant issue which emerged from this section of the research was that of the fears located in the environment, the 'stranger danger' discourse was dominant. This was true in all the various type of lived environment investigated. The relative risk to the child from strangers compared with the potential risk from traffic is small and yet it is now the focus of most concern. Deconstructing this discourse reveals the complex nature of its origins and the way that its influence is manifest. This topic is the main focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 5

The Construction of Fear

In the previous two chapters the field research demonstrated that children's independent mobility is highly constrained, and also identified the fears which dominate parents' and children's perception of the environment. Having thus constructed a representation of 'how' and 'why' children's mobility is managed, it is necessary to provide a reasoned explanation of the process through which this has come about. The recent change in the way the environment is perceived and the consequential impact on children's lives demands an explanation. A theoretical analysis of the issues which have given rise to the increase in fear will aid understanding. The aim of this chapter is to analyse the processes through which they evolve and consider the popular discourses which impact upon them. Conclusions will be drawn concerning the process through which culture impacts on the perception of the environment and this will provide a framework for further considerations of the participants' stories in subsequent chapters.

An analytical exercise such as this is located outside the forms of explication traditionally used in geographical research. As geography has increasingly embraced qualitative research as an insightful methodology, the discipline has looked outside its boundaries for methods of analysis and relevant theory (Jackson 1989, Sibley 1995). Qualitative research searches for the meanings and motivations of individual human behaviour rather than the explanation of patterns and trends in behaviour that occupied the discipline in the past. Writers in the fields of sociology, cultural and communication studies use models which can help contribute to the understanding of human behaviour and address the issue of why and how particular ways of seeing the world are constructed (Gramsci 1971, Foucault 1967, 1972, 1976, Giddens 1979, 1985, Hall et al. 1978, Hebdige, 1979, Hoggart 1957, Williams 1977). The work of Gramsci has included consideration of how popular beliefs are formed and become hegemonic within a society. His ideas will inform the arguments relating to the perceived need that children require increasing supervision. The main focus of the chapter will be to consider the concept 'stranger danger'. For this the work of Cohen, Hall and others on the growth of moral panics will provide an initial framework.

Good Sense and Common Sense - a Gramscian analysis

Children may encounter many hazards when interacting with the environment but the previous chapter has shown only some of these hazards really worry the children and some are of major concern to their parents. The parents' concern for their children focuses on two things, the fear of others and the risk from traffic. Whilst bullying and accidental injury were mentioned by several of the participants in the study they were afterthoughts rather than primary concerns. The children also articulated the same fears, strangers and traffic, but their stories showed that harassment and bullying were more important in their everyday lives than they or their parents acknowledged. However this chapter is concerned with the two fears which dominated both children's and parents' *perception* of danger - the issues that both groups immediately raised in the focus groups, the fear of strangers and the problem of road traffic. It is these fears that can influence the confidence of some children to go out alone and it is these fears that will underlie the parents' decisions about their children's independent mobility.

Concern about traffic is based mainly on personal experience of negotiation of the streets. There was a general consensus among the respondents with respect to the danger of traffic. The main problems were identified in Chapter Three as the increased volume of traffic, the speed at which it travelled, the skill of the drivers and the care that they take in built up areas. It makes good sense to be fearful of traffic. It is empirically demonstrable that road accidents regularly kill and maim victims and this danger is encountered on a daily basis by most people. The control of vehicles is open to human error, as is the behaviour of others in near contact with traffic, and there is always the possibility of mechanical faults or weather conditions creating problems.

Children learn very early about the dangers of road traffic. They are taught by those responsible for their safety that care must be taken, rules must be obeyed, when they are in the presence of road vehicles. They are constantly exposed to images that reinforce the potential danger. Images of crashes on the television, damaged vehicles that have been involved in collisions and dead animals on the road are common experiences for them. The danger is undeniable. Any vehicle is capable of causing injury or death and many injuries and deaths are caused by road traffic. It is good sense to be cautious or even afraid of traffic. The fear is rational but also, for most, something with which they cope. They know what they must do to avoid danger. Road travel is so much a part of everyday life that it is not usually the stuff that nightmares are made of.

	'94	'95	'96	'97	'98
Zebra Crossing	27	14	13	11	17
Zebra and School Crossing Patrol	0	2	0	2	0
Zebra and Authorised Person	0	0	0	0	0
Pelican Crossing	22	20	34	25	15
Light Controlled Crossing	2	0	3	2	1
Pedestrian Phase Signal	19	25	28	32	30
Other Sites with School Patrol	3	1	5	2	7

Table 7. Accidents to child pedestrians at crossing facilities in Nottingham

Source: Road Accidents and Casualties Nottinghamshire

Nottingham County Council.

Most children do not doubt their own ability to cope. They are only fearful of the misbehaviour or negligence of the drivers. They are afraid of drivers who go too fast. They worry about drivers who do not stop at pedestrian crossings. To negotiate these situations they impose their own limits, avoiding situations with which they feel they cannot manage. They therefore rarely doubt their own ability to take care of their own safety in traffic.

While children are cautious but prepared to negotiate their way around in traffic, their parents, as it has been shown have great fears about their safety. They question children's competence to cope and their ability to recognise the danger in different locations. Parents also fear for their children because they do not trust those in charge of vehicles on the road. Accident statistics demonstrate they are right to be concerned about road users. Many accidents to pedestrian children occur on pedestrian crossing facilities and a considerable number each year happen during the pedestrian phase of the signal at light controlled crossings (see figures for Nottingham in Table 7). How competent children are in negotiating roads may be a complex issue but the changing attitudes to children and parenthood have influenced parents to exercise more and more control and supervision.

The parents' fear of the danger of traffic has a rational foundation. Gramsci (1971) argued that cultural formations may be envisaged on various levels, with some having a rational, practical basis whilst others are based on an uncritical, largely unconscious way of perceiving and understanding the world. He made a distinction between formations which are 'good

sense' and those which he considers are 'common sense'. Fear of traffic can be considered 'good sense' in the Gramscian meaning, which is practical and empirical common sense in the English sense of the term.

Gramsci defined common sense as '*the incoherent set of generally held assumptions and beliefs common to any given society*' (Gramsci 1971:323) and the fear of strangers can be interpreted as such a construction. Although most of the parents and children in the study articulated the fear, they were rarely able to qualify it with personal experience. When the topic was explored further many suggested that their fear resulted from the wide publicity given to cases of abduction and child murder. Some even questioned whether there had really been the increase in incidents in recent years and whether the situation was different or merely their perception of the potential danger changed. The general acceptance of the 'stranger danger' discourse, along with the lack of a coherent reasoning around the issue, suggests it could be labelled 'common sense'. The issue is incorporated into the structure of beliefs which are unquestioningly accepted, part of the hegemony within which society operates. As Gramsci explained it:

But this same group has for reasons of submission and intellectual subordination, adopted a conception which is not its own but is borrowed from another group; and it affirms this conception verbally and believes itself to be following it, because this is the conception which it follows in normal times - that is when conduct is not independent and autonomous, but submissive and subordinate.

(Gramsci 1971:327)

The attitudes of a great majority of the parents and children who participated in the study conformed to Gramsci's notion that commonly held beliefs can be produced in differing ways. The response to the danger of traffic is not just a construction imposed from outside but it is supported by everyday experience. Those living in a quiet village are unlikely to change their behaviour in their immediate environment as a result of press reports relating to motorway accidents. Constructions which have been intellectualised and arrived at through individual reason are less likely to be affected by outside influences. The inflated fear of strangers is a common sense notion, which has its formation rooted in outside agencies, principally the media. As such it is more susceptible to influence from these agencies, and the widely publicised murder of a child, even if it occurs in another country, can have an effect on public attitudes and individual behaviour.

This lack of rationality is transferred to everyday experiences. If a child carelessly steps out into the road and is narrowly missed by a passing car then we are justified in interpreting the situation as 'a near miss'. The child was definitely in a situation that could have proved fatal. If a child is approached by a stranger and engaged in conversation it is highly unlikely that the child is in a dangerous situation, and yet that is how many parents today would interpret the incident. Only a very few parents have personal experience of a situation of real menace, but many I talked to told stories of situations which they had considered potentially dangerous. The stories were usually accompanied by the coda 'of course it was probably perfectly innocent but...' One story Sue told in the focus groups illustrates this:

Well our house was on the market last year and a friends of mine was also for sale on Musters Road and she rang me one afternoon and said that somebody had stopped the car and knocked at the door and when she said it wasn't convenient and to contact the estate agent she went away. And my boys were playing at the front of the house, they were playing football and David ran in and said a lady had just stopped and asked how much the house is and it was this same woman who stopped and then when she saw me she drove off. And I said 'David you shouldn't have said anything to her', and he said 'Well I thought she wanted to buy the house' and that worried me because I'm sure she was a genuine person who was just scouting round the neighbourhood but God it was so easy she could have had the children in the car like that and I wouldn't have known about it.
(Sue mother middle class suburb)

The most likely explanation was that the house was outside the price range of the house hunter and she did not want to waste time on it. Even the mother admits this is the most probable explanation, but it is not in these terms that she recalls the incident. Her perception about what has taken place is subverted by the 'common sense' notion that strangers making unsolicited approaches to children are to be regarded with suspicion.

Parents and children accept the common sense fear of strangers but two different levels of understanding were evident from the research. Most of the children and some of the parents considered it to be a real threat. The parents were convinced as Dot put it '*things have got worse since our day*' and that the risk that a child might be abducted or attacked a high one. Alternatively some parents, like the mother in the story, are conscious that they may perceive the risk as greater than it really is. They understand that a false consciousness may exist about the reality of 'stranger danger', but nevertheless cannot but respond to it. They are not surprised when shown statistics relating to non-accidental deaths of children that they show

little variation over the past fifty years. This poses the important question: why is their perception of the environment so different from that of previous generations?

The Construction of a Moral Panic

When they were asked where such fears originated the children and their parents always cited the media as the main source of the information that gave rise to their concern.

*It makes you think things are really, really bad.
(David inner city)*

*My Mum is worried she has heard all these things on the news.
(Andrew transitional)*

*I mean now-a-days they seem to publicise it (crime) all the time.
(Linda mother transitional)*

*I think it has an effect on the parents as well as the children because they hear these things and in the past it didn't get as much publicity.
(Yvonne mother middle class suburb)*

Several of the stories that were told to illustrate how dangerous the environment was for children today had come from friends or acquaintances. The focus groups themselves provided an opportunity to pass on recent happenings.

Linda Did you see it Sunday? (cars racing through the estate)

Sam No I was at karate wasn't I?

Linda Oh, of course, no it were about tea time.

Sam No I go out for tea.

Linda Yeah, it happened again on Sunday.

(working class suburb parents' group)

A girl was attacked up Bestwood last week, did you hear?

(Dot mother transitional)

These are the sources that together escalate the construction and operation of the system of common sense within the community. Information gleaned from the press and, occasionally, personal experience, is circulated, reinforcing the perception that the environment is dangerous. There is now a wider availability of information, an increase in sources of information, and an increase in the speed with which new information is relayed. All these factors must be significant in this process of escalation.

In practical terms the nation is more exposed to news coverage than ever before. Over the past forty years the numbers of radio receivers has risen from under 1 per household to 3.5. Car radios have become standard accessories. The number of households owning a television set has grown from 10% in 1951 to 95% in 1995 and 43% of households own two or more. Whilst newspaper readership has declined slightly in percentage terms over the same period, 55% of adults still read a national newspaper on a daily basis and 10 newspapers have a circulation of more than 13 million.¹ When an incident involving a child is highlighted in the media there is a high possibility that parents today will be exposed to the story several times on the same day, and if the story runs over several days an individual may hear or read about it on twenty occasions or more. For example a not unlikely sequence might be: early morning news on the radio or television, the car radio on the way to work, the newspaper read during the day, car radio on the way home and at least twice during an evening's television viewing. It may be that this repetition of stories through different media contributes to the perception that there has been an increase in the number of incidents involving children and strangers who do them harm.

The incidents reported in the media that were most repeated by the parents were those with which they could most closely identify. If the parents could transpose the story of assault on a child to their own home environment then it appeared the impact of the incident was greater: Rosie Palmer was abducted and subsequently murdered when she ran to buy an ice cream from a mobile van (Guardian July 28th 1995), Imraan Voha was last seen alive standing at the school gate (Times Jan 2nd 1990) and Sarah Harper was on her way to buy a loaf of bread when she disappeared (Guardian May 20th 1994). The everyday circumstances of these tragedies makes them more meaningful for the parents. As one mother remarked *'If a child is abducted on the way to the fish shop and you have just sent your child to fetch the supper, it 'makes you think'*. Sally used to let her son sleep in his tent in the garden, *'but I won't let him any more, not after that girl was snatched'*.

Identifying with a specific incident and replaying it in one's own lived environment with one's own children as actors may be a significant factor in constructing concern. However the potential for such identification has existed in the past. The parents of the participating adults would have heard of similar incidents reported and yet they did not respond by containing their children in the house. This was demonstrated by the stories of the adult

¹ General Household Survey 1995 HMSO and Media U.K. Internet Directory 1995

participants who reported they enjoyed far greater freedom than their own children: *'I don't remember having to tell me Mam were we were, we just used to go out', 'When I was eleven nothing would stop me I didn't need taking care of', 'I mean we used to go up the fields, there was nothing there but you was just running around the fields.'* Similar findings have been reported by Blakely (1994) and Valentine (1997b). The change in attitudes must have been precipitated by a difference as yet unidentified and one possibility might be in the way the stories are written and agendas behind them.

Various writers on the subject describe 'stranger danger' as a 'moral panic' (Cahill 1990, Blakely 1994). This label indicates an overreaction by the public to the situation. The term was originally used by the sociologist Stanley Cohen in his study of the media response to the Mods and Rockers skirmishes in the 1960s. The concept was developed by Cohen to label the escalation of public engagement with specific 'folk devils': *'A condition, episode, person or threat to societal values and interests: its nature is presented in a stylised and stereotypical fashion by the mass media'* (Cohen 1972:9). The media misrepresentation of events escalates the panic by the use of rumour, improvisation and distortion. He suggested the phenomenon captures the headlines for a period of time, the detail and descriptions becomes more lurid in order to maintain interest but then, as the public becomes bored, the story dies. What remains is the reality that the media have created, the myth which is accepted into folk law and collective memory and thus as Gramsci would suggest hegemonic 'common sense'. Such panics Cohen claimed may have *'..serious and long lasting repercussions and might produce such changes as those in legal and social policy or even in the way that society sees itself'* (Cohen 1972:9). The 'stranger danger' moral panic suggests that this change in perception might be also include the way that society perceives its own lived environment.

In Hall et al.'s (1978, 1979) writing on mugging and racism, Cohen's work was expanded developing within it an extended time dimension. He saw each new moral panic as a new 'stage' leading to increasing state control, punitive policies and moral sanctions. The crisis allows the state to instigate methods which in 'normal times' would not be tolerated.

A society, famous for its tenacious grasp on certain well-earned rights of personal liberty and freedom, enshrined in the liberal state, screws itself up to the distasteful task of going through a period of 'iron times'. The sound of people nerving themselves to the distasteful but necessary exercise of 'more than the usual law' to ensure, in a moment of crisis,

constructed and reconstructed within our society. To understand the impact of the representation of these discourses they must be considered in the context of this debate and the encoded messages identified and deciphered.

Law and Order

Children and youth involvement in the *perceived* increase in crime and governmental attempts to tackle the problem are prominent issues today (see Table 8 for actual figures). Young people have two roles in the law and order debate. They are increasingly seen as the cause of crime and one recurrent theme has been the ever more youthful nature of the perpetrators of crime. At the same time they are also identified as the innocents who must be protected from the criminal classes.

The involvement of young people in criminal activities is much in the news. Michael Howard's Green Paper of 1997 stressed that 14% of known offenders are aged between 10 and 15, despite as the table shows a decrease in some categories (Times March 5th 1997). Stephen Grey wrote in February of that year in the same paper under the headline 'Invasion of the Superpredators':

They are young brutal and remorseless. They commit crimes by the dozen and get away with most of them. What can be done to combat the new generation of child gangsters dubbed 'superpredators'?
(Times, February 16th 1997).

He tells us that the superpredators have now arrived in, invaded, Britain. These brutes seem not to be products of our society, but have arrived from elsewhere to plague us. In the same article Alan Brown, the then acting deputy chief constable in Newcastle, describes the young criminals in his area as a '*cancer on the community*', emphasising the fact that they are not considered part of the body of the community but as some kind of extraneous growth. They are depicted as the enemy of society which feels reassured when the headlines announce '*Straw goes to war on crime by young*' (Guardian Nov. 28th 1997). These young people have so contravened the norms and expectations of society by the way they have behaved that they are excluded from it. Once excluded from society the usual rights and privileges are no longer automatically theirs, so they can be treated in ways which might not under other circumstances be acceptable.

the 'more than usual order' is heard throughout the land.
(Hall et al. 1978 :323)

As a result of the increased concern about sexual attacks on children the register of paedophiles was introduced in 1998. Curfews, restraint orders and fines imposed on parents have all been recent additions to the power of the authorities. The 'stranger danger' moral panic has allowed more punitive measures to be introduced which affect many groups, not just the predatory stranger.

In his work on the AIDS crisis Wantey (1987) suggests that these approaches to moral panics confine the analysis to the representation/reality binary and does not place the events in a wider ideological historical context. He claims this is an inappropriate approach in the debate surrounding Aids as the underlying 'demon' homosexuality has been the site historically of even more scandal and punitive action than it is today. He sees the moral panics as part of an ongoing strategy to protect the institutions that the state supports, e.g. the family, and further to isolate sexual deviance.

Moral panic theory is always obliged in the final instance to refer and contrast 'representation' to the arbitration of 'the real', and is hence unable to develop a full theory concerning the operations of ideology within all representational systems.

(Watney 1987 :41)

These writers have suggested that to understand the impact the media has on individuals, stories must be considered in the context of the discourses that they impinge upon and beyond that to the way that these discourses themselves have emerged.

Even Watney's more refined model is not satisfactory when considering the issue of 'stranger danger' and the increasing demonisation of the environment for children. His concern centres on one particular discourse, the question of sexuality, but the issue of 'stranger danger' is associated with several ideological sites and it has produced a variety of folk devils and punitive actions. It is part of the 'law and order' debate, it also relates very strongly to the place of 'the family' within society. It is also concerned with aspects of sexuality and the effects of gender on behaviour. One of the consequences is that a greater supervision of children is required which increases the pressure on childcare. Child care has traditionally fallen on women and as such impacts upon their potential opportunities outside the home. This is a major area of feminist concern. Finally the debate must be placed within the context of the changing paradigm of childhood, that is the way that the idea of childhood is

		'90	'91	'92	'93	'94	'95	'96	'97	'98
Indictable offences	Convicted	46.1	42.0	38.1	35.4	37.9	42.2	44.4	46.4	49.7
	Cautioned	96.6	95.5	105.6	94.1	95.1	80.6	79.9	73.7	77.2
Summary offences	Convicted	38.1	31.6	25.2	19.9	21.7	25.6	30.3	22.0	36.8
	Cautioned	30.5	27.1	28.1	27.5	29.2	30.0	33.2	30.8	32.5
Criminal / malicious damage	Convicted	3.9	2.9	2.5	2.2	2.9	3.4	3.9	4.4	5.2
	Cautioned	10.4	10.1	10.7	11.4	12.5	12.8	13.8	13.5	14.2

Table 8. Under 18 Crime Statistics 1990 to 1998.

Source: Annual Abstract of Statistics 2000. Government Statistical Office

Local Authorities now are able to confer on their police forces the power to insist that children under age 10 remain in their homes after a certain hour unless accompanied by an adult. Hardly a voice has been raised in protest at this action. Those that have seem to be concerned with the practical implementation of the measure and its divisive nature rather than the restriction of civil liberties it represents. Paul Cavadino, spokesman for the Penal Affairs Consortium, said curfews could backfire as young people forcibly kept indoors often ran away from home and ended up on the streets causing more trouble. He said, '*Fines for parents who could not keep their children at home would penalise the poor. Last year 24,000 people were jailed for not paying court fines. Many single mothers had their children taken into care while they served their sentence*' (Observer July 2nd 1996). The stress here is on the efficacy of the legislation and its impact on the parents rather than the way it might constrain children's lives.

The other role allocated to young people is as victims who must be protected from the highly criminalised world outside their homes. In this role they are not deemed competent to take care of themselves. As they are not considered part of the responsible structure of society, society becomes responsible for them. To administer this care, society disregards the rights of the young 'in their own interest'. In legal terms the '*non competent child who figures in the legal imagination is treated as arational rather than irrational*' (Alderson and Goodwin

1993: 305). That is the children are considered incapable of reason and therefore all decisions must be made for them. Such an approach sits uncomfortably alongside the trial of Jamie Bulger's two ten-year-old killers and the removal of the *doli incapax* law under which children between 10 and 13 were considered incapable of evil. It is however the 'angels' who are treated as innocents and protected at all costs whilst a different set of standards applies to the 'devils' (Valentine 1996a). If these angelic children are incapable of rationality, it is up to those who are responsible for them to ensure their safety. To do this they must be kept away from potential danger - off the streets.

In whichever role children are allocated, superpredator or innocent, they are not welcome on the streets. Their lack of power and status has enabled the introduction of measures which, if they had been applied to any other group, would have been considered an infringement of rights (Franklin 1995). At the same time the measures concerned with the control of young people have placed the responsibility for their behaviour on their parents or guardians (see below). This is indicative of a new emphasis on the role of the family in society, an emphasis which has reallocated responsibilities to the family within the framework of state control. This is another ideological site which has implications for children's freedom of movement.

The Family

Traditional ways of thinking about politics in binary terms in this country has emphasised the responsibilities of the individual on one side, and on the other the state as a representative of society; positions which have been associated with the right and left respectively. The Thatcher years saw a move away from the welfare state created by the Labour Government in the 1940s, towards a society in which individual responsibility was stressed. Part of this process was to shift away from the state responsibility for those unable to make provisions for themselves. In the past two decades, both sides of politics have given new emphasis to the responsibility of the family in areas of every day life. The family has become the new focus of responsibility for individual members, often replacing state care. Care of the elderly, the mentally ill, the handicapped and the sick during the eighties was increasingly off loaded by the state and placed in the hands of their relatives. '*Care in the community*' did not often translate as *care by the community* but placed responsibility on relatives - some of who coped but many did not, so '*Care in the community*' became no care at all for some. In a similar way family responsibility for children has reached new levels, some imposed by law, others part of a hegemonic acceptance of parental duties.

The focusing of the law and order debate on youth crime and continual referencing to the ever increasing youth of those involved in anti-social behaviour has been accompanied by an increasing emphasis on the responsibility of parents for their childrens' behaviour. '*Parents must pay for youth crime*' (The Times March 5th 1997) and '*Howard plans to tag parents of errant children*' (Independent March 5th 1997) were headlines following Michael Howard's proposals in the 1996 pre-election run up. His ideas included parents paying compensation for vandalism committed by their children and orders to parents to keep their children under a curfew. Failure to comply might lead to the parents' criminal conviction and fines, curfew, electronic tagging or confiscation of driving licences. Such a scheme is fraught with practical difficulties in implementation. For instance, are both parents equally responsible, are both to be tagged? What about parents working away, on night shifts or absentee parents? Leaving aside these obvious difficulties the principle that effectively parents be punished for their children's wrongdoing demonstrates the extent to which responsibility is centred on the family. Nor is this just a vision of the right. Tony Blair's New Socialism is promoting, through Jack Straw the Home Secretary, a similar ideology. The response of parents to such measures is likely to limit children's freedom even more in order to avoid conflict with the law. Alongside these punitive proposals has been an emphasis on the responsibility for all aspects of their child's development and, particularly relevant to this discussion, a responsibility for the safety of the child. This has been reflected in media reporting which has emphasised parental culpability for any mishap involving a child.

Media reports involving children have prompted a trend to apportion blame to the parents whatever the situation. Children who come to grief in some way when out playing on the streets or in the park alone or the way to the local shop are considered to have been indulging in risky behaviour. The responsibility for this rests with the parents. If parents drop their surveillance of their child for a short time and a mishap occurs, then it is not considered just an accident but incompetent parenting. In the summer of 1996 parents took their eyes off their two children for a few minutes whilst on a beach in Norfolk. The result was a tragic double drowning. At the inquest the coroner said the children were 'unhappily left' for a few minutes by their parents. He added ' I make no comment about that, it would be unnecessary and unhelpful to do so'. He also asked them why they had not summoned help sooner. Implicit in these statements is parental culpability for what would once have been regarded as a dreadful accident. The press echoed this with headlines such as '*Unknown dangers faced drowned youngsters*' (Guardian Oct. 8th 1996), not only suggesting that the parents should

have been aware of the dangers but also that the children were allowed to go out and face such dangers unsupervised.

The parents of murdered schoolgirl Kate Bushell were asked *'hadn't they heard rumours that the lane where she was walking her dog was unsafe?'* Her father was required to justify why they let a fourteen year old walk her dog in daylight in a lane used by many other people from the village. The parents responses were that *'you cannot live your life in a cocoon'* and that she was *'just in the wrong place at the wrong time'*, a more rational approach to the tragedy than the paranoia suggested by the press.

When Zoë Evens, aged 9, went missing in 1997 newspaper reports described her as an *'independent young lady, often out of the house'*: this was definitely not intended as a compliment - more a warning to parents not to allow their daughters to behave in a similar manner (Guardian Feb 4th 1997). Confidence and competence in children may be implied faults if they lead the child to act alone. Children who demonstrate such traits have clearly been *'badly brought up'*. Zoë's stepfather was eventually convicted of her murder so she actually was safer when *'out of the house'*.

It would seem that parents are only free from potential criticism if they factory farm their children, keeping them inside as much as possible, only allowing them out under strict supervision, never taking their eyes off them for a moment no matter how safe they consider the location to be.

The emphasis on the responsibility and control of parents over their children lies uneasily with another strand in the public debate that encourages the emancipation and empowerment of children. The Children's Act of 1989 was the first British legislation that allowed children to contribute to decisions within situations that intimately concerned them such as the divorce of their parents or medical procedures. The Act represents a move by society to accord some respect to the views and wishes of children and is dealing particularly with situations where historically the responsibility for decision making was enshrined as parental right. Parents have a right to be confused when they are told on one hand they must accept full responsibilities for their children and on the other that their children are entitled to make decisions for themselves. The question of the status of children within society is pivotal in the whole construct of child safety and will be considered in the concluding section of this chapter. It is an issue which underpins all the other societal structures under discussion.

The family is entrusted by the state and society with wide responsibilities, so it must be assumed that it is considered a functional and safe unit for the care of children. In fact it is commonly dysfunctional and from a child standpoint statistically more dangerous than anywhere outside. Of the children killed non-accidentally, over 90% of the deaths are attributed to a parent or step-parent. As detailed in the next section most sexual abuse takes place in the child's home, most non-accidental injuries and a considerable proportion of accidental injuries occur in the home environment (Roberts et al. 1995). The NSPCC deals with about 7,000 cases everyday,² and it is acknowledged that many cases go unreported or undetected, particularly if the abuse is mental rather than physical. Even if the family is merely dysfunctional because of a break down in relationships within it, it can be a miserable place for a child. Now, not only is the child denied the opportunity to play outside to escape

from such an environment, but the pressures on the family are increased as it bears responsibility for keeping the child in.

Sexuality

As Chapter Four demonstrated, the perception of children and adults is that strangers are considered dangerous predominately because they may represent a sexual threat to children. The subject of children subjected to sexual abuse has moved from an absent discourse, too horrific and distasteful to be articulated, to a fear provoking topic that tabloid newspapers exploit and broadsheets consider their duty to report. The demonising of sex offenders reached new heights following the introduction of the sex offenders' register and generated public hounding of individuals. A report in *The Independent* (April 1998) described the attack on a police station in the Knowle West area of Bristol where protesters thought the convicted child murderer Sidney Cooke was being held following his release from prison. Petrol bombs and bricks had been thrown at the station resulting in the injury of 46 policemen. The aggressive action by these parents is a measure of the concern generated within society today. Paedophiles are presented as an ever-present threat to their children, a threat that it is difficult for them to protect their children against. Their parental concern is focused by the representations of such offenders in the press. Both broadsheet and tabloid newspapers run headlines which contribute to the heightening of existing worries. *'Paedophiles target single mothers'* said the *Times* (Aug 25th 1998) and *'Monster on the*

² NSPCC (no date) Welcome to NSPCC <http://www.nspcc.org.uk> (accessed November 16th 1999).

loose' from the Sun (April 26th 1998). Commenting on the events in a leading article two days later the paper stated: *It is not the habit of liberal newspapers to stand up for a baying crowd. But if a dangerous paedophile turned up at any neighbourhood slammer free to walk, every local parent would be, to go to the root of the word, vigilant* (Independent April 27th 1998).

Comments from leading politicians at the time echoed this empathy with the demonstrators. Jack Straw declared that *'his sort (Sidney Cooke) were better off in prison'* and promised to bring in legislation which would ensure that in future his like would not only serve their sentence but be detained for the rest of their *'unnatural lives'* (Times June 20th 1998). The concept that paedophiles and others (arsonists, rapists and those convicted of serial violence were mentioned) should be imprisoned not for what they have done but for what they might do is a new and potentially dangerous development in British justice. As Michael Grove pointed out in his Times article (June 23rd 1998), it is difficult for any reasonable person to defend a paedophile but the legislation suggested by Mr. Straw has echoes of George Orwell's 'thoughtcrime'. In effect simply to be in possession of a particular mindset judged to make criminal activity likely would be treated as a punishable offence.

The suggestion of such draconian measures from the Government gives credence to the moral panic surrounding those guilty of molesting children. It reinforces the notion that such men are lurking around every corner and action must therefore be taken to contain them. The lengths to which the Government is prepared to go, undermining traditional freedoms in order to secure children's safety, is seen by some as a reflection of the magnitude of the problem.

This concern to protect children from the roving pervert can actually have the opposite effect. Firstly the increased publicity has already resulted in the disclosure of the whereabouts of several men convicted of offences against children. These men were known to the local police and kept under the surveillance, but the fear of persecution has resulted in their disappearance and the police are no longer aware where they are. The disclosures move the threat to a new location and may actually increase the risk to children.

Secondly it diverts attention from the more likely sources of harm. The police do not keep records of the relationship between the victims of child abuse and their abusers but a representative of the Nottinghamshire agency responsible for child protection suggested that

in her experience more than 90% of the situations they dealt with involved either a member of the child's family or were well known to the child.³ In a survey conducted by the Greater Manchester Sexual Abuse Unit it was found that 65% of those charged were males in a parenting capacity to the victim (Waltham et al 1988) and 80% of the offences took place in the home of the victim or the perpetrator (Grubin 1998). It has been demonstrated that victims in these situations are more likely to be intimidated into silence than when the assault involves someone they know. Explanations as to why they did not speak out illustrate how they can be coerced into remaining silent:

Children often say they were confused and misled by the abuser's insistence that sexual activity was proper and normal: or that they did not know they had a right to refuse or that other adults would defend them if they complained: or that they were thrown off their guard when the adult behaved in a way they had never been led to expect.
(Porter 1988: 23)

Parents and guardians of children should be concerned to ensure that children are armed against such situations. This is problematic because it means empowering the children with sexual knowledge and, as has already been shown in Chapter Four, there is reluctance in society today to do this. Furthermore, children must have confidence to know that they will be believed, for many who have complained in the past have been ignored or considered to be lying. Waltham et al (1989) in their manual for workers in the field of abuse illustrate the ambivalent attitude to children's complaints in their comment:

Listening to children means exactly that even when, as must happen at times arguably there may be 'good reasons' for treating what the child says with caution.
(Waltham et al. 1989: 12)

This is not a comment which would fill a child with confidence in being heard and believed. A similar volume, written by Mrazek and Kemp (1987), when discussing recognising abuse situations deals only with interpreting doctor's reports with no mention of what the child has to say.

The perception of the child at liberty in society presents the same binary in a sexual context as in the law and order discourse. The child is on one hand the innocent likely to be preyed

³ From a conversation with Acting Inspector Helen Attenborough, Child Abuse Investigation Unit, Nottingham Constabulary.

on by the lurking paedophile. Alternatively the child is a sexual being who may engage in the practice of underage sex, potentially causing problems to itself and others. The images of provocative pubescent girls used in advertising, the marketing of adult style clothes and cosmetics to young children and the continual reminder in the media of the extreme youth of some of today's mothers and fathers; these are all reminders to parents of their child's potential sexuality. When a day in the life of a thirteen-year-old father is the subject of a fly on the wall documentary just a week before the announcement of a multi-million pound scheme aimed at reducing the number of teenage pregnancies the messages are confusing. Children are caught between the pressure to preserve their innocence, which effectively can prevent them acquiring sensible and accurate knowledge about sex and the commercial and media exposure which encourages them to look like adults and frequently discusses or demonstrates how sexually active adults behave.

Parents may fear for their child as an innocent or be fearful because the child is 'knowing,' or possibly both at the same time. Whatever the fear of the parents the consequence for the child is the same - their freedom will be constrained and licence to roam restricted.

Childcare

Post war concern about child-care centred on the work of Bowlby (1952) who identified the importance of attachment to a small number of carers for the very young child. Feminist reflections on this have suggested that his work was used as a pretext for encouraging the war time female labour force to return to a purely domestic role (MacKie and Pattullo 1977, Oakley 1976). This is not the context to debate whether society has fully accepted the notion of a working mother. It remains a complex question, for whilst the state certainly is exerting pressure on mothers claiming benefit to seek work whether they wish to or not, child care facilities are still not adequate and 'nanny scares' rife in the press. What is apparent is the greater input expected of parents to supervise the activities and movements of their school age children. It is expected that children of primary age will be accompanied to and from school and this is now extending to the younger secondary age children. Sharon Hays terms it 'intensive mothering' (Hays 1996). She uses this term to describe an ideology not simply about mothers and children but an ideology that '*speaks to a more prevalent set of social and moral concerns*', one of which is child safety.

I have myself been criticised by a member of staff from my children's school for allowing my young daughter to walk to school with her siblings. Staff at one school I visited discussed the

issue whilst I was there and were extremely critical of several parents. The results of the questionnaire indicate how few journeys children make alone, particularly in the middle class suburban areas, an indication that parents are transporting their children to and from their outside activities as well. The age at which children are considered dependent on their parents for day to day care is ever increasing. The primary age latch key child would no longer appear to be an acceptable option. One mother of a nine-year-old daughter who took part in the research gave as her reason for not seeking employment the commitment of accompanying her child everywhere:

*How can I work when I have to fetch and take her all the time?
(Sam mother working class suburb)*

Others felt restricted to part time employment for the same reason.

In the past mothers were made to feel guilty if they worked and left their child with a carer. Now they are made to feel guilt if they do not provide constant supervision for their child till at least the start of secondary school. The emotional blackmail is very similar and whilst the first issue has been grappled with by feminists, none have addressed the second (Oakley 1976, 1981, Firestone 1972, Beechey and Whitelegg 1986). The first issue was countered by a more accurate interpretation of the psychological findings. It was emphasised that, provided a suitable substitute attachment figure was available, a child did not suffer if left by its mother (Mackie and Pattullo 1977).

If the need to supervise children is in any way a patriarchal device to encourage women into their traditional roles then it is a very subtle one. It is exceedingly difficult to challenge, when the implication of the challenge is the putting of children into risk situations. Feminists are only on safe ground if they claim that the responsibility should be shared between the sexes. To suggest children need less supervision would be seen as negligent and callous. It is difficult to ignore risk once one has been made aware of its existence, no matter how slight is that risk, particularly if the risk is to a vulnerable person in one's care. This is the dilemma for mothers and theorists alike and it has delayed any challenge to the ever more confining nature of parenting.

The Child

The ambivalent attitudes to children which are raised in the family, law and order and sexuality debates are representative of the confusion surrounding the current discourses relating to childhood. The debate goes beyond the angel / devil binary raised by Valentine in her work on children in the environment (see law and order section, this chapter), for it relates to the child's position and rights within society and the way that childhood is understood by the other members of that society.

Chapter One dealt with the historical changes that form the context for the place of children in society today. The growth of the vision of the innocent child, developing within a free and gentle environment as postulated by Rousseau, remains a dominant image today. This child is seen as vulnerable and to be protected by its parents from the world outside. Its mind must be untainted by the baser aspects of life for the cliché would say, 'there will be enough time for them to worry about that later'. In its protected cocoon it does not need knowledge of the potential wickedness in the world and therefore does not require education about sexual matters. This attitude is problematic in today's society, for only a child growing up away from other children and without access to any of today's media output could develop like this. The extensive coverage of President Clinton's relationship with Monica Lewinsky is a very clear indication of how impossible it is to be unaware of the role of sex in everyday life. Parents all over the United States objected to being asked to explain the term 'blow-job' by very young children but if the parents were not prepared to explain then it is likely siblings or friends would. Those who continue to perceive the child in this way are protecting a fantasy of a child that no longer exists.

I have personal experience of trying to implement a sensible sex education policy in a primary school confounded by elderly school governors who saw no necessity for it. Their particular objection was to the children being given information about AIDS as this would involve addressing the issue of homosexuality. A begrudging compromise was reached whereby the teachers would only talk about homosexuality in response to questions from the children. The attitude of the governors reflects the Conservative Government's stance in 1986 when they introduced Clause 28 to Local Government legislation banning local authorities from financing activities that were said to 'promote the teaching of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship'. In some schools, this action effectively eliminated teaching about homosexuality from schools, as few felt able to maintain the neutrality required (Thomson and Scott 1992). Teachers said that at the very

least it cast a shadow over discussions in class. These attitudes are not only expressing a particular view about homosexuality but they treat the child as lacking in the competence to understand and to deal with the issues. There is an argument which says that exposing a child to such information might influence decisions he or she might make concerning their own sexuality (Epstein and Johnson 1998). This is echoed in the loud protests concerning the supply of contraceptives to young children. When Boots the Chemist opened a teenage birth control advice centres in Newcastle, Valerie Riches speaking on behalf of the pressure group Family and Youth Concern protested because it was seen as encouraging young children into early sexual relationships. She claimed that it would increase pregnancies and abortions because young people simply cannot cope with contraception. (Daily Mail, Dec1st 1998). Yvonne Roberts commented in the Guardian the following day '*How dangerously wrong can any one be?*' and cites the Dutch experience where a liberal approach and thorough sex education have led to lower abortion rates and teenage pregnancies and a far more responsible approach to relationships.

This perception of childhood assumes parents or guardians must protect children, exercising total control over them, albeit within a context of love and it also places low value on the ability of the child to understand issues which are denoted as 'adult'. It does not consider children to be competent enough to reach considered decisions or to take the practical steps necessary to implement their decisions.

Another debate centres on the recognition that there are rights to which all individuals are entitled. In recent years institutions such as The United Nations and the Governments of several countries including the United Kingdom have acknowledged that the child has rights which have not been identified or implemented. The United Nations issued a charter of Children's Rights in 1989.⁴ The British Government produced the Children's Act of 1988 which for the first time enshrined in law the right of children to have some say in issues which affect their lives. Critics of the implementation of the Act have pointed out that the problem lies in conflicts over perceptions of the child as a rational individual capable of making its own decisions. The 'get out' clause in the Act make it possible for those who are controlling the child's future to make assessments as to their competence to make decisions. The then Master of the Rolls in a case referred to as 're. s' (1993) made it clear that the law felt it necessary to protect children:

⁴ The Convention on the Rights of the Child. 1989 UNICEF

The reason why the law is particularly solicitous in protecting the interests of children is because they are liable to be vulnerable and impressionable, lacking the maturity to weigh the longer term against the shorter, lacking the insight to know how they will react and the imagination to know how others will react in certain situations, lacking the experience to measure the probable against the possible.

(in Franklin 1995 :10)

Franklin points out that the objections to children being involved in decision making can be met positively or negatively. It is possible to assert that children do possess the qualities which critics suggest they do not or that if they lack them it is in no greater degree than many adults. The problem remains that many of those implementing the Act hold views similar to those outlined in the quote, and so the child is often excluded from any meaningful contribution to the decision making processes.

Conclusion

The paradoxical attitudes towards children within the various ideologies considered in this chapter indicate the complexity of the issues surrounding children's safety. The Thatcher years saw an emphasis on individual responsibility that stressed the role of parents as controllers and custodians of their children. Both legal and moral sanctions have been applied to those whom, it has been suggested, have not fulfilled these obligations. The escalation of fear, particularly relating to the 'stranger danger' moral panic, has provided the justification for confining children in the home. It has aided authorities' efforts to tackle the public's fear of crime by providing scapegoats - the superpredators - in the form of children 'out of control'. It has defined public space as undesirable for the 'good' children, so that effectively all children are excluded.

'Stranger danger' has also served as a mask to the more likely sources of danger to a child, the dangers of traffic and the risk of accidental and non-accidental harm within the home. To expose the realities of greatest risk would undermine the institution of the family, an institution successive governments have been keen to support. The family must be a strong and capable institution in order to bear the responsibilities the state no longer meets. To expose the flaws in the family would undermine this ideology. Children are therefore entrusted to an institution which consistently fails some of them (Kitzinger 1988).

The non-specified nature of 'stranger danger' amplifies the menace and is part of a wider ideology aimed at preserving children's innocence. This preservation of innocence is unhelpful in empowering children to deal with the more likely sources of abuse. The preservation of this particular construction of childhood also perpetuates the construct of the child as an 'arational' being in need of protection, effectively denying children a chance to make decisions and leaving the decision making in the hands of the powerful. The chapter has shown that the construction that is childhood has multiple images within different ideologies: the innocent, the evil, the pure, the provocative, the arational, the competent. Most of these reflect a no-win situation for children in pursuit of a life beyond the home.

Thus multiple discourses contribute to the construction of the 'stranger danger' myth. Its message is channelled to parents through the media and other institutions such as the police, the schools and the institutions of government. The message is escalated by local communities until it is incorporated into the local culture and ultimately impacts upon behaviour. The neighbourhood environment is demonised as unsuitable for children and parents then have little option but to conform with the cultural norms of their neighbourhood. Exactly how the parents read, and respond to, the influences upon them will be the subject of the next chapter.

This chapter has identified the discourses which give rise to the expressions of fear discussed in Chapter Four, and so provides a new context for examining the behaviour of the children and the parents who took part in the study. It provides a framework for the consideration of the experiences of the parents and children as they recounted them in the discussion groups, the aim being to establish the extent to which the constructed discourse impacts on the actual behaviour of the participants. Discrepancies between the conduct of the children and parents and their articulated fears will now be examined in depth and the implications of these discrepancies considered.

Chapter Six

The Parents

The children's descriptions of their experiences, their perceptions of fear, and the way they responded to their carers' control have been the focus of this study. However, it was apparent that the attitudes of the parents and the constraints they imposed on the children were a major influence on the children's own perception of their environment. This was true even though the children sometimes transgressed the restrictions placed upon them. The children's fears reflected the fears of their parents and other influential figures in their lives. In addition to this their lack of personal autonomy meant that the whole structure of their lifestyle was dependent on adults. The adult influence was so fundamental to the children's understanding of their environment that it is essential to understand the parents' attitudes to their children's safety (Valentine 1997a, 1997b, Sibley 1995, Aitkin and Herman 1996). This chapter, therefore, focuses on the responses of the parents who took part in the study. It focuses in particular on the parents' interpretation of the discourses surrounding child safety and the way they translate their understanding into action, constructing the boundaries within which the children are expected to operate. One particular paradox in their responses, their liberal parenting behaviour when on holiday, is explored in depth in order to better understand all of the determinants involved in parenting decisions.

The parameters of responsibility involved in caring for children are not fixed but vary over time and space (James and Prout 1990). The introductory chapter demonstrated changing attitudes to childhood through history and showed how the needs of the child have been identified in dramatically different ways. It showed that, at any one time, different societies treat children in very different ways. In this country, the care of the child in the wider environment is a particular facet of social behaviour which has changed significantly in recent times and this research has contributed to the information available relating the extent of that change. The most influential of the discourses which have affected the change were discussed in the previous chapter and the channels of influence identified through which parents' attitudes have been formed. It has been demonstrated through comments of the participants in the study that individuals respond to this social conditioning in differing ways. How

individuals - specifically the individuals in this study - have responded to the influence of the media and other institutions is the concern of this chapter. The focus group discussions identified areas where there was a dissonance between the expressed beliefs and actual behaviour of some of the participants. This provided an avenue along which to explore how the parents made decisions concerning their children and the motives and sensitivities that influenced them. The analysis of their holiday parenting practice will be central to the consideration of possible explanations for their attitudes and behaviour.

Parenting Practice

When defining dangers within the environment all the parents in the groups agreed that traffic represented a hazard to their children and that the problem had increased since they were young. It is beyond question that the volume of traffic on our roads has steadily increased and issues relating to road accident rates, prevention and children's competence to negotiate roads have been addressed in Chapter Four. Parents identified main roads as being particularly hazardous for their children, but they also talked of spaces which were considered relatively safe in terms of traffic yet were still placed out-of-bounds for their children. Open grassed areas, parks and disused railway lines were mentioned in this context.

She has never been down to the park unsupervised, much to her annoyance.

(Sue mother village)

From where we live, you can see a bit of green but to get to it he has to walk through houses and I won't allow him to play there on his own, even though he asks to.

(Vikki mother middle class suburb)

Where I live it's a dead end and there is a field as well and the other kids have said, 'Can Thomas come to the rec?' (Shakes head indicating she would not let him).

(Carole mother transition)

Many of the areas mentioned have been provided specifically for recreation purposes and often provided with facilities intended for the use of children in the age group under consideration, children of 9, 10 and 11. Despite this, many of the children were not permitted to play on them unless with an adult. Parents consider such places unsafe because they may attract potentially harmful strangers. They are considered to be the places targeted by paedophiles who would expect children to frequent them.

*I won't let her go up Gladehill, there are tramps and all sorts.
(Dot mother transitional) (see Plate 5)*

*There is access to the Open Space from across the Golf Course, it's a public footpath. And the number of times I have been down there exercising my dogs and I have seen individuals who are probably totally not suspicious but I mean I am a little anxious being down there with them - they make me feel uncomfortable and if I am as an adult then I am not prepared to let the girls be put in that situation.
(Sue mother village) (see Plate 6)*

The fear of 'others' plays a significant role in the boundaries that parents place on their children's movements. 'Stranger danger' was raised as a fear in every one of the parent focus group discussions without any prompting from me. When I explored the issue further by asking them to consider their own behaviour at a similar age, and if things had changed since they were young, the responses interestingly took two forms. Some parents reaffirmed the 'stranger danger' discourse whilst others, on reflection, expressed doubts about its validity. For those who considered that the environment was more dangerous, the threat they most frequently mentioned was the violent or sexually deviant stranger;

*I mean for me, other than the traffic on the main road, I don't worry about the traffic. It's the fear of being abducted, I can't say that it isn't.
(Sue mother village)*

*I've got two older children and they walked to school on their own at the same age. There is more violence, more rape and everything else than when I was little.
(Dot mother transitional)*

*'I'm trying to find out what's changed...'
Well there are a lot more nutters out there.
(Sam mother working class suburb)*

*You could go in the street, walk to school. You daren't let your children do that now.
(Mike father inner city)*

In several of the discussions I introduced the idea that most assaults on children were committed by someone the child knew. I explained this was clearly demonstrated by statistics. One mother suggested this must be because the 'stranger danger' campaign had been so effective in warning parents and children. She said that she had heard that paedophiles now moved into communities and made themselves known in the locality in



Attractive recreational areas out of bounds for many children because of 'stranger danger'.
above Plate 5 Gladehill, after which the school in the study was named
below Plate 6 The Open Space, Tollerton



Her logic enabled her to continue to consider the molester as an outsider and not really part of the community. She was so convinced of the validity of 'stranger danger' that she provided an explanation of the statistics which conformed with the discourse. An alternative explanation - that one's friends or relatives were capable of assaulting children - would be unthinkable. This possibility was not to be contemplated, for not only does it require one to be suspicious of everyone but it makes it virtually impossible to protect one's child (Johnson 1996, Kitzinger 1990, Maher, 1989). To avoid confronting such an insurmountable difficulty parents construct strategies to avoid even accepting the possibility. This is the difficulty faced by those who wish to protect children but find it extremely difficult to get their message accepted. Writers on child abuse have pointed out that the only sure way to protect children is to educate them to protect themselves (Elliot 1989, Kitzinger 1988). But for many parents arming their children with sufficient knowledge to protect themselves is often not seen as an option. The children are not deemed competent to cope with the knowledge and it is considered that it would destroy their 'innocence'.

Not all the respondents were convinced by the 'stranger danger' mythology. Several focus group participants expressed doubt about the accepted notion that 'things had got worse'. These doubters were not confined to one particular socio-economic group. The ability to question received truths must not be considered confined to a particular sector of society.

*In our childhood I don't think we were so aware of strangers. (When I was a child) this bloke invited me to go and have a cup of tea with him and I didn't and I wasn't the only person who experienced that sort of thing so I don't think, in reality, it's much different now.
(Mike father village)*

*You know, 'stranger danger', obviously it happens and it isn't nice but I'm not conv.... I mean obviously I worry about it for Kate but it's the road I worry myself to death about.
(Sally mother transitional)*

*I am not unaware of these problems and I'm bothered about them if I'm reminded of them but the first thing that springs to mind is the danger on the roads
(Yvonne mother middle class suburb)*

Sue I don't know whether it has increased or whether it's our perception of it that has increased or whether it's the publicity that has increased.

*Mike I'm sure it hasn't increased. I'm sure it's just that we are made aware now as parents and we want to protect our children.
(village parents' group)*

*I don't know if it's really worse or just we hear it on the news more.
(Mandy mother inner city)*

Despite these doubts, virtually all these parents still controlled their children's movements very closely. There was general agreement that there was a great difference between their freedom as children and the freedom their own children experienced. They spoke with nostalgia of their own experiences as children, looking back on what they perceived as a safer, perhaps more innocent age.

*I mean we never...well we used to bike from Netherfield down to Stoke Bardolph. {appx 4 miles}. We used to go out and she didn't see us till teatime and she never used to be running round fretting.
(June mother inner city)*

*I walked for miles across fields with my dog when I was about ten, eleven or twelve and I could be out for hours and nobody would worry and it never occurred to me to worry.
(Sue village mother)*

The shift in attitude to children's safety had obviously changed since these parents' childhood, but one mother's comments indicate it was an even more recent phenomenon. Dot, quoted earlier in this chapter, saw a difference between the way she treated her older children - now in their late teens and early twenties - and her youngest daughter who was ten years old. This comment confirms findings from other studies which show that children as recently as four years ago had greater freedom than those in the study (Hillman 1993, Pugh 1996).

Several of the parents expressed concern about the effect the different lifestyle might have on their children. Some felt their children were less 'streetwise', less confident about taking care of themselves than they had been at the same age.

*My worry is because of the way we have brought them up or have had to bring them up they are not as worldly as they should be, that's a self perpetuating problem. They are not as worldly. When I was eleven nothing would stop me and I didn't need taking care of.
(Mike father village)*

*I do think as children we were far more worldly wise and able to look after yourself a bit more then...I mean my children, certainly Sam the ten year old seems so much younger in himself you know.
(Yvonne mother middle class suburb)*

The groups discussed whether children regretted not having greater freedom of movement and their feeling was that the youngsters were unaware how restricted their lives were

because they had never experienced anything different. As one mother put it, '*what you don't have you won't miss*' but added... '*but we miss it for them*'. The parents regretted that the children did not enjoy the freedom that they themselves once knew. This regret provided a strong motivation to allow their children this freedom when they could. Such liberty could only occur in an environment where they felt the child was secure and they felt confident that it was acceptable to allow the child greater independence.

The Holiday Safe Haven

One of the questions I put to both the parents and the children in the focus groups was 'Is there anywhere that you have visited that you think is a safer/better than the area where you live?' The answers included places in the Nottingham area and places they visited to see relatives and friends. Early on in the research it transpired that many of the children considered holiday destinations as 'better' places. Further discussion on the topic suggested the children had greater independent mobility when they were on holiday despite being in an unfamiliar environment. I felt this was an interesting finding and worth pursuing further. Consequently questions on holiday behaviour were included in all subsequent focus groups. This line of inquiry proved of great importance to the whole research and highlighted the benefits of the focus group method. Only with a method as flexible as focus groups is it possible to expose and pursue new lines of enquiry such as this.

The holiday behaviour of the families emerged as a pivotal issue in the research, and it is useful therefore to consider some of the models which have been proposed by those taking an interest in holidaymakers. This will provide a theoretical base from which to understand better parents' behaviour towards their children in a holiday setting, although it must be stated at the outset that in one respect all the models are lacking, and that is in the inclusion of children. In the first chapter, it was noted that children are absent from much geographical research and writing. The emphasis on family holidays in advertising demonstrates that the trade is aware that children play an important part in holiday choice. Their enjoyment is important to a successful holiday, so they are considered and in many cases have an input to the selection. Why then are they hardly given a mention in any of the theoretical models? There is considerable scope for extending research in this area.

Non-institutionalised traveller	Drifter	Search for exotic and strange environment
	Explorer	Arrange own trip off the beaten track
Institutionalised traveller	Individual mass tourist	Arrangements made through tourist agencies to popular destinations
	Organised mass tourist	Search for familiar, travel in the security of own 'environmental bubble' and guided tour

Table 9. Tourist typologies: interactional model.
Source: Murphy 1985 (after Cohen 1972)

Explaining how tourists¹ make choices about their holiday destinations has been of interest to many geographers and provides a starting point for this discussion. Writers have approached the question by defining different categories of tourist and Murphy (1985) and Finn et al. (2000) identify two distinct typologies of tourist classification. They divide the models into those which relate to the interaction of the tourists with their destination and those which are based on the motivation of the tourist to travel. The latter are usually referred to as the cognitive-normative models.

The interactional models (Cohen 1972, 1974, Smith 1977) place tourists on a spectrum dependent on the type of destination and experience they are seeking. At the extremes are the explorer in search of new places and possible danger and the mass tourist who is seeking the familiar in another location (see Table 9). The parents I talked to certainly were not seeking adventurous holidays which exposed their children to danger, but nor did they want their destination to be just like home. They wanted a safer place where they felt confident about letting their children roam with less restraint. The 'tourist bubble', an environment created especially for the holidaymaker (Smith 1977), did provide the required security for one mother. She was very enthusiastic about her holiday in Menorca where her daughter had the freedom of the complex where they were staying and was often left under the supervision of children's couriers. Many of the parents and children talked of holidays camping, caravanning or in rented accommodation - in this country and abroad - and in most cases

¹ The definition of the term tourist in Geography includes those who travel for purposes other than holiday making, such as business and for study. I have chosen to make use of a more populist definition and have used the word interchangeably with holiday maker.

Modern pilgrimage	Existential	Leave world of everyday life and practicality to escape to 'elective centre' for spiritual sustenance
	Experiential	Quest for alternate lifestyle and to engage in authentic life of others.
	Experimental	Look for meaning in life of others and enjoyment of authenticity
Search for pleasure	Diversionary	Escape from boredom and routine of everyday existence; therapy which make alienation endurable
	Recreational	Trip as entertainment to restore physical and mental powers

Table 10. Tourist typologies: cognitive-normative models.
Source: Murphy 1985 (from Cohen 1979)

these holidays were arranged on a private basis. Such individual arrangements do not take the holidaymakers into the constructed haven of some resorts. Smith's (1977) category that he called 'the incipient mass' refers to those who travel as individuals or small groups as these families did. He described them as seeking a combination of amenities and authenticity. The comments of the parents I spoke to suggested that they were less concerned with authenticity than the quality of the environment. They were in search of something not mentioned in any of the categories, an environment that they perceive as safer than their own lived environment.

The cognitive-normative models do consider the motivation of the travellers, but they also fail to include categories which seem appropriate for many. For example, of the categories described by Plog (1972), only the parents who had been on package holidays to popular destinations are really included. They would qualify for the group he labelled psychocentric, those on organised package holidays to popular destinations. But Plog claimed such travellers are seeking facilities similar to their home area, whereas I would suggest they are seeking something better. They want to leave behind the stresses that their own environment engenders and enjoy a greater sense of security. Significantly in his much quoted hierarchy of human needs, Maslow classed safety/security needs as next in significance to physiological needs (Maslow 1954). Those that organised their own holiday, sometimes year after year to the same place, do not seem to have a 'place' in Plog's model at all. Eric Cohen (1979) later revised his interpretation and produced an alternative classification (see Table 10). This does

have resonance with some of the parents' feelings about holidays - although his definitions are rather elaborate and transcendental in tone. I feel certain the parents would not accept they were in search of their '*spiritual centre, which for the individual symbolises ultimate meaning*' (Cohen 1979: 22). Such self-actualisation needs were at the apex of Maslow's hierarchy and only emerged when all other needs were fulfilled (Maslow 1954). The parents might agree with the fact that they were looking for an experience on vacation which could not be found at home. Cohen saw this search to be located in the lifestyle of those resident in the holiday destinations, but the parents' comments suggest it is the perceived quality of the environment that is of concern. Philip Pearce demonstrated the importance of the environment in a survey which placed 'relaxing atmosphere' as second only to visiting friends and relations in holiday destination choice (Pearce 1982). Parents are looking for more than both the 'diversionary' tourists in his classification who seek an escape from boredom and routine or the 'recreational' tourists who require relaxation to restore the physical and mental powers. These factors certainly contribute to their motivation but theirs is not an idealistic quest for a different, more enlightened culture, but the search for a safer space, a utopian environment. For it is such a space that relieves them of the everyday concern for their children's safety. Such a space also allows the children room to develop and mature. Several parents commented on the benefit to their children of greater freedom, but it was best expressed by one single mother from the middle class suburbs:

*I think when you are on holiday...I know when I go on holiday, Luke comes back sort of different because he has had that, you know, freedom. I think he grows up a bit more whenever we've been on holiday. He seems to come back more mature because, you know, he's had much more freedom and then we get back and... (sighs).
(Vikki mother middle class suburb)*

There was certainly a feeling among many of the participants, children and parents, that they found the utopian space they sought when they were on holiday.

*Its wicked up there, Miss. You know when we go on holiday its dead good there, there are no bad people.
(Cindy transitional)*

*Yeah, (in Wales) like a five year old could go out with an eight year old.
(David working class suburb)*

*We were allowed to go where we wanted there. We just had to be back in an hour or so.
(Gemma working class suburb)*

The parents echoed these comments:

*When we are on holiday she can go where she wants.
(Sam mother working class suburbs)*

*Even abroad. You don't know anywhere abroad, but when we went to Spain they was just off. We didn't have to bother.
(Theresa mother working class suburb)*

*I think there is a different attitude and I was really surprised at myself. Two years ago and they would have only been five and seven but they were allowed to go round the entire site...I don't know what it is. I can't explain why when it was drawn to my attention.
(Sue mother village)*

*It's a different atmosphere isn't it?
(Diane mother inner city)*

The motivation for granting this increased freedom is easily understood. Parents' nostalgia for their own less constrained childhood and wish to allow their children a similar freedom have already been mentioned. In addition, the parents expressed a wish to have 'a bit of peace and quiet' without the children around. Holidays are the ultimate leisure activity and leisure is a time when one is free from trammels which circumstance other spheres of life.

The motivation is easily comprehended but the rationalisation is far more difficult to explain. If strangers are seen as posing the greatest threat to children's safety, if play spaces in the lived environment are demonised by the threatening presence of shadowy strangers, then why is the risk not the same - if not greater - in unfamiliar surroundings? The comments of the parents and children suggest that many of them perceive this environment with which they may only have fleeting knowledge as much safer than their own familiar home area. The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to possible explanations of this irrational behaviour since it may provide insights into why parents impose a more restrictive regime on their children at home.

It is important to note that the more liberal holiday codes were not just experienced by children of parents who expressed doubt about the risk involved in 'stranger danger'. Many parents who accepted the discourse also said that they treated their children differently whilst on holiday. The explanation for the change of behaviour is unlikely therefore to be a simple one and several different influences will be suggested as contributory factors.

The last chapter explored the most powerful messengers responsible for constructing the discourse of 'stranger danger'. Comments made by the parents suggested the ways in which these messages were internalised by them. These comments suggested that the parents re-enacted the harmful stories they heard or read about, using their own children as players and locating the action in their own lived environment.

I won't let them camp out in the back garden, not since that girl was snatched.

(Sally mother transitional)

You hear about someone being snatched on the way to the shops and you think that could have been Toni.

(Linda mother working class suburb)

Incidents were referred to as happening 'in the park' or 'on the way to the chip shop,' indicating that each story had been recalled in a particular spatial context. The equivalent space in their own environment is related to this harmful space and thus becomes tainted by it. In addition to this, incidents which occur locally are circulated among the residents, adding to the sense of insecurity and further demonising the local environment. This construct of fear is not necessarily transferred to other locations. For some it is located in their specific lived environment and not in space in general. In the terms of the object relations theory utilised by Sibley the home environment is here 'dirtied' by association with occurrences in similar neighbourhoods elsewhere and by circulating and local knowledge of bad incidents, yet the holiday environment remains pure and unsoiled (Sibley 1995). When they go on holiday families seek a break from routine and they will choose an environment which has positive images for them. It is unlikely to fulfil their needs otherwise. In the new situation parents will make an assessment of the risks and they will have to do this principally by their own observations. Children will be constrained by visible dangers rather than theoretical ones. In such conditions it is likely traffic will re-emerge as the greatest threat to children's safety and the boundaries drawn and constraints imposed are likely to be influenced by the road system.

The demonisation of an environment is a complex process. It is not brought about simply by the media reporting of an incident which took place in an equivalent space. It has greater meaning for those living in a particular environment if they can relate the location of the incident to a similar space in their own lived environment. The need for transferability to the local in order to have real meaning for the local residents can be indicated by use of a case study. The particular incident in question took place on a Norfolk beach, an environment far

removed from the everyday experiences of the residents of Greater Nottingham. In August 1996, wide coverage was given in the press to the loss of two young children on a beach in Norfolk (see also discussion in Chapter Five). It attracted much attention, possibly as it followed close on the disclosure of a paedophile multiple murder of children near the coast in Belgium. There was some initial suggestion that the children might have been snatched. In fact, weeks later, their bodies were recovered from the sea and the deaths were found to have been a tragic case of drowning. During the focus group discussions I introduced reference to this incident. All the parents recalled the event, confirming the extensive publicity the case had received. I was interested to see if the tragedy had had any impact on the parents. Particularly I was concerned if it had changed their attitudes to the beach environment or caused them to rethink the regulation of their children in this setting. None said that it had changed or would change their behaviour on the beach with their children nor had it made any of their children fearful of the sea. At the time this was not the response I expected as I had anticipated that the media influence would have changed their attitudes. The reporting in the press was clearly emphasising what a dangerous place the beach could be and I thought they would have felt about the beach as they did their own lived environment. Although the parents declared the media to be a major influence on their thoughts, it was apparent that one highly publicised incident did not have a significant impact. It seems likely that that their fear of their own environment has developed over time and that multiple sources have contributed to its construction.

Another example which demonstrates how the demonisation of an environment can arise comes from a story told by a personal friend. We were discussing the issues I was investigating and she made an interesting comment about her own experience. She and her husband regularly take their three children to holiday in France where they also have relatives whom they visit. Their relatives warned them that the wooded area around their home is unsafe, so when Eve was staying there she kept her children confined, near to the house. When they visited other areas of France she allowed them far more freedom to wander about, more even than she did at home. She acknowledged how illogical this was and said she was relieved she did not have to confront the dilemma that this presented her with as her children were now old enough to be responsible for their own safety. We considered why she behaved in this way and concluded it was partly an acknowledgement of her relatives' greater knowledge of the area and partly a desire not to behave inappropriately as a parent in their presence. The examples indicate that, whilst the media has a particular influence in

arousing fears, it is only effective in particular circumstances and other influences may be as powerful on parents as the media.

Whilst many of the parents perceived their own environment as unsafe and the holiday environment as more reliable, they did also recognise other areas as unsafe. They were particularly aware of areas known to have the reputation of a high criminality, particularly if these were near to their own locality. Not all the parents I talked to perceived the danger as localised at all. One or two felt their children were in danger wherever they were. There were even those who were less confident of their children's security in the holiday environment because of its unknown nature. One couple from the inner city told me:

*We are more strict when we are at the sea-side.
(Mike and Bernadette parents inner city)*

Another mother felt so strongly about this that when told that children had said that they had more freedom on holiday she retorted:

*If that's what they say then they are lying.
(Paulette mother inner city)*

This point of view was most clearly expressed by one of the children. When her focus group members talked about their greater freedom on holiday, she said:

*That's not the way my Mum thinks. I can go further (at home) than when I go on holiday 'cos your Mum don't know whereabouts you are, because if you have never been there before you don't know what's hanging around, you don't know what's going on, you don't know how far you might go before something happens.
(Lucy inner city)*

Lucy expressed very well what might be seen as the most logical response to being in an environment one does not know well, but she was the only one who put forward such a view. One or two children talked of particular holidays where they had felt more restricted in their movements. For example, one or two had visited Florida and found it to be 'all roads with no footpaths'. Their complaints indicate this environment did not match their expectations of freedom usually enjoyed on holiday. The children, like their parents, saw the holiday as a time of greater freedom and were resentful if this was not possible.

The geographical theoretical considerations of tourists' behaviour made some contribution to the quest for an explanation of the parents' behaviour but did not sufficiently explain why many of them felt able to slacken constraints on their children whilst on holiday. The work of writers in other disciplines within the humanities provides alternative contexts in which to seek explanations.

Johan Huizinga the sociologist and philosopher, wrote of the play element in culture, of its importance in many aspects of human society and as a force for civilisation (Huizinga 1949). He asserts that play is first and foremost a voluntary action;

For an adult and responsible human being play is a function which he could equally well leave alone. Play is superfluous. The need for it is only urgent to the extent that the enjoyment of it makes it a need. Play can be deferred or suspended at any time...play is not 'ordinary' it is not 'real' life. It is rather stepping out of real life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all its own.

(Huizinga 1949 : 26)

Huizinga's seminal work considers the play element in language, law, war, poetry, festivals and other facets of life. He demonstrated that many activities have been restructured into commercial or intellectual activities and no longer qualify as play in his terms. So sports activities have crossed a boundary, as have games such as bridge. What is missing from his analysis is the twentieth century western construct 'the holiday'. This surely represents the ultimate opportunity for play activity. Holidays satisfy all Huizinga's definitions of play, they are voluntary, they can easily be left alone and they are outside everyday life. A holiday is a socially approved time for play. It is a cultural construct that recognises the need to escape from the everyday and indulge in activities that are perceived as meaningless in worldly terms. Torkildsen considered it was much harder for the adults to '*shrug off social and personal inhibitions to really play*' (Torkildsen 1983:147). Holidays have become so important in modern life as the unfamiliar environment allows the adult to make the journey back to childhood to indulge in much need play activity without the usual social constraints. Urry feels that, 'It is a crucial element of modern life to feel that travel and holidays are necessary'. He suggests that "*I need a holiday*' is the surest reflection of a modern discourse based on the idea that people's physical and mental health will be restored if only they can 'get away' from time to time' (Urry 1990:5). Within this time for play, this period of restoration, ordinary rules are shelved. Play time is a time for self-indulgence. People eat more, they drink more, and they keep different hours from their normal routine.

Within a such a framework of change it may not be considered surprising that their attitude to the control of their children changes.

Berger writing in his *Invitation to Sociology* declared that as tourists people '*temporarily leave behind their 'serious' identities and move into a transitory world of make-believe*' (Berger 1963:160). If they are not 'serious' then people may be said to be 'playful', if they are entering a world of make-believe they are indulging in an activity closely associated with play. This has significance for this study since the make-believe world that parents enter is one of their own making and can therefore be constructed in their imagination as a safe one. The world can be one in which it is acceptable for children to enjoy greater freedom. It can even be the utopian world of the parents' childhood. In such a world the stranger is not a threatening figure. If adults are leaving behind their 'serious identities' then they may leave behind some aspects of their role as parent. If they are in a playful mood because they have escaped the everyday routine. then their playfulness enables them to treat their children with indulgence. On holiday children's requests are more often granted, requests for food, ice-creams, drinks and fairground rides, and so perhaps requests to be allowed to make independent journeys are also regarded more benignly.

These ideas are supported by the work of Wickens who wrote of the *Hedonistic Behaviour of Holiday Makers in Greece* (Wickens 1993). He reported that holiday makers he talked to in Greece said they were in search of 'opportunities to relax, to feel less constrained, to please oneself, to be able to let one's hair down and to have one's fling'. To achieve these goals the responsibilities of parenthood may be relaxed, for such ambitions may be in conflict with behaving as controlling and responsible parents.

Holiday euphoria goes a considerable way to explaining the way some parents relaxed control on their children whilst away from home. It is difficult to believe, however, that caring parents can change rules, which some of them considered essential in the home environment, in pursuit of pleasure. It is difficult to reconcile this behaviour with the concern expressed by the parents for the safety of their children. The parents perceived strangers as the greatest threat to their children's safety and yet in a new environment everybody is a stranger, so the risk *should* have been considered greater. It is therefore necessary to consider factors other than the environment or perceived threats to provide an explanation for the parents' behaviour. The other possible influential variable was the presence or absence of familiars; the presence or absence of the peer group gaze. The final section of this

chapter will consider how parenting is influenced by day to day contact with others and how distancing from this contact might enable parents to behave more flexibly.

The Social Pressures of Parenting

The parents' observations and opinions revealed in the discussion groups suggest that they confine their children in their lived environment more than they would like. They are pleased to alter their behaviour when they feel it is safe to do so. Although some of them also question the severity of the risk they still feel it is necessary to protect their children. They are aware that they are protecting their children more than their parents protected them. This change in the pattern of parenting has been precipitated by the changing attitude to the space in which we live, and the previous chapter has identified the most significant fears and demonstrated how discourses in the public domain have contributed to the sense of danger. It is clear from other examples that, no matter how powerful the messages of propaganda, they are not always acted on by the populace. Messages may be ignored by most people and others are ignored by particular groups within society. Examples of this might be the continuing use of tobacco by a significant sector of the population, the use of illegal drugs by a high proportion of today's youth, and the disregard for the rules of the highway code by drivers - particularly those of speeding. These are all proven to be dangerous activities, the media, the state, the police and schools make efforts to prohibit them but they still continue. They are pursuits that are a risk, in some cases not just to those directly involved in them, and yet they are tolerated to different degrees by different sectors of society. The danger involved in these activities is obvious or has been public knowledge for decades. Despite this, changes in behaviour are slow and in the case of drug consumption the practice thought to be on the increase. It is therefore very surprising how quickly the mobility of children has altered. The change in attitudes to children's freedom has been rapid. As has already been noted, one mother was aware of a difference in the way she treated the eldest and the youngest of her children. Recent studies have demonstrated just how quickly change has occurred (Pugh 1996, Hillman 1993). The risk to a child from being attacked by a stranger would be rated lower than the risk from smoking cigarettes or taking drugs. A child is probably more at risk from passive smoking or riding in a speeding car than going alone to a park, so why has this discourse had such an effect? Why is its message so powerful? What are the forces that encourage and police this behaviour?

A large part of parenting has traditionally been learnt by example. Socialising techniques and rule making are handed down from parent to child. In the past a daughter usually lived near

her mother and the mother assisted in the upbringing of her grandchildren. In the Wilmot and Young study conducted in the East End in the nineteen-fifties, over half of the married women had seen their mother within the previous twenty-four hours and 80% within the previous week (Wilmot and Young 1957 :45). Today extended families living in the same neighbourhood are less common. Wilmot conducted follow-up research in London in the nineteen eighties and ascertained that only one third of the couples had parents or parents-in-law living within ten minutes' travelling distance. The increase in single parent families in our society has a particular impact as in many cases grandparents and relatives on the absent parent's side are estranged from the family. Although, as I know from experience, the telephone has filled the gap in emergencies, the active, day to day, passing of parenting skills from generation to generation is no longer the norm. The consequence is that with mothers and fathers isolated from their immediate family, the peer group becomes an important source of information and support.

Stolz (1967) in her extensive study of influences on parent behaviour stated that all but a few parents reported being influenced in their child rearing practices by acquaintances. Those mothers who found acquaintances particularly helpful stressed the influence of values for providing nurturing, beliefs about the environment and learning (Stolz 1967: 268). These issues are ones which have particular relevance to decisions made about children's independent mobility. She demonstrated that authority figures such as doctors, health visitors and teachers could have a significant influence on parental attitudes, but that the areas of influence of such professionals were more likely to be related to their expertise. Since the issue of mobility is not central to the expertise of any of these groups, the peer group can be considered the most significant influence over this issue.

Her study did not address to what extent the influence of these groups actually changed parents' beliefs or whether sometimes they merely altered the parenting behaviour. In the context of this study these possibilities represent the difference between parents being convinced that the environment is a dangerous place for their children or parents confining their children because they perceive that to be the appropriate socially acceptable parenting behaviour. Such a distinction has particular implications in the context of the changes in behaviour under consideration. Several of the participants in the study initially talked about the local environment as a dangerous place but then expressed some doubt about the validity of some of their presumptions. Their immediate responses conformed with the received view, but when pushed to a closer examination of the situation they were not as sure that their

superficial perceptions were totally correct. Their parenting decisions concerning their children's safety were arrived at based on the notion of the dangerous environment, but these values were reinforced by the gaze of those around them. Their wish not only to be good parents but also to be perceived as good parents structured the set of rules they devised for their children.

Valentine's (1997b) Manchester mothers described their guilt at not performing as other parents expected them to behave. She quotes one mother who explained:

If I don't go to school at night to pick the children up I feel very, very guilty because all the Mums are there. I wouldn't not pick her up. I think Laura's quite old enough to really walk home from school on her own but guilt makes you go because it's expected.

(Mother, middle class, non-metropolitan area in Valentine 1997b: 74)

Valentine in the same article also quotes a single mother who was even more sensitive to the gaze of others as she anticipated accusations of inadequate parenting if she did not conform. For these parents the approval of others dominated their actions that they did not see as necessarily in the best interests of their children. They were concerned that their children's excessively protected life style would inhibit their acquisition of streetwise skills. This lack of skills would make the children more vulnerable when they reached an age when the social norms accepted greater mobility as inevitable.

Maureen Freely writing in the Guardian (March 7th 1999) in an article aimed at the growing concern over children's lack of freedom in the environment puts forward various arguments as to why she is not prepared to feel guilty at restricting her children. Although she understandably expresses concern about traffic, her greatest concern seems to be the gossip at the school gate that any sign of laxity on her part might incite. She is critical of those who advocated that children deserved more freedom and was unrepentant about using computers and televisions to entertain her children rather than meet their demands for greater freedom. She does not contemplate teaching traffic skills or constructing boundaries around safe areas within which they could enjoy some freedom. The only reason she does not do these things appeared to be that other people might disapprove. She was honest about the importance of the approval of others, whilst acknowledging that allowing other people's opinions to effect your child rearing practices can be seen as a form of weakness by some people. The suggestion was certainly resented by some of the parents I talked to. One village mother said:

*I make my own decisions about what I want them to do irrespective of what anybody else tells me. I shall stick with what I think is right.
(Sue mother village)*

She was upset to think that she might be thought so malleable as to be influenced by others, but did subsequently agree that other people behave in particular ways because otherwise they might be considered inadequate mothers. She also suggested that parents were often made to feel guilty in respect to their parenting practice no matter how hard they tried.

In the group of inner city parents, I felt one particular mother tempered her comments to match the views of the others. She had teenage daughters older than any of the other participants' children and her youngest daughter who had participated in the children's focus groups said that her older sisters had considerable freedom. This was not the impression her mother gave, although she made comments such as '*You won't find it so easy when yours are older*'. It was my opinion that she did not wish the other members of the group to disapprove of her parenting so remained quiet about her daughters' activities.

The information I gleaned from the focus groups on the subject of the peer group gaze was limited. However I am able to add experiences of my own to support my contention this can play a significant part in the way we construct rules for our children. I referred in the introduction to the more restrictive parenting practices I encountered when I arrived in a new environment. On moving house and settling my three daughters aged 11, 8 and 6 at their new school, I indulged their request to walk to school together, as they done at their previous school. When I went to the school to meet them that afternoon I was taken aback to be told by the youngest child's teacher that she thought it was inappropriate for Hannah to be brought to school by her sisters. I explained that they were used to this and had asked to be allowed to walk together, but the teacher was not impressed. I felt forced to walk with the children in order to establish myself as a caring mother in this new environment. My admittance to hospital for a prolonged stay a few weeks later meant necessity reinstated the regime that the girls and I wanted. We were able to maintain this without too much criticism when I returned home following the birth of my youngest child.

Later I became very much part of the school as a voluntary helper and Governor. When I undertook the role of Chair of Governors, I felt it expedient to conform to the expected behaviour in order to avoid alienating any of the parents. I therefore transported my children far more than I personally thought necessary and did not allow them into the centre

of Nottingham alone - when I felt confident they were perfectly able to take care of themselves. I felt in my role it was necessary to be above reproach, sleaze free, and so I conformed to the norm.

I have also on occasions heard teachers and parents criticise those who were not seen as fulfilling their role as guardian of their children. One child of five caught the bus to and from school. It stopped directly outside school and took him almost to his door. Usually he was with his brother but sometimes alone. This was considered highly irresponsible and yet the child was perfectly happy with the arrangement. Many children at other schools at this age travel by special school bus, the only difference in this case was that Josh had to pay for his fare. It is not so long ago that this would have been considered perfectly acceptable and it is difficult to understand why his journey was regarded as so unsafe. Parents who witness criticism of others are unlikely to expose themselves to such censure and so will ensure their children are not permitted to step beyond acceptable limits of mobility. I do not claim all parents would respond in this way. If Josh's mother, whom I know quite well, had heard the criticism I doubt she would have altered her attitudes, but plenty of parents are more sensitive to the opinion of others. Such parents are free to act differently, if they wish, when they are beyond the gaze of those they encounter in their lived environment. Holiday time may be one situation when they take the opportunity to do so.

Conclusion

This chapter has used the evidence of the parents to consider how they respond to current discourses concerning child safety. It has been demonstrated that not all parents fully accept that the 'stranger danger' myth can be substantiated by fact but most feel pressure to contain their children nevertheless. The close examination of holiday behaviour demonstrated the desire of many parents to allow their children more freedom and emphasised the importance of the peer group gaze in parenting behaviour. These differences that have been highlighted all fall into an overall framework of parenting which was remarkably consistent throughout the groups. The concern for safety and the imposition of tight controls on the children were common themes in all the interviews and, the next chapter will consider the responses of the children to these issues and consider their experiences of their local environment.

Chapter Seven

The Children

To claim to interpret accurately the way children perceive their worlds is presumptuous. Feminist critiques, from the earliest times, have convincingly demonstrated the inadequacies of the analysis of other worlds by those outside them (Millman and Kanter 1975, Oakley 1981, Harding 1987, Hartsock 1983, Firestone 1972, Rose 1993). Millman and Kanter explained that:

Certain methodologies and research strategies - such as having male social scientists studying worlds involving women may systematically prevent the elicitation of certain kinds of information, yet this information may be most important for explaining the phenomenon being studied.

(Millman and Kanter 1975 :24)

The complexity of this problem when wishing to understand the lives of children was considered in the opening chapter. There are real difficulties in organising children to conduct and analyse their own realities which make it necessary for others to undertake it for them. Additionally researchers in the field are haunted by the fact that children form a unique outsider group - because it is a group to which we have all once belonged. This triggers an assumption that we can accurately recall and transfer our own experiences from childhood to aid our interpretation of the lives of today's children. Writers can exercise an arrogance about their comprehension of this other world which can be blinkering and misleading (Aitkin and Herman 1996, Matthews and Limb 1999).

The difficulties surrounding the writing about children's realities does not mean that such writing should not be attempted for, as Matthews and Limb point out, this only goes to '*maintain the hegemony of adults*' (Matthews and Limb 1999 : 64). Listening to children in the most sympathetic environment possible and making full use of their own words are approaches which can lead to important insights. It is vital, however, to be constantly aware that any analysis of children's observations will always be those of an adult, and in the case of this research of one particular adult. Inevitably, my own particular interpretation of reality will influence the way I decipher the lives of others. Many now include

biographies in their writing to enable the reader to form an opinion of the perspective of the author (Walkerdine 1990, Epstein and Johnson 1998). The inclusion of personal stories in this text is intended to provide brief autobiographical details which will help to illuminate my own standpoint. It is in this context, that this chapter will concentrate on the children's stories relating to their experiences in their lived environment. It aims at making sympathetic use of these stories to deduce the way the children cope with and interact with their environment and to demonstrate the way they experience the constraints imposed upon them.

The previous chapters have dealt with those determinants which have most influenced both adults and children in their perception of their environment. Their parents, the media and other organisations encountered in everyday life such as the school and the police service are some of the key agents for the children in the process of learning about the world around them. The children's peer group is another important source of information and ideas and one which holds a perspective more in tune with a child's way of seeing. Finally, and perhaps most important of all, is each child's personal experience of their surroundings. These inputs interact to give each individual a perception of their lived environment. The children's stories illustrate all these sources and show how the different ways of learning can influence different aspects of understanding.

The importance of understanding a landscape as a child sees it has been emphasised by writers such as Hart (1992), Aitkin and Herman (1996), and Matthews and Limb (1999). However, just as it would never be claimed that there is one way all adults appreciate and experience their environment, so we must not consider children as a homogenous group (Aitkin 1994, Aitkin and Herman 1996). One child's perception cannot be used to generalise for all. The universal child does not exist (James and Prout 1990, Valentine 1996a). Whilst allowing for each child's unique experiences, my aim is to search for common threads which link those children who share their spatial worlds. Within the groups to whom I talked, commonalties existed between all the children. Within subgroups there were themes which linked the children's outlook on their world. The data from the questionnaires illustrates that there are differences of mobility between: the children living in different environments, the different socio-economic groups and the genders. Studies which have been able to collect information about the different ethnic groupings have also exposed such commonalties (Woolley and Amin 1995, Parker 1995, see also footnote in the Introduction). The aim in this work, as ever, is to identify commonalties whilst

continuing to recognising differences. This chapter will look in depth at children's responses to dangers within the environment and their stories which explain which spaces are available and which unavailable to them. I will relate this to the relationship between the various boundaries they encounter and the way they manipulate and manage these boundaries.

Strategies of Coping

The children's initial responses in the group discussions demonstrated their familiarity with the dominant views concerning the dangers that faced them in the environment. The quotes in Chapter Four vividly illustrate their engagement with the issue of strangers who might harm them and also show that they recognise that traffic is a constraint on their freedom and a threat to their safety. Reading the transcripts of the discussions it was apparent that these were issues that had to be acknowledged before we could advance to the rest of the discussion. These issues held such dominance in the public domain that it was essential that the children prove their awareness of them in order to demonstrate their competence. This is not to suggest that the children did not engage with these particular issues. They certainly encountered some forms of them in their personal experiences of the environment. I am suggesting though, that the manner and context of their initial answers was based on an adultist interpretation of the dangers that faced them. Many of them expressed the danger, particularly the 'stranger danger', in terms of their parents' fears rather than as a danger located in the environment.

*She worries about people taking me. She has said it millions of times.
(Sharpe middle class suburb)*

*My Mum's worried because sometimes big people hang around there.
(Kate transitional)*

*I think she worries about people taking me because she doesn't let me
go that far.
(Lauren working class suburb)*

The way they initially explained the problems conformed to their perception of what was required of them and was not entirely consistent with the experiences they went on to recount. Children can learn and repeat the lessons conveyed to them by those in the role of pedagogues. However, they do not necessarily translate these lessons into their everyday behaviour, nor do their everyday experiences reinforce the things they are told. With respect to traffic, children have considerable knowledge and experience of its dangers but it

has been demonstrated that teaching children in a classroom how to behave in traffic is not particularly effective (Valsiner 1985). How much more difficult therefore to teach children effectively about 'stranger danger', a concept of which most have no experience, particularly when it is taught in a way which only tells half the story. Chapter Four showed that it was unlikely that all the children had an accurate understanding of the implied threat of 'stranger danger'. The language the children used was on the whole vague, but with the common theme of being overpowered or controlled in some way by the stranger, 'the other'. If the messages concerning safety do not give clear explanations or do not match the children's lived experiences there is a danger that they will be misunderstood or even ignored. Drug education programmes which have dismissed the possibility of trouble-free recreational use have found their message is ignored by young people whose experience contradicts this (Baker and Caraher 1995). It is important therefore that any safety campaigns aimed at protecting children from abusive 'others' must also be honest and open not only about the danger but also about where the danger may be encountered.

The nature of the threat from stranger might not have been fully understood by all the children but this does not mean that they did not have coping strategies. Some strategies the children claimed to have evolved themselves, others were the result of instruction from parents or advice from teachers or the police. None of the children mentioned any educational campaigns such as that run through Kidscape¹, and the staff of the schools confirmed that they had not undertaken such projects.

Strategies might involve always being with others:

If my Mum said I could walk to, like, the corner shop she would say, like, just go with your friends so that if I was taken they could rush back and tell her.

(Sharpe middle class suburb)

Or some means of deceiving their pursuer;

But if any one after me I'd just run in the garden and say 'Hello Mum' so they would know it was my house.

(Cindy working class suburb)

Or just avoidance;

¹ Kidscape is a charitable foundation founded by Michele Elliot which promotes child protection programmes in schools.

There was this man one day when me and Clare was playing on the park it was nearly six and dead dark there was this man and he kept coming near us and we kept moving away didn't we?

(Yvette inner city)

Go round slow and if somebody who looks a bit funny is round there don't go round there, go round the other way.

(Lucy inner city)

Sharpe suggested an imaginative strategy for dealing with strangers:

Sharpe So like if they slugged me or take all my things off me, than you could like tell them, take a picture like in your head and tell them and even go back and draw them.

PP So it would be safer if they could catch the people who harm...?

Sharpe It would be safer and then your Mum would think that you could get through life, but if lots more people got had, you could probably make friends on the road.

(Sharpe middle class suburb)

He was a child who was particularly confined, living in what estate agents might term a 'select area of riverside flats', located on the border of the suburb and the city. He explained that his mother was very worried about strangers - 'she's told me so hundreds of times' - and would not allow him to play out alone in the traffic free area in the centre of the complex. His strategies appear more concerned with convincing his mother that he could be allowed more freedom rather than dealing with the threat itself.

Strategies suggested or enforced by parents were also mentioned by the children and seen as effective ways of keeping safe.

They normally check if you're going with a mate or something, because if there is no one else around. There's a problem really.

(Michael inner city)

My dad says if you're in a group just kick them in the shin and leg it.

(Dwaine transitional)

My Mum says if you see someone following you just run.

(Sian village)

The children I talked to not only demonstrated that they had strategies prepared to deal with dangerous situations but their stories illustrated how these were put into practice when the need arose.

Yvette This man, we came back from swimming about six o'clock one, last week with my friends called Stephanie and Jamie, and Stephanie she seen a dead spider so she screamed and then this man said 'Do you want some sweets' and she said 'No' and he asked her to get in the car and she told her Mum and her Mum said 'Right, you can't go swimming on your own I have to come and pick you up or walk you down'.

Moderator You got away?

Yvette Yeah we ran up the street.

(inner city children's group)

Yvette experienced at first hand what did appear to be a threatening situation. She and her friends recognised it as such, stayed together and ran away, all sensible strategies for dealing with the situation. She did not appear unduly disturbed by what had happened, and although Stephanie had reported it to her mother, Yvette had not. She was more concerned about restriction of her freedom than about potential danger. Incidents such as this may be frightening at the time, but once the danger has passed they become adventures to be recounted. The girls may have been 'dead scared' at the time but the manner of telling was as if they were talking of the fear experienced on the latest ride at Goose Fair. Having dealt in a satisfactory way with the incident they saw no reason for it to inhibit their future activities.

Within communities, news and information is networked and stories passed around as salutary tales for others, highlighting risk and reinforcing appropriate behaviour. Children told stories of the experiences of their friends:

My friend went up and she was with a group and there was these two men and they were just following her, and my friend, well her friend lives just across the road from the Lodge so they ran to her house and they saw him walking past the house twice. He was walking past the house.

(Toni working class suburb)

Toni's story demonstrates the use children make of their familiarity with their environment, using known locations as safe houses to run to when they feel threatened. Their knowledge protects them from those unfamiliar with the locale and gives them confidence in their own ability to take care of themselves (Valentine 1997b). The inconsistencies in the story, two men changing into one, show the 'Chinese Whispers' effect. Stories are altered and distorted as they are passed around. As Chapter Five showed, this is one process in the escalation of fear within a community.

Adults use such stories as parables to demonstrate how children should behave and the consequences of not obeying the rules.

*Martin Well, my cousin he lives in Calverton he was with his mates
and his mates went on and he was walking on his self and this
man came out, straight out of the front door and said 'Get in
here' and he ran off and he were crying his eyes out.*

PP *Who told you this?*

Martin My Aunty.

(Martin transitional)

Martin's cousin had not stayed with his mates, he did not stick to the rules of safety and had therefore left himself open to trouble. He becomes an example to others, and even though he did the right thing in running away, he is exposed to the shame of everyone knowing he had cried. It is unlikely he would have included this embarrassing fact if he had been telling the tale himself since boys are more likely to brag about danger and enjoy the prestige such an encounter might warrant (Quadrel et al 1993, Valentine 1997b).

The children reflected popular concerns over 'stranger danger' in their discussions but it was not real enough to them to inhibit their movements. Most discussed the issues with an enthusiasm and openness which would be hard to equate with deeply felt anxieties. This may be due in part to the lack of explicit discussion about what it meant or the fact they had not experienced at close hand any violence or assault. Their stories indicated they were aware of strategies both to avoid danger and to escape from it. They had a highly developed sense of suspicion about any strange adult behaviour and responded to this by employing sensible avoidance tactics.

Michelle Elliot relates the responses of children who had been through the Kidscape educational preventative package and had subsequently successfully deflected attacks or abuse. She poses the question '*Without the Kidscape scheme would they have done so anyway?*' (Maher 1989 :258) . The responses of the children in this research indicate that children are aware of the appropriate action and in many cases are confident enough to take such action in a real situation. This does not negate any value of schemes like Kidscape, for they may well empower those children who lack the confidence needed to cope.

Negotiation of Boundaries

The parents' fear of the traffic danger and 'imagined others' placed spatial and temporal boundaries on the children's movements, confirming the finding of many other studies (Anderson and Tindall 1972, Hart 1979, Schiavo 1988, Matthews 1987, 1992 Valentine 1997a). The imposed boundaries are usually the result of a negotiation process between parents and children. The responses to the questionnaires indicated most children would be anxious to maximise their potential range. It has also been shown that for many children the home range was extremely small or did not exist at all. The discussions that follow apply to those who were allowed limited access to the world beyond their home, within the boundaries they negotiated with their parents.

These boundaries were both temporal and spatial. A distinction can be made between the boundaries that the children endorsed and colluded in and those that they challenged or transgressed. Their comments suggested they offered least resistance to temporal boundaries. The night was considered a dangerous time by both children and parents in all the groups and there was no complaint among the children about not being allowed out at night. Crossing the road is thought a more dangerous action in the dark since it is possible drivers may not see you. The children's comments in Chapter Four show that objects of fear become even more fearful when it is not possible to see them clearly. There is continual exposure to the use of the dark, to increase the tension, in many fictional, dramatic situations. Dark rooms and buildings, unlit roads, lanes and woods are used in television and cinema to create suspense. Paul (from the village) shows how this can have its affect. Only when it is dark, he told us, does he look behind himself when he turns a corner '*just in case*'.

The spatial boundaries were negotiated with the parents. Distance from home was the most significant factor, with the parents requiring the children to be easily found if required. Many boundaries related to traffic danger and were the inevitable consequence of the planning of the lived environment. All the schools, and therefore the children's homes, were close to busy roads. These often formed range boundaries which were acceptable to both parents and children. The groups from all the different areas were united in their dislike of busy roads:

*I'm scared of main roads and things.
(Natalie middle class suburb)*

You've got a fifty-fifty chance of being run over when you cross that road.

(Paul village)

PP *What's the traffic like round here?*

Chantelle *Murder*

(inner city children's group)

This often contrasted with the way their view of the traffic situation in close proximity to their home. The children for the village were all agreed that within Tollerton traffic was rarely a problem.

Quiet ... and that's an understatement.

(Paul village)

Sometimes I mistake it...the road...for a country lane.

(Jenny village)

Another united group were the children in the affluent suburb, none of whom made any claim for a safe area around their home. The layout of the particular area of West Bridgford where they lived did not provide any extensive areas with light traffic. As the map shows, three main roads run through the area and the linking roads are busy with traffic crossing between them. Road calming schemes have been put in place on the most used 'rat runs' but these have only slowed the traffic rather than reduce it.²

In the other three settings, there were differing responses from children living in the same area. The description of the traffic situation of the children from the working class and transitional suburbs and the inner city depended on exactly where their home was located. Some like Cindy found it '*dead quiet*' because they lived in a dead-end-road or small close. Others living on one of the main thoroughfares through the estate said the traffic '*was bad most of the time*'. Such variations make it more difficult for parents to set what could be considered safe boundaries. In the village there were obvious borders which the parents could demarcate as safe, hence the greater freedom near to home of the children who lived there (see Chapter3).

The children implied in the discussions that most of the time they remained within the boundaries agreed with their parents. However, in all the areas, several admitted that they occasionally went beyond these limits. Paul, from the village, had, unknown to anyone,

² Nottingham County Council Traffic Department , 1999.

ridden his bike well out of his allowed range to look at a small local airport. Two of the boys from the middle class suburbs talked of 'playing chicken' on a main access road when they were supposed to be in the adjacent park.

Andreas It's really dangerous on Boundary Road because if you're like crossing it's near the junction just where they turn off and we were crossing from there . So once we crossed Hew nearly got run over.

PP Why did you cross over?

*Andreas Because we were doing all these things - like we were crossing and just coming back over. (Somewhat embarrassed)
(middle class suburb children's group)*

Parents also reported that their children had gone beyond their permitted range, been found out, and subsequently punished for it. Sue's son had been grounded for going outside his permitted rectangular range in the middle class suburb, as had Sharon's daughter in the inner city. One of the parents at the transitional school lived close to the A601:

My son's seven, well he is seven and a half now, but he does venture out a bit more, we live near a big pub and there's a car park. I can see it from my house but he does go round the corner where I can't see him. But he has recently been to the shops across a main road with a bigger boy, which I said 'O.K, you know, as long as you go through the crossing and are careful' 'cos I want him to learn them and also my sister lives across the main road and he's sneaked across there in the past so we've made sure he does know how to cross that if he does sneak across - we haven't given him permission but he's done it because now we know he's safer.

In this case the boundary, specified by the parent, is being transgressed by the child, with the parents' collusion. In effect there appear to be two sets of boundaries in operation, one which has been negotiated between the child and the parents and another beyond it. Hart observed two sets of boundaries, twenty years ago, in his mid-western American town study. There were those that the parents laid down and those, just beyond, that they suspected their children adhered to. He suggests there is a tacit agreement about this between parents and children which allows the children to develop a sense of independence and enjoy a sense of devilment and disobedience. He found that this applied particularly to the boys in his study:

The rules, usually made by both parents , are in fact administered by the mother who often turns a 'blind eye' when her boy breaks a

*boundary; 'Well she knows I go , but I'm not supposed to'.
(Hart 1979 : 65)*

Although the number confiding transgressive behaviour was small in this study, eight in total, all but one were boys. It does appear that there is still an expectation that boys are more likely to '*explore more, engage in more rough play, be more physically active, and get into trouble more. Such are the attitudes toward the making of a man*' (Hart 1979 : 65). One of the boys from the village explained this very simply. To quote Neil's comment again, he said that his Mum '*wouldn't mind me getting into a little trouble because...because I'm an ordinary boy*'.

Parents mentioned a number of varied spaces where they considered their children might potentially be at risk from 'others'. These were very diverse in nature from places known to be the hang-outs of drug addicts in the inner city area to what might be seen as the other extreme, the local play area in the village, which was considered unsafe by one mother because there was access to it from several footpaths. The children also reported that their parents considered places dangerous in this way. In the working class suburbs, John said his mother did not like him going down alleyways,

*Because maybe she thinks there's lots of people hanging about
(John working class suburb)*

And Jenny said her mother was

*Worried if I go further than the shops and if I haven't told her she's
worried about taking away and drug dealers and all.
(Jenny middle class suburb)*

The children from the working class suburbs also told how their movements were limited by their parents because of the activities of others:

*My Mum don't let me out because there are loads of burglaries down
our street.
(David, working class suburb)*

*I'm only allowed up there (Bestwood Park) with certain people 'cos my
Dad works there at the fire station and there's been drug addicts up
there and there's been a lot of hangings where people hang themselves
on the trees.
(Gemma transitional)*

The children felt that restraints were placed upon them by their parents because of the actions of other adults polluting their space by engaging in activities that the parents perceived as threatening (Sibley 1995).

The children reiterated their parents' fears but, perhaps surprisingly, they also claimed that the threat of strangers did not actually stop them going out. There were no places they had permission to visit but avoided because of the threat of 'stranger danger'. In that it was one factor taken into consideration when their parents agreed their boundaries the fear of strangers was a limiting factor, but it did not have any impact on the way the children made use of their home range. None of the children reported being so frightened of the idea that someone might 'get them' that they did not leave their home or avoided certain areas. Several times in the discussions children told stories of situations they had found frightening or stories about other children in problematic situations. I asked several of them at the end of their stories if the cautionary tale they had just related had had any effect on their movements and the usual response was 'Well not really'. There was almost a suggestion that they felt it probably should have had more effect than it did!

The difficulty with the 'stranger danger' myth is that it is ubiquitous. If a child is unsupervised no matter where the location it is possible for the child to be overpowered by an adult. This makes it difficult for parents to protect their children. One strategy used to cope with this dilemma would appear to be the demonising of certain locations. In their own home environment by identifying some places as particularly dangerous they were able to rationalise the decisions about where their children were allowed to go. The children did not all share this perception. There was consensus over some locations; for example, the abandoned garages which were the known gathering place for drug abusers in the inner city area were identified by many of the children as a 'dangerous place' in the questionnaire. This would be a place that both parents and children felt it wise to avoid. However, for some children their parents' selection was over protective and there were places mentioned that the children felt confident about visiting and yet were out of their proscribed range.

*She gets really cross because I won't let her go to the Open Space
(Sue mother village)*

His new friend called for him to go to the park and he was mad when I

wouldn't let him go.
(Sharon mother transitional)

One location which was mentioned by children from all the groups was Central Nottingham. Whilst the parents were all very concerned about allowing their children into Nottingham most of the children were counting the days. Their comments show they were well aware of their parents' reluctance to let them take step.

I think I'll have to be 19.
(Hew middle class suburb)

When I can drive.
(Nicholas village)

Never!
(Sara, transitional)

Many had already negotiated the age they must reach before they would be allowed to make the journey and others knew because their older brothers and sisters had already reached that watermark. Their enthusiasm for the bright lights of the city overcame any doubts they had about the place. The children from the village variously described it as smelly, polluted, busy and full of bullies but they were still keen to go. The groups from the inner city were less critical. Two of the girls had already been allowed to go with friends but they said they would not go at night because of all the drunks and 'you wouldn't know what they might do to you', a temporal rather than spatial constraint. From the child's perspective the acknowledgement of danger did not constitute an automatic veto on access and their concern about strangers was less specifically place located than that of their parents.

This interpretation may seem to imply that 'stranger danger' has had little impact on the children. This is not the case, for although their range, frequency of journeys and desire to travel further did not seem affected by the 'stranger danger' myth it had modified their behaviour. Their awareness of the risk meant they avoided putting themselves in situations - rather than spaces - they considered dangerous. They did not talk to adults they did not know, they went out with friends rather than alone and if they felt they were in a situation which was possibly threatening they removed themselves from it. The strategies they related in dealing with potential threats have already been discussed. Thus the children's

response to 'stranger danger' is behavioural rather than spatial, for they considered more than adequate spatial parameters have already been laid down by their parents.

Spaces of Exclusion

The implication of the previous section is that children have the confidence and freedom to make full use of the range allocated to them by their parents and are not limited by any constraints of their own making. Listening to the children's stories made it clear this was not so. There are boundaries which the children recognise and the parents do not. These are boundaries constructed as a result of the imposition of territorial boundaries by *known* others rather than as a result of any threat of 'stranger danger'. The boundaries are not always in place, for some have a temporal as well as a spatial nature. The boundaries are those imposed by groups of older children described variously as 'teenagers', 'youths' or 'gangs' by the children. They share the lived environment of the children and, as by virtue of age, they were the more powerful, they were able to mark spaces within the environment as their own.

In none of the areas investigated were the groups of teenagers 'gangs' of the type observed by Patrick in Glasgow (Patrick 1973), for they were not structured groups with hierarchies of status, specifically defined and defended territories and a primary aim to seek out violence. Discussions with the police in the areas confirmed this. This type of violent gang matched the most extreme of Yablonsky's three classifications of gangs (Yablonsky 1967). The first of his categories was the social gang, based on 'feelings of mutual attraction' among boys who band together to enjoy social interaction in socially acceptable activities. This would be close to the police description of the groups in the village and middle class locations but with some qualifications. They were described as the local young people, that is boys *and* girls, getting together, sometimes drinking too much and occasionally causing some damage. The police thought that some groups might be using drugs but on the whole the transgressions were seen as annoying but relatively minor. The police were anxious to discourage these groups from 'hanging around', they told me, partly because the gatherings did occasionally get out of hand but mainly because they were seen as threatening by others. The police particularly mentioned elderly people who found the presence of the groups of young people intimidating.

The groups in the inner-city and the working class suburb tended to match Yabolsky's second category 'delinquent' gang. They had been known on occasions to carry some sort of weapons, in fact one of the children had told in the discussion of seeing youths with knives but the incidents of violence were not frequent. The police also considered many of these young people had been involved in petty crime. Theft, particularly car theft, was a common occurrence and vandalism, including arson was a problem. Drug abuse was considered a problem among these young people and there had been occasional confrontations between groups from neighbouring areas.

That these observations conform to stereotypes is an uncomfortable observation that must be made. I am well aware that the link between delinquency and social status has been challenged by numerous writers from various standpoints (Becker 1974, Young 1971, Lemart 1972, Cicourel 1976). More recently, Rutter et al. (1998) suggest that many of the old theories which relate social deprivation with delinquency no longer have currency because *it became clear that the association between crime and social disadvantage was not as strong or as consistent as assumed*. However, they go on to state:

Nevertheless, it remains the case that social disadvantage and poverty constitute reasonably robust (although not always strong) indications of an increased risk for delinquency - as assessed by both self-report and by official convictions.

(Rutter, Giller and Hagell 1998:199)

What I can claim is that the delinquency problem was perceived by the police to be greater in the inner-city and working class suburbs and, as the quotes used in Chapter Four demonstrate, the children and parents from the different lived environments also had this perception. The evidence of damage to property travelling round the less affluent neighbourhoods was apparent. Burnt out and boarded up shops, broken fences, graffiti and damaged play areas were evident as the photographs show. The reports of the secondary schools in these areas showed an above average level of truancy. In the more affluent areas, all the play areas were in good condition and the only evidence of vandalism I could find were one or two incidents of graffiti. It could be argued that the greater affluence of some areas allowed damage caused by vandals to be promptly repaired. This might be true but the visual impact of the environment still would support the perception that deviant behaviour was more prevalent in the less affluent areas.

The effect on the younger children of the actions of the youths was to exclude them from spaces within their environment, either completely or on a temporal basis. The teenage groups referred to in the study did not have the clearly demarcated spatial territory of the Glasgow (Patrick 1993) or New York (Yabolsky 1967) gangs, but there were micro-spaces within the locale over which they exercised some control (Matthews, Limb and Percy-Smith 1998). Their control over these closely corresponded to the definition of territoriality given by Smith in the Dictionary of Human Geography.

The attempt by an individual or group to influence or establish control over a clearly demarcated territory which is made distinctive and considered at least partly exclusive by its inhabitants or those who define its bounds.

(Smith 1986 p48)

Sack, in his influential writing on the topic also considered territoriality to be:

The attempt by an individual or group to affect, influence or control people, phenomena and relationships, by delimiting and asserting control over a geographical area.

(Sack 1986:19)

In the village the 'open space' playing fields and in the suburbs a play ground and the Green Line³ were identified by the children as places where the teenagers 'hung out'. There were clear signs for the children that teenagers used the area. Broken bottles and beer cans were mentioned and in the playground the swings would be wound round the upper horizontal support so that it was impossible to use. As Sack says, defining a territory requires some form of marker or sign. Not only did the action with the swing act as a sign but it also went some way towards Sack's next criteria which says that:

Territoriality must involve an attempt at enforcing control over access and to the things within it.

(Sack 1986 :21)

The teenagers were effectively exercising control over the playground by ensuring that it was not fully available for the use of others. Phil Cohen suggested such action *enables kids on the block to imagine themselves as a kind of ruling class* (Cohen 1997 :64).

Other methods were employed by the teenagers to emphasise their control over the space. The younger children talked of being teased and called names although they did not

suggest that they might risk directly real physical harm. Hugh had suffered indirectly as he had fallen off the climbing frame onto some glass which he assumed had been left by the teenage drinkers, but this had not stopped him using the play area during the daytime. The consequence for the children of this appropriation of space was that they considered these spaces unpleasant places to be if the older children were about. Summer evenings were the times most likely for the gangs to occupy these spaces. 'They come later', Sian from Tollerton told us, 'half nine or so'. The young children's exclusion from these areas was seasonal and temporal. They avoided the areas at night but were confident about making use of them during the day as long as the teenagers were not there.

Just as the gangs in the affluent areas marked their presence on certain areas so the more transgressive gangs in the less affluent districts had a similar, if more extreme, code (Coffield 1991). A similar use was made of glass and graffiti but at least two of the play areas had been so vandalised that they were unusable. The swings and slides had been set on fire and in one the surface laid beneath the apparatus had been ripped up. Such actions rendered the play apparatus useless to the children and two sites were mentioned which they had stopped visiting altogether because of the damage. Lucy mentioned one form of damage which not only acted as a territorial sign but also, like a graffiti tag mark, identified the 'owner'.

And there is this boy, I won't say his name, but he gets matches and sticks them into green bins⁴ and it looks like its had a painting done onto it.

(Lucy working class suburb)

Not only was the system of marking their territory more dramatic and destructive than that of the more affluent gangs of youths, but these gangs used more aggressive methods of enforcing their control. The younger children mentioned having balls deliberately kicked at them, being chased with lighted cigarettes, being picked on and being threatened.

The effect of the gangs' actions was to make some of the play areas no-go areas for the younger children. Not only were they were in such ruins they no longer attracted them but in addition there was the menace of the gangs, so they just stayed away. Other areas operated on a similar time share system to that in the more affluent areas. Yvette from the inner city said that:

³ The Green line is the site of a former railway line through West Bridgford which has been preserved as a wild area with public access and is used in the daytime by many dog walkers.

They come in at night when we've gone off and they normally start fights on there and jump on the slide and pee down the slide and everything and are just dirty.
(Yvette inner city)

Urinating on the slide is an example of such stereotypical animal behaviour when marking territory that it almost comic (Ardey 1977). It has the affect of making the gang's presence felt when they are not there by smell and in their absence continuing to control the behaviour within the territory, for any child who realises what has been done is unlikely to play on the slide. Michael from the transitional area said;

At night the youths go there. But not in the day. You are safe in the day.
(Michael transitional)

There was one large field mentioned by children from both schools in the Bestwood area which was shared by all the young people. Kieran said it had:

loads of space for a game of football or some cricket and they don't bother you if you go on. Older people go but they don't bother you 'cos they just let you...
(Kieran transitional)

The size of this space appeared to be too great for the imposition of the forms of enforcement the gangs used to control their spaces. Territorial limits are in part defined by the means available to those wishing to exercise control. The methods used to mark ownership employed by the youths is difficult on a large open field and intimidation is not as easily exercised over a large area unless one has long range weapons! This neutral zone where the older and younger children mixed might suggest a more appropriate model for recreational space in neighbourhoods where conflict over space occurs. It would appear that small spaces can be more easily controlled by groups and therefore providing a larger area would make it easier to maintain a neutrality. All the groups had most favoured places where it was 'safe to play' and these were all identified as being the largest of the local spaces available; the Open Field in Tollerton, the Central Park in West Bridgford, the Field in Bestwood and the Sandy Place in Northgate.

Two of the boys in the working class suburbs and one in the inner city said they were not intimidated by the gangs because they knew most of them. On checking I found these boys

⁴ The green bins are the plastic litter bins, usually fixed onto posts, provided by the Council.

all had older brothers and one of them, David, talked about his brother who was in 'one of the gangs'. David said his brother who was fourteen was involved with the damage in the playground and he explained that it happened when he; *'starts drinking, then he gets drunk and starts smoking'*. These boys seemed protected by their siblings from the aggression of the gangs and already seemed to have some involvement with their activities, a watered down version of the behaviour Patrick noted in Glasgow where there existed a hierarchy of gangs, from the Baby Team to the Heavy Team, often containing siblings of different ages (Patrick 1973: 177). Later in the discussion David mentioned how he and his brother and Paul had got 'pulled up' by the police for nothing. The labelling theorists (Becker 1974, Young 1971) would consider that David's card had already been marked.

None of the girls exhibited the same confidence as these two boys about the youths. They all indicated they were inhibited about going near them. Katy said she would not go to the shopping parade where groups of teenagers tended to 'hang out' and went about twice the distance to an alternative parade. A few talked about friendships with individual older girls, for such friendships often enabled them to achieve greater mobility, for the older girls were trusted to accompany them to places they were not allowed to visit alone or with their contemporaries. There was some discussion in two groups about the role and behaviour of older girls. They were not perceived as 'going round in gangs'. They could individually be 'catty'; Gemma told of one girl she knew being picked on by an older girl and *'having her hair pulled'*. They were not, however, thought responsible for the vandalism or to be involved in 'muggings'. There was a suggestion in one group that the girls were indirectly responsible for some of the boys behaviour for it was said that it was to impress the girls that the boys stole cars and went joy riding (McRobbie and Garber 1975, Campbell 1987).

In all the groups I spoke to there was condemnation for the behaviour of the youths.

Gary *Sometimes in the park people get graffiti and write all over the walls saying, People for that thing or weird things and spoil the swings and snap everything off for the little children.*

Lorraine *Last week, at the school, some people ripped all the nursery, smashed all the windows and that.*

Andrew *That's why we are not allowed to play here anymore.*

PP *Here?*

Gary *Just people being bored, off school and are bored and think it would be good.*

Lorraine *Yeah they think they are good. Wrecking places.*

Ben *How are they good when other children go to school?*

Gary *They've got to live somehow.*

Lorraine More clubs

Ben Yeah for people to go and have fun.

PP But you are all going to be teenagers one day.

Andrew Yeah, but we are not going to be like that.

(inner city children's group)

Whilst disapproving of their actions, Gary recognises the malaise affecting the teenagers causing the trouble. There is in his words the seeds of understanding at their disaffection from society and destructive rebellion. Lorraine and Ben see the solution to be occupying the youths. They are responding with solutions that might satisfy them but not necessarily the young people who cause the damage. These are the similar to the responses of the parents from this area to the problem, so perhaps Lorraine and Ben heard this from them. They are responses that have been tried and failed, as one of the mothers pointed out.

Mandy There is the community centre at Basford but they didn't go last week because there was nobody there and it was boring.

PP There was nobody interested in it?

Diane It wasn't open.

Mandy It was open but nobody went, so my daughters went round and there was nobody there so they came home.

(inner city parents' group)

The confidence with which Andrew claims that they will never behave in a similar manner is poignant for history may be against him. Many would consider with adolescence comes the resistance to the system that has dealt a poor hand to these inner city children. (Hall and Jefferson 1975, Willis 1977, Coffield 1991).

Self-imposed Boundaries

The other boundaries apparent from the discussions of the children are those they impose upon themselves. Some of these are linked to their demonisation of spaces or people as part of their mythologies of childhood which was discussed in Chapter Four. The haunted house, the wood where people hang themselves, the aggressive farmer, the strange man with the gun and the 'mad' man who throws cans and milk bottles at you are all excellent examples of the mythologies of childhood which are not necessarily shared by adults. The adults might recognise the place or the individual but the framework of myth constructed around that object are the property of the children alone. Some times these myths are known to all the children in the lived environment, although each child may have its own individual take. A reconsideration of the children's conversation about bottle throwing Mac illustrates this.

Scott Well me and this girl called Zara we were playing out, she lives just across the road from me, and this boy started knocking on the window, this old man's window and he came out and he slapped me and I went home and my Mum come down and sorted it out and he said sorry and that lot.

PP He thought it was you?

Katy This very old man.

Scott Everybody says he's a murderer.

Katy Everybody says he's a murderer but he isn't a murderer. He just comes out and tries to throw milk jars and tin openers at you. He's mad. He is mad.

PP People annoy him do they?

Yvette Yeah, people knock on his door and shout through his letter box and bang on his windows and he comes out and tries to throw milk bottles at them and then they realise he is going to do something to them and they don't do it any more.

Clare Yeah but one day he might...

PP It's not surprising he gets a bit mad.

Katy He don't do anything he just hits people 'an all.

(inner city children's group)

The children had different perceptions of exactly how dangerous Mac might be. He was an outsider in the community and a mythology had been constructed around him which the children knew in whole or in part. The extent to which the myth influenced their movements depended on their interpretation of it and their belief in the things that were said about him.

Some myths belong only to one or two children based either on some shared experience or some mutual fantasy. My son and his friend always crossed the road when they reached a particular house on the way to school. It transpired that the dog that lived there had barked at them rather aggressively on one occasion and they wove a complex tale around the dog and the owners of the house which they almost came to believe. It certainly influenced their movements, nothing would induce them to walk along that particular stretch of path for over a year.

These fantastic aspects of children's worlds are only glimpsed by adults. They are rich resources, feeding imaginations, developing awareness of self and of others. They can remain powerful memories into adulthood. The intense imagery of novelists and writers demonstrates that - Laurie Lee, Flora Thompson, Roddy Doyle and many others. To exclude these aspects of children's lives from environmental research is to diminish the richness of their worlds, and yet such information is hard to access for part of its magic is

its secrecy. Researchers must, to paraphrase Yeats, tread softly - for we tread on their dreams.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that within the boundaries acknowledged by the parents are others some of which are which are known only to the children. The boundaries are often multi-layered with a more extensive range being tacitly understood by some parents. The children frequently transgress the boundaries and are often punished for doing so. Another set of boundaries exists outside those acknowledged by the parents which are imposed by others, particularly the youth of the neighbourhood. These may be defined spatially and temporally and are frequently 'marked' in some way by the teenagers. Such 'ownership' can deter younger children from the space altogether. There are also boundaries imposed by the children themselves, some known only to a few children, others which form part of their local folklore. This chapter has clearly demonstrated that children's environmental experience can only be explained by children themselves. The stories presented in this research show why consulting children about changes is so important. Changes made to their lived environment may affect their lives in ways of which adults have no appreciation. It is only by understanding children's real experience of their neighbourhood that sensible decisions can be made about their lives within their surroundings.

Understanding the way children experience their lived environment emphasises the restraints within which they are required to operate. The thesis has demonstrated that they lead increasingly restricted lives, with the hidden agenda that this may be somehow detrimental to their development. The final chapter will demonstrate that concern about current trends *is* justified and considers ways in which the trends may be countered.

Chapter Eight

The Why and How of Change

This final chapter considers the possible consequences of this increasing containment of children. It will look at the impact on the children's development and the growing concern over the issue expressed by health workers, educationalists, academics and others. There is evidence suggesting that children are suffering as a consequence of their lack of freedom and that there is therefore a need for change. The question is then raised, how is it possible for change to occur? How can the attitudes of parents and other care takers be changed? My research has suggested ways of working towards a change in attitudes. By considering how perceptions of danger in the environment are constructed and reacted upon, strategies may be identified by which confidence might be restored. Such a change would require not just a change in attitudes towards children's independence but practical measures are required to restore children's and parents' confidence in their surroundings. To ascertain how this might be done the children and parents participating in the research were asked to suggest ways in which they considered the environment could be improved - could be made safer. These suggestions will be discussed, as well an example of a scheme which has been implemented by a local authority with a view to increasing children's independence. These concluding discussions will thus indicate the strategies which are appropriate to make changes in the current dominant system of containment and enable children to achieve greater independence.

The Consequences of Containment

Hillman was one of the first writers to acknowledge and investigate the phenomenon of children's decreasing mobility as a result of his research in 1971 and 1990. He raises the question of the possible consequences on children's development in his chapter in the aptly named *Children, Transport and the Quality of Life* (1993):

The erosion of children's freedom to travel independently means they have far fewer opportunities to do things on their own - all essential elements of the process of growing up, taking initiatives, acquiring social and practical skills in the informal setting that the local neighbourhood provides, exercising their minds and their bodies in self directed activity, developing a sense of adventure, gaining self-esteem

and not least getting up to mischief - and suffering the consequences of being caught 'red-handed'. Could the loss of this freedom be adversely affecting children's emotional and social development?

(Hillman 1993 :68)

Hillman raises important issues about the consequence of the increasing lack of independent mobility of children. The change in their lifestyle has possible impacts upon their physical and mental health and their social and intellectual development.

There is a great concern among health workers and the medical profession over the fitness level of the population. Physical fitness is an important feature of good health and it is associated with appropriate weight, another factor in health maintenance. Studies have disclosed an increasing lack of fitness among children and young people and, associated with this, an increased incidence of obesity and overweight (Armstrong 1996, Biddle et al. 1998). In research conducted at Exeter University, it was found that, of 420 children and adolescents, 13 per cent of the boys and 10 percent of the girls were overweight, when measured against the criteria set by the Royal College of Physicians. In addition two-fifths had a higher blood cholesterol than suggested as appropriate by the American Health Foundation. Of another group of 266 children studied, half the girls and one third of the boys did not experience even the equivalent of a brisk ten minute walk during a four day period. Sensors attached to the children's chest revealed that the heart was put under no strain at all in a high proportion of them. Armstrong, quoted in the Independent, said:

The heart is a muscle, it grows stronger only if you put it under stress. We would recommend that children take at least 20 minutes of vigorous activity at least three times a week.

(Independent Feb 5th 1996)

The most recent Health Survey for England (The Health of Young People 1995-97) recorded similar findings with only 59% of the boys and 47% of the girls having taken part in some form of vigorous activity in the previous week. The report also showed that the mean weight of children in each age group between 5-10 years had increased since the previous report in 1994. An assessment of the body-mass index found that 6% of the males and 8% of the females were above the 98th percentile and could be regarded as obese. Research has related body weight to the amount of hours spent watching television and found a strong correlation. Diez and Gortmaker (1985) found that the number of hours spent watching television as a child related directly to the body-weight as an adult. This study was conducted before the ownership of computers and play stations became widespread. No doubt these pastimes would now be factors in any such study. In the

Report on Obesity for the Department of Health (1995) conducted by James and others, it was disclosed that active adults tended to have been active as children and that sedentary adults who had been active as children were more likely to be persuaded to become active. James (1996) reporting to the Ciba Foundation Symposium 201 said that this implied it was important for children to adopt an active lifestyle. He suggested one of the major determinants of inactivity, apart from TV, is the terror of parents about their children playing outside. Whilst he presents no evidence that this is the case, his comments clearly reflect and reinforce common-sense perceptions.

It is therefore well proven that, in order to be healthy, children require exercise. In British schools one hour and 40 minutes is allocated to physical activity every week, less than elsewhere in Europe and less than the two hours a week recommendation of the Parliamentary Committee for Sport and the Arts. The pressures of the National Curriculum have inhibited flexibility in primary education. Although PE is still on the timetable, it is no longer possible to indulge in additional spontaneous activity. Qualitative evidence of this was relayed to me by a friend in the teaching profession. She told how in the past she would always take her primary class children out to play in the first good fall of snow or for an additional game of rounders on the first fine summer day. She now found indulging in this kind of pleasure is no longer possible. Not only do they lose out on exercise but also the joy of such impromptu activity and an appreciation of the changes of season and weather.

It has become routine that children who are keen to indulge in more sport of one kind or another have to rely on their parents to take or accompany them to some form of organised activity (Valentine 1996b). Many sports club have competition as their driving force, and few competitive activities are run just for the pure pleasure of participation. In such clubs the aim is to win, so talent becomes of primary importance. For those who do not naturally excel at sport, this can be a negative experience. They can be put off sport for life. Most children in the past were included in the kick-around on the local park, even if not that good at football. Now the park and most other recreational areas are considered to be dangerous places and are out of bounds. It is mainly the talented who maintain their interest in sports activities (Haywood et al 1989).

Not only is the physical health of children suffering. The results of a three year research programme into the mental and emotional health of children and young people in the United Kingdom were published in July 1999. The first ever programme to address this subject on a large scale, it incorporated *'over 1,000 pieces of written evidence and oral testimony from health and education professionals, service providers, academics parents and children'* (Press release Mental Health Foundation, Feb1999). (It is gratifying that the researchers did consult children - even if the bottom place on the list does suggest they did not have the highest priority!)

The study suggested that one in five children suffer from psychological problems and one in ten requires professional help with them. One of the numerous factors identified as contributory to this situation is the fact that children are no longer 'going out to play'. The report talks of the need to establish 'emotional literacy' in children which increases their resilience to mental health problems. Key components in the development of emotional literacy are the making and consolidating of friendships, dealing with conflict, the taking of risks and participation in group games. The findings indicate there is a lack of opportunities for free play and the replacement of play by television and video games which can inhibit the development of these skills. The Director of the Mental Health Foundation, June McKerrow, suggests:

Unsupervised play enables children to take risks, to think through decisions and gain increased self confidence and greater resilience.
(Guardian June 24th 1999)

The report also discusses the role of families in the mental health of the children. Stress within the family makes it difficult for some parents to meet the needs of their children. Such stress is not helped by the increasing containment of the children within the home and the added burden on parents to escort their children everywhere. The mental health of the parents must be put under increasing strain if they are not able to 'send the children out to play' at weekends and during school holidays. The parents are placed under pressure to provide entertainment for their children, entertainment which previous generations created for themselves.

The effects on the intellectual development of children of their increasing containment has yet to be thoroughly examined by researchers. Several questions present themselves in this context. Children who make many journeys by car do not get the opportunity to explore their locale and cannot have extensive mental maps of their local environment. When they

are older and granted greater independence they will not explore their surroundings with the eyes of their younger self, so they grow up unfamiliar with many aspects of the area in which they live. One can postulate what effect this might have on their adult life. Will they have greater difficulty in locating destinations? Will they be unable to construct mental maps of a new area? Will they always confine themselves to the obvious routes in a new location and be unwilling and unconfident about exploring the less obvious? This latter hypothesis could be important in, for example, tourist destinations as it would mean a greater concentration of people in the main route ways as people lack the self-assurance to find their way around in unfamiliar surroundings.

The following extract from the Guardian Education Supplement highlights some of the concerns felt by an ex-teacher, Kevin Berry, about the everyday experiences which some children are being denied.

Back in the 1950s my gang of six always walked to and from school together. Admittedly there was less danger but we stuck together during the mile-long journey, our friendships were not determined by the availability of parents' cars. We walked in burning heat, down-pours, knee-high snow and howling gales. In bad weather we ran, in good weather we walked along the top of high walls like tightrope walkers at the circus. We saw adults going to work, we looked out for the blind man with the stick and the old woman who always wore wellingtons. We heard the roar of lorries and the rattle of trains and were able to observe what nature there was at first hand. We could see the change of cloud patterns as a storm developed in the sky overhead, we knew where the swallows always made their nests.

We knew more about each other through those journeys to school, more than we ever could if our play had been confined to the weekends and each other's houses. We were in a group but we were thinking independently, making decisions, asking questions, choosing which way to go. If there was danger we knew how to deal with it, what measures to take. Yes I'm sure that there were bad people about in the 1950s, but our parents talked more in terms of danger than fear. There was a healthy regard for danger and we were never terrified.

Thinking over my last years in teaching I found it increasingly difficult to stimulate children's writing and artwork because there was so little in the way of stored experience for them use. Class and group discussions were often barren and listless, hardly ever enlivened by a child's vivid recollections.

If I wanted children to write about walking in the rain I had to suggest just about everything because so few had walked in the rain.

If the rain fell at home-time Mum or a family friend would always be there with the car. Can't let them get wet, but what harm does it do? Had any of my class ever been soaked to the skin? Not one, not one of them had had the chance to feel raindrops running down their backs. Had any of them walked in the morning fog? Had they had

the chance to walk in the teeth of a howling wind? Had they felt the full force of a hail storm? Of course not.

Taking children out I was often appalled at their weakness in social skills, their inability to approach adults and ask questions, their reluctance to make decisions. Many were unable to follow directions to the toilet without an adult accompanying them.....

They live in a cocoon, their experiences, their view of life largely determined by what they see from a car window. What will happen to them when they eventually have to act independently?

(Guardian Education, Oct. 29th 1996)

The writer obviously considers that his own childhood experiences were more varied and satisfying than those of his pupils. He shares the nostalgia of many of the parents I talked to for childhoods of the past. Many children today have different, rather than less, experiences with wider travel and the increased availability of technology having a significant impact, but their lives might be richer still if they had greater mobility. The article also suggests that social skills and mapping abilities may be suffering and further research is required in this area to give credence to these observations. It is important that those involved in education become aware of their pupils' lack of experience within their lived environment and seek ways to compensate for it. In particular, pedagogues should be aware of the possible variations among groups identified in Chapter Three, for their expectations of pupil achievement must take into account such potential differences.

Many parents are aware of the impact the present culture is having on their children. One example previously quoted serves to demonstrate how one parent was aware of her child's improved development and growth of self-confidence in an environment where it was considered possible to allow him greater freedom. Vikki, Luke's mother, said of him:

Luke comes back sort of different because he's had that, you know, freedom. I think he grows up a bit more whenever we've been on holiday he seems to come back a bit more mature because, you know, he's had much more freedom...and then we get back...

(Vikki mother middle class suburb)

Concern among the parents about the changing norms was evident when we discussed their own experiences as children. The parents in all the groups discussed the kind of activities they were able to indulge in their youth. The vast majority considered that they had been more capable of taking care of themselves. They used the term 'streetwise'. In their day such a term had not been coined but they used it to describe an attribute their children were lacking.

*I was doing a lot more at her age and so was my husband.
(Myra mother inner city)*

*My worry is because of the way we have brought them up or had to bring them up they are not as worldly as they should be...When I was eleven, nothing would stop me and I didn't need taking care of.
(Mike father village)*

However accurate the parents' evaluation of the difference in self-preservational skills between the generations, the parents' perception is bound to influence their attitude towards their children. The process becomes a spiral of constraint. The parents do not let the children out because they are fearful for their safety. The children are perceived as lacking the skills to take care of themselves because they have not experienced the wider world so they are not allowed out. Breaking out of this cycle is hard for the parents and frustrating for the children. The Young People New Media study published in March 1999 by the Broadcasting Standards Commission in conjunction with the BBC, ITV, the Independent Television Commission and the London School of Economics suggested children would rather play on the street, resented being kept in and blamed their parents for this. The children, aged between 6 and 17 felt that they only watched television or spent time on computer games because they were not allowed out of the house to play. The groups to whom I talked were more understanding of their parents' concerns than those in the Young People New Media study, but there was a still a desire among most of the children for greater freedom of movement.

Encouraging Cultural Change

The evidence that children need, deserve and desire a greater degree of independence and freedom is convincing and those concerned with the welfare of children are faced with the problem of how this might be achieved. The next section of this chapter considers if it is possible to alter attitudes and how this may be done. It will also look at signs which indicate that new attitudes are already emerging which challenge the dominant discourse.

This research has demonstrated that some of the anxiety which leads parents to limit their children's movements is the result of pressure on the parents to conform to current practices, these practices relating to the perception of an increasingly dangerous environment. To scrutinise the possibility of change, two questions must be addressed: how might this change come about and are parents prepared to change?

The responsibility for the formation of the current hegemony lies with the structures which contribute to the formation of cultural practice, particularly the 'good sense' concern about traffic and the 'common sense' concern about strangers. The danger from increased traffic is not so insurmountable that it should exclude children from the public space. Spaces can be designed or redesigned with limited or no access to traffic and traffic can be regulated to be more child friendly. Children can be better taught how to take care. These are problems for which solutions can be identified. Traffic is not the greatest barrier. The real difficulty lies in altering the attitude of those who consider that allowing children anywhere not under direct supervision is too great a risk for 'responsible' parents to take. For change to take place ideologies which have formed current perceptions must be reframed. This means that the agencies which have helped to frame society's view must readjust their message. The media, the Government, the police, the schools and the local authorities must consider the harm that is done to children by limiting their opportunities and be motivated to seek ways of rectifying the situation. Examples throughout the thesis have demonstrated different ways in which these organisations impact, not only on the public in general, but also directly on individuals. Influential organisations must be convinced that the messages they convey and the policies they implement are detrimental to the development of the child and need revision. The nature of the issue makes it difficult for change to take place. To initiate these policies the 'unspeakable' must be spoken, since to challenge the dominant is to suggest that children should be exposed to risk and this is a controversial line to take. Furedi takes some steps in this direction in his examination of *The Culture of Fear* within society today (Furedi 1997). He observes that:

The possibility that the attempt to protect children may actually make them less likely to be able to cope with the unexpected is rarely entertained.

(Furedi, 1997 :117)

Williams, in his work *Marxism and Literature*, considered the processes and formations involved in cultural practices (Williams 1977). He suggested that before existing ideologies are challenged there will exist a situation of pre-emergence where 'structures of feeling' or structures of experience begin to '*exert palpable pressures on experience and on action*' (Williams 1977:130). The rising awareness during the past decade over the developmental impact of limited independence on children has created such a situation. This concern has created a climate in which it has become possible for worries to be voiced. In November 1997, in a speech widely reported in the press, Jacqueline Lang, the Head Teacher at St.

Paul's Girls' School in London, said that many of the girls in her school so rarely went out, unless in a car, that they did not possess a warm coat.¹ She was anxious because she felt they were leading restricted and unstimulating lives. This was the first voice to gain wide publicity in the media on the issue and since then there has been a steady increase in expressions of concern about the quality of children's lives.

The existing situation is being challenged in two ways which correspond to the two positions identified in the parent group in Chapter Six. The first represents those who accept the dominant notion that the environment has become a dangerous place and therefore seek to put into place measures which will overcome this danger. The recent initiative, from the NSPCC, a highly respected charity, demonstrates the great concern over possible long term damage to children (The Safe Open Spaces Campaign, 1999). They reinforce the fears about the environment in their literature but state their desire to counter the effect on children by creating 'safe open spaces'. Their campaign suggests that an oasis of safety will be created for children amidst the mayhem of the outdoors. Such a campaign does not alter the dominant perception of the environment, it merely seeks ways to cope with it. In the view of Williams such movement would be seen as '*elements of some new phase of a dominant culture*' (Williams 1977:121) rather than a new oppositional perspective.

Others are more critical of the dominant view, indicating that they consider the risks to children are greatly exaggerated. Many of their views have been cited in this text. They are more oppositional and might be expected to seek '*meanings and values, new practices and new relationships*' which are alternative or oppositional to the dominant (Williams 1977: 123). This would mean a new paradigm of parenting gaining social approval, which places a higher value on children's independence and gives less credence to potential danger. However such voices are constrained by the nature of the discourse they are confronting. Parents' concern about their children is such that once a danger has been identified it is difficult to ignore. The risk may be exaggerated but it is not possible to say that the risk no longer exists. Today's parents have suffered a 'loss of innocence' which cannot be restored. For this reason it is likely that the dominant discourse will continue to prevail with this generation of parents, and their children will only benefit if there are changes within the existing framework. There are signs that there are new values emerging but these may only impact on future generations. Today's children, resentful of the

¹ Reported in the Independent 1997 Nov 28th.

restrictions placed upon them, may be more disposed to a new conception of the environment for the sake of their own progeny.

It is important to establish whether changes in parental behaviour are at all possible in the short term. This has practical relevance for those involved in the planning of the environment who have asked if parents will change their behaviour if attempts are made to improve things. If parks and play areas are made safer will parents let their children use them? If safe routes to school are provided, will the children be allowed to walk? If the speed limit is cut and road design improved, will children be allowed out more?² The evidence from this research is that there is a strong possibility parents will take advantage of such improvements.

The parental nostalgia for their own childhoods and their wish to reproduce such conditions for their children has already been demonstrated. Williams recognised the importance of elements of a society's past in constructing present and future cultural formations. He made a distinction between the 'residual' and the 'archaic':

By residual I mean something different from archaic, though in practice these are often very difficult to distinguish. Any culture includes available elements of its past, but their place in the contemporary cultural process is profoundly variable. I would call the archaic that which is wholly recognised as an element of the past, to be observed, to be examined or even on occasion to be consciously 'revived' in a deliberately specialising way. What I mean by the residual is very different. The residual, by definition, has been effectively formed in the past, but still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present.

(Williams 1977 :122)

If it is considered that the parents' nostalgia for their childhood freedom in the past is archaic, then the holiday behaviour might be seen as a deliberate revival. It is then unlikely to be a practice that will be incorporated into a reconstructed parental practice in the present-day home environment. Alternatively the holiday parenting could be considered a residual aspect of cultural formation. Parents allowing their children greater freedom when on holiday demonstrates their desire to reproduce aspects of their own childhoods for their children. Their confidence to do so in one location indicates the possibility they might also

² Reported by the NSPCC researcher who conducted the study of Local Authorities for 'Safe Spaces'. She had talked with several representatives of local authorities who were concerned that improvements they made would not make any difference.

consider allowing their children greater freedom at home if they considered the environment had been made safer. I am optimistic the second is the correct interpretation. The recognition among many parents of their children's deprivation in independent environmental experience, reinforced by the ever increasing evidence to this effect, will encourage parents to take advantage of new opportunities.

There is some indication that this issue is reaching the public arena. The reports on health and mental health mentioned earlier in this chapter and other initiatives in the academic world have become of interest to the media. In recent times, television programmes (BBC 1 *Horizon* Sept 10th 1998) Radio Phone In's (Radio 4 *You and Yours* July 12th 1999) and even broadsheet headlines (Guardian Aug 2nd 1999) have considered children's safety and freedom. The interest of the media in the topic is of particular note since the children and parents in the study considered the media responsible for the moral panic surrounding children's safety. If the media concern turns to the stunting of children's development through lack of independence then a new set of issues will face families.

Not only is the media generating debate but they may be adopting a different standpoint in items related to the topic. The issue of responsible parenting had previously set the tone for many news items involving children. Implicit in many articles was the concept of parental neglect or carelessness. The reporting of a recent tragedy lacked the moralising of the past and may be the indication of a change of emphasis. On August 24th 1999, a 9 year old girl went missing from a small village in Lancashire. She was out alone visiting the shops and yet there were no criticisms of her mother in any of the broadcast or newspaper reports. The reports referred to the small caring community in which people looked out for each other. The implications were that the mother was entitled to feel her child was safe in such a situation. This contrasts with examples from the recent past quoted in earlier chapters where parents have been held responsible for mishaps to their children. It appears that in this case, as in so many, the 'stranger' who abducted and murdered her was not a stranger but someone known to the child and mother. Keeping her off the streets would have been unlikely to make any difference to her fate. The media appears to have recognised that there are some situations it is almost impossible to guard children against and that the parents who find themselves in such tragic circumstances should not automatically be held to blame. There is also an increasing tendency to stress how rare such situations are and to quote statistics demonstrating that there has not been a sudden increase in such crimes. These are indications of a repositioning which in time may reframe wider attitudes.

Such suggestions of change in the framing of the ideology may be read as a positive sign by those anxious for things to alter. However they must be treated with caution for the evolution of such a change is likely to have its problems. Chapter Five demonstrated that the issue of child safety is bound up with other cultural beliefs, and, as Williams said:

It is necessary at every point to recognise the complex interrelations between the movements and tendencies both within and beyond a specific and effective dominance.
(Williams 1977 :121).

The ideological concerns are still impinging on public debate and may have the effect of acting as drags on any new thinking. The revelations and convictions involving paedophilia still receive wide publicity and the fears relating to the safe housing of convicted paedophiles is an issue which has generated increasing concern.³ Debates on issues surrounding the sexuality of young people has been recently fuelled by the media treatment of the story of the unanticipated birth of a child to a 12 year old girl and her 14 year old boyfriend. This prompted the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, to declare that the Government should promote a new order of morality (*not* a new order of sex education - which many would think more appropriate). The law and order debate continues to demonise young people with the Government criticising local authorities for not making greater use of the curfew order. These concerns could well impede progress towards any increased independence for children if they are considered to be the consequences of greater freedom. Unless ways forward are found which provide reassurance on these issues then the progression towards a new perspective on the environment is likely to be slow. These problems have been constructed as being issues of major public concern. The Government is obliged to address them, if only for the sake of political expediency. For the sake of all concerned, it is hoped that progress may be made.

It is apparent there will be no change in children's mobility unless there is a change in social attitudes, a change in the common sense view. However changing attitudes in itself will not be sufficient to alter behaviour. There must also be a change in the perception of lived environments. The parents' 'good sense' must also be satisfied that things have improved. The streets must no longer be seen as hostile, but as places with hazards that can be dealt with; places that children can cope with, given the resources to do so. There are two routes

³ Demonstrations outside Nottingham Prison in the summer of 1999 where accommodation has been provided for released, convicted paedophiles is one expression of public concern.

to this change in perception. One is a realisation that there has been an overreaction to the risk and an underestimation of the consequences of not allowing children some freedom. This research shows that already many parents are conscious that there has *not* been a great increase in the risk to their children from strangers - what *has* increased is the awareness of this risk. A more general understanding of this will help the situation but it may also be necessary for actions to be taken which convince society that the environment has become a safer place. Practical measures need to be taken and the ability to identify those measures which would make a difference to children and parents is an important first step. During the discussion groups I asked the children and parents what measures could be taken to make their area safer. The next section discusses their responses.

How can your Environment be made Safer?

If the fears of children and parents are to be dealt with then we must address the issues that give them particular concern and as this research has shown these are not necessarily the dangers which generate the greatest risk. Through discussion and consultation it is possible to find the actions which would bring most reassurance and thus identify improvements which the children and parents would see as beneficial. Schemes instigated in the past in the Bestwood and Northgate areas had generated the scorn of several parents who thought they had done more harm than good.

They are doing it in the wrong area. If they asked the people round Basford⁴ area where they need it and they spent the money in the right place they could work wonders.

(Mike father inner city)

They put bumps on the road to stop the joy riders. That doesn't stop the joy riders. It makes them go faster.

(Mandy mother inner city)

When the children in the discussion groups were asked to suggest improvements, their greatest concern was adequate and appropriate space to play in and how it was possible to keep this space safe. Safe for them meant free from the interference of teenagers rather than safe from strangers. As in their stories concerning their problems on the street they saw teenagers as the major stumbling block in the pursuit of a better environment. They were far less concerned about strangers and when they did talk of clearing the streets of 'undesirables' it was mainly in the context of placating their parents.

⁴ Basford is the District Authority in which Northgate School is located.

Providing additional space for play is extremely difficult in existing areas of housing. The age of the housing developments in most of the residential areas in the study pre-dated a time when the planning authorities required the inclusion of frequent open areas within an estate, so it is unsurprising that the most frequent suggestion of the children was to increase the provision of suitable spaces for recreation. The middle class suburb, built mainly in the 1930s, was particularly badly served and the children here came up with radical suggestions to combat this.

Kylie *I think my road, oh let's see we've got...most kids on our road it's one of the good roads it's got loads of kids and I think there should be a nearer park where kids could just go there.*

Jenny *It's just that there's so many...*

Andreas *I think they should build more parks in West Bridgford.*

Jenny *...in West Bridgford and everybody wants to have more freedom than they have now and it's just that you can't exactly put a park near everybody's house.*

Kylie *Must just like in the middle of the road half way I mean when they move house like knock it down so.. and just like have a small park so that kids could tell their Mum 'Oh we're just going to the park up the road Mum. See you later'.*

(middle class suburb children's group)

The inner city development dates back even further and Gary from this area had an even more unusual solution .

Alex *People should have more space*

Ben *So you can't play nowhere now.*

Alex *There's a lot more traffic.*

Gary *I reckon that now you've got all the graveyards full, sounds a bit weird, but I reckon they should dig all the graveyards up all the bodies if there are any left just cremate them and then knock all the graveyards down. There would be a lot more space for houses and parks and a lot more space for cars.*

The clearance of derelict factories and old buildings to make room for more recreation provision was suggested by several children in different groups. There was frustration that areas were left derelict, 'just rubbish', and locked up when they could be usefully put to alternative use. 'What's the point of building something if you are just going to lock it up?' Lucy asked. 'Why don't they build something useful like a children's playground?' In inner city areas of mixed housing and industrial premises it seems likely there is possible scope for redevelopment as some of the older industrial premises become obsolete. In the middle class suburban areas there is more of a problem as land values are often high and

any areas where redevelopment is possible are of interest to housing developers. Fortunately, new developments are required by local authorities to address these problems, so they are designed with more attention to the needs of the children who will live there. Consultation with children who are users of such developments might ensure that the designs are sympathetic to children's needs (Matthews and Limb 1999).

Past studies have demonstrated that even in the most uncondusive environments children have found and appropriated places to play (Ward 1978, Roberts et al. 1995). The children in this study were defining recreation space in very conventional terms. The space they saw as safe to play on was the space provided for the purpose and they did not admit, talk about or even contemplate playing in alternative spaces during the discussion. They showed none of the flexibility of Ward's city children of the 1970s who appropriated derelict spaces and ruins for their play, even though they described such places in their discussions (Ward 1978). Two possible explanations for this may be suggested. Children are aware that playing in such places is undesirable and they may have not been prepared to discuss it in the presence of an adult. As they did divulge confidences on other matters on several occasions, this explanation is not wholly convincing. The other possibility is that the greater constraint placed on the children and the generalised increase in caution in the environment make it less likely that they transgress by trespass or by playing in inappropriate places. This is not to claim that such trespassing no longer happens but suggesting that a lot of the children involved are either older than the group in this study or those who are in families where the parents exercise little control. A recent programme concerned with the issue of child poverty 'Through the Eyes of a Child' (BBC 2 Sept 6th 1999) showed a group of very young children playing in a car breaker's yard and others on derelict land late at night. Activists concerned with supporting families in need, commentating on the film, described these children as exceptional. They were children from highly dysfunctional families and the parents exercised little control over their activities. These would be the neglectful parents described by Baumrind (1971) and discussed in Chapter One. When they were filmed out late at night on derelict ground there were few other children with them. For most children in the younger age group, being allowed out unsupervised is in itself an adventure and their use of the environment is usually so monitored that they do not have the time or opportunity to transgress. The general fears about the environment must also decrease the likelihood that they will stray into unsuitable places. Those whose parents have convinced them local parks and shopping areas have to

be treated with caution because of the fear of strangers, would find that waste ground and empty factories may simply be too frightening for many of them to go near.

Chapter Seven demonstrated that merely providing space for young children did not solve the problem of providing safe places for them to play. Such spaces may be territorially appropriated by older groups or vandalised so many are unusable. Although the need for more space dominated the children's comments, they showed awareness that the provision of space in itself was not the full solution. They knew that existing areas that were intended to provide them with recreational space had become unattractive or unsafe. As Andrew said:

*But if they build a children's playground then look how all the people spoil it and put graffiti on it and chuck the swings around.
(Andrew transitional)*

How to keep play areas safe and undamaged was an issue of major concern. The suggested solutions to this were either segregated areas so that the teenagers (whom all the children considered responsible for the crimes against the playgrounds) were encouraged to congregate elsewhere or that the playgrounds had some form of benign supervision. Donna thought dividing recreation areas would be a good idea:

*...and then like split it into two so that all the older people like teenagers they could go on one bit of it and we could go on the other and then the little 'uns could come and play and it would be a lot safer.
(Donna transitional)*

An alternative strategy suggested by Michael was to make more provision for the teenagers so they would not have to resort to using the playgrounds at all.

*So they should build something, like, I don't know, an arcade...
...or something more closer, like another park or a youth club.
(Michael working class suburb)*

Teenagers were not the only group that the children wished removed. Sara thought there ought to be more hostels for tramps 'to keep them from sleeping where we like to go'. Dwaine thought the streets would be safer if the police were to 'chuck all the drunken people in prison'. Luke wanted even more drastic action to be taken and all those who might menace children caught so 'it would be safer and your Mum would think you could get through life'. Luke's comment shows that the children are aware that their parents fear's must also be placated before they are likely to be granted more freedom.

One strategy which has been proposed to increase the safety of recreation areas is some form of surveillance. The use of surveillance cameras in city centres has prompted their use in other 'black spot' areas. Despite fears that the trouble will just move elsewhere, they have been shown to be effective in some places. The children were familiar with such methods and felt it could be used to protect recreational areas. They considered that cameras would enable the police to 'keep an eye' on the play areas and respond if they observed any trouble. The children in Northgate felt the cameras themselves might get vandalised and spent several minutes discussing ways in which they could be kept safe, the most imaginative of which was putting up a sign with writing on it and hiding the camera behind the full stop at the end! The idea of having more police around was considered a positive thing by some and Kylie said she thought it should be easier to contact them somehow if you were in trouble, but Paul, in the same group in Bestwood, was concerned that the police '*told lads off just for hanging round and doing nothing*'. This sentiment gives some indication of the problems faced in policing this particularly difficult area.

One method of monitoring the parks which the parents mentioned but the children did not was park keepers/rangers. It is unlikely that the children had ever come across such an individual, unless in fiction, for in most areas they are a thing of the past. There was mention by the children of parents, who live near the park, 'watching out for trouble' and even a suggestion that guards could be employed, so I suspect that they would have approved the idea if they had known of such a role. The recently launched NSPCC campaign seeks to encourage the wider use of such individuals. The campaign follows a survey involving over four thousand people, each representing a different park. The key concerns of those who took part in the survey were much the same: vandalism and anti-social behaviour, teenagers, bushes and trees obscuring play areas and young children playing unsupervised, traffic nearby and dogs and dog mess. The most frequently mentioned suggestion for improvement was some form of supervision, with park rangers the most popular concept. Other ideas included specific play areas for young children - with adults banned which reflects the ideas put forward by the children in discussion. Other ideas which did not come up in the discussion groups but are obviously worth consideration are better lighting, telephones and better toilets. However, since all these involve appliances or buildings which could be vandalised they would only be practical if there was some form of supervision to keep them from being damaged.

Support for the idea of park rangers came from the parents' discussion groups. They were familiar with the role from their own experiences as children and felt it would be very reassuring to know an adult was available in areas where children were playing.

Gwen I mean years ago when they used to have parks and things there used to be a park keeper...

Carole Yes there did.

Gwen And if there was a park keeper I know he couldn't be responsible for the children..

Carole But he could deter some of the others.

Gwen ...he could have a bit of authority to stop some of the bigger kids that shouldn't be on the park for the little 'uns to play on, you know. There is nobody there...and what parks there is ... well there's not a lot of parks anyway.

PP But then they'll say 'where's the money coming from to pay for a park keeper?'

(transitional parents' group)

Linda It would be nice if park keepers were back on parks as well..... because a park keeper on a park, because I noticed, I mean we went up here to Mosswood. There is no toilet, there's no first aid, there's no nothing. I mean when my Chris broke his arm, he had to walk home to come and tell me he had broke his arm.

Dot But at least when you had a park keeper there they kept everything under control and if anybody needed an ambulance or anything like that they was there to see to it.

(transitional parents' group)

One group of parents was concerned about the cost of paying rangers/keepers but it was pointed out that the decrease in vandalism might provide a saving which could be set off against the outlay. This positive attitude towards park keepers/rangers is encouraging in the light of the NSPCC campaign, for the organisers have met some resistance from local authorities who are uncertain that parents will respond to the introduction of such figures.⁵

The other idea that one parent had heard about was the 'safe house' system. This involved parents in a neighbourhood agreeing to provide assistance for children in trouble and indicating this by a 'little sign in the window'. Dot, who had heard of the scheme, thought that the people were first vetted by the police and that the scheme originated in Glasgow. Linda commented that the majority of parents in the area concerned had been involved in setting it up. She referred to them as a 'closed community', but in the context she used the term I suspect she could have meant 'close community'. This arrangement was a

⁵ This concern was expressed in conversation by Carol Sexty, Policy Adviser to the NSPCC.

formalised version of the protection many of the adults felt they had been given, as children, by their own communities. The element of distrust which has undermined this is overcome by the notion of 'police vetting' - just as in the NSPCC proposed park keeper scheme. This suggests a desire among parents to regain the trust in the wider community which has been lost, but some form of official sanction, approval and support is required before they have the confidence to do this.

The comments of the children and their parents indicate that the NSPCC campaign is suggesting the right strategies to make children and their parents feel that the environment is secure. Some form of surveillance of recreation areas would be a very constructive initiative. The task now is to convince local authorities that such surveillance is necessary and worthwhile.

Secure recreation areas would provide children with places to play and to socialise with their friends. In order to enjoy independence they also need to be able to access such spaces without supervision and to make other journeys within their lived environment. The safe house system suggested by the parents would be one method of providing reassurance on such journeys, but the problem of traffic, the most likely threat to a child's well being in the environment, also requires attention. Suggestions put forward by the children's groups reflected methods already in use such as traffic calming, altering road patterns, crossing lights and lollipop patrols. On journeys such as the route to school, the paradox remains that parents drive their children to school because they are concerned about their safety and in doing so add to the traffic and increase the problem.

Evidence that schemes to improve children's mobility can be devised and achieve success comes from one such scheme in Leicester. In 1995 the County Council Road Safety department took action to alleviate the increasing flow of traffic each weekday on the school run and to make general improvements to an inner city area called Highfields. Traffic was discouraged by a series of traffic calming measures such as speed bumps and road narrowing and the appearance of the area was improved with tree planting and outdoor seating. Some areas were created traffic-free zones providing space for play and relaxation in the middle of dense housing. It was hoped an additional benefit from the close consultation and co-operation with the Authority would be that the residents would feel a sense of pride and communal ownership within the area.

The final aspect of the scheme focused on the needs of children and a local community arts consultancy, which specialised in play work, was employed to encourage the involvement of mothers and children. The consultants visited schools and set up market stalls to contact the children and their parents. From these consultations a project was devised, aimed at providing safe routes to school for the children. The problems which prevented parents allowing their children to walk to school were identified as; increased traffic, 'stranger danger' and bullying. The routes most frequently used by children attending three schools in the areas were identified and plans put forward to make these routes safe. Traffic calming schemes were introduced with narrowing of roads at crossing points and large brightly coloured signs, designed by the children, indicated to motorists they were in a 'Feet First' area. In addition every seventh paving slab along the route was removed and replaced with one containing a coloured resin design. The designs, human and dinosaur footprints, stars and arrows were selected by the children and colour coded for each school involved. In addition ready, steady, stop slabs were placed at the approach to a junction.

An evaluation of the scheme was conducted a year after the completion.⁶ The number of accidents in the first year of the scheme had decreased by 50% by comparison with the first year of the decade which was taken as the base. The most significant change was in the motor vehicle category which fell from twenty-one in 90/91 to six in 95/96. The severity of the accidents also fell, serious injuries were only suffered in two cases as opposed to six in the earlier year. These changes would appear to be the result of the traffic calming measures which the study showed had decreased the average speed in the area by 10mph and prompted a decrease in traffic flow on most roads in the area. The number of children walking to school showed a slight increase from 81% to 86%, and this must be set against national trends which showed a significant decrease over the same period. The maintenance of the high percentage walking was one of the main aims of the project and so it must be considered successful. Of parents who drove their children to school only two stated it was on safety grounds; most commonly, the parents incorporated the children's transport into their journey to work.

This scheme was based on an original idea piloted in Odense, Denmark. The Danish child accident statistics were the highest in Europe between 1955 and 1971 and prompted a new road traffic act in 1976 in which it was stated 'It is the responsibility of the Police and

⁶ Conducted by Graham Brown for a MSc in Urban and Regional Transport from Cardiff University.

Road Administration authorities to make provisions for the protection of children from motorised traffic on their journey to and from school' (Garling and Valsiner 1984). Provision was also made to provide annual road safety instruction in the schools. The result was a reduction in accident rates of 85% and it this approach which has been at the core of schemes in the United Kingdom. Other schemes have followed that of Leicester and it is to be hoped that they will be adopted by ever increasing numbers of local authorities.

The children's suggestions reflected their overriding desire for areas, near to their homes, where they could safely pass time with their friends. Implicit is the need for a safe route to the space and to be to be separated from traffic once there. The space would also need to be protected from the other perceived dangers, teenagers who bully and destroy and strangers who threaten. Segregation or attracting the teenagers elsewhere were the strategies suggested to cope and some form of discreet supervision would help and also combat 'stranger danger'. The dominating concept of the children's suggestions for improvements was the allocation of spaces over which they felt they had right of access. However they acknowledged that such spaces must be kept secure for them by adults but in some minimally intrusive way. Such ideas may not be original but they do appear practical and sensible and underline the useful contribution children can make in planning an environment which reflects their needs.

In contrast most of the suggestions made by the parents involved ways in which the children could be suitably occupied with active adult participation and supervision, which would not therefore have an effect on the children's independence. Youth clubs, after and pre-school clubs were discussed by the Northgate parents at length but they did not consider any activities which the children could undertake without supervision. The potential risk to their children had apparently become so internalised that it was difficult to ignore and less easy to visualise that it could change for the better. The parents would appear to need the most convincing if gains are to be made for the children.

There is no going back to the innocence and freedom of earlier days because today's parents have been fed the apple of knowledge and must always now be concerned for their children's welfare when they are out alone. The idea that knowledge generates uncertainties has been suggested by both the German sociologist Beck and Giddens in the UK. Giddens feels that many of the uncertainties we face today have been created by the growth of human knowledge (Giddens 1994). Beck considers society to have entered a

new era, that of '*the risk society*' (Beck 1992). He suggests that during the age of modernity the production of wealth was the dominant concern, and society therefore minimised or ignored any potential dangers. Increasingly, he suggests, '*The productive forces have lost their innocence in the reflexivity of the modernisation process. The gain in power from techno-economic 'progress' is being increasingly overshadowed by the production of risks*' (Beck 1992:13). Beck encourages people to challenge the assessment of risk by the scientific and technical paradigm, and rather than be fobbed off by 'techno-babble', consider the issues for themselves. He concedes, however, that this new reflexivity within may not always focus correctly. Risks may be denied or '*interpretative diversions*' may displace thought and action away from actual dangers (Beck 1992:75). Whilst Beck was concerned with industrially created risk on a global scale, a similar process takes place in the context of child safety. The risk from strangers diverts consciousness away from the risks children encounter within the home and on the roads. Yet, Beck, in the same passage, claims that such diversion can only take place '*as long as they [the dangers] have not already occurred*', which is certainly not the case in this context. As Chapter Five demonstrated, there is evidence within the public domain to demonstrate that many children have already been harmed in the home and on the roads. Despite this, the concern of many parents continues to focus on strangers. This research suggests, therefore, that sections of society may be even more gullible than Beck suggests and are deflected from real risks even when those risks have occurred. This would be neglecting those parents who expressed doubt over the increase in danger from strangers. They may be identified with Beck's new reflexive society challenging a dominant discourse which has institutional backing. However, they are challenging what they see as an overestimation of risk, whereas Beck feels that often society is not taking the risks seriously enough. Beck supports society's inclination to become more paranoid in order to protect itself against the increasing environmental risks. He fails to be aware that in some contexts, as this chapter has shown, such an increased paranoia may be to the detriment of some sectors of society.

All the suggestions for improvement which I have described are operating on an assumption that the child, when outside the enclosed environments of home and school, is exposed to a high level of risk and must be protected. They will only bring about changes within the existing climate of fear and confirm my argument that this is all we can hope for in the short term. The best that can be hoped for is that places within the lived environment can be made secure enough to give parents the confidence to allow their children a more acceptable level of freedom.

Conclusions

Geographical research has neglected the diversity of humankind in the past. It now acknowledges that a variety of perspectives must be recognised, a multitude of voices must be listened to and new knowledges explored. Of the neglected groups, I consider children to be those with the least authority to voice their own concerns. This research has given children the opportunity to talk about one aspect of their lives. By developing a research method which enabled children to discuss issues with me, and with each other, a step has been taken towards their greater empowerment. By using the information gathered from the children in combination with the views and attitudes of the parents, a picture has emerged of the wide variety of children's environmental experiences. These experiences are dominated by increasing containment and enforced chaperoning. The interplay of parents' perception of risk, and their desire to follow a socially acceptable regime of parenting practice has had a dramatic impact of the lives of children.

The relationship of children with their environment has changed and continues to change. This research has identified the differing experiences of children in different lived environments and it has also considered the impact of social and gender differences. Comparison with past studies has indicated that the trend is towards an increasingly regulated lifestyle for children in the age group studied. Today, in order to demonstrate good parenting practice, it is necessary to accompany children on most journeys and ensure that any freedom allowed children is closely controlled. Children's lives are regulated spatially and temporally, limiting their independence in order to ensure their safety.

This research has provided new insights into the patterns of children's mobility. Analysis of the questionnaire enabled the groups whose members are likely to have the least independent experience of their surroundings to be identified. Socio-economic factors certainly influenced mobility. The children who led the most restricted lives were those in the middle class suburbs. Those children whose homes were in the working class areas were more likely to be allowed to make longer journeys unaccompanied. Car ownership may play a significant part in this pattern. The middle class families are likely to be one or two car owners and therefore have the means to transport their children. A culture is created whereby it is unacceptable for children to make journeys alone, so parents conform to expectations. Working class households are less likely to have such flexibility of

transport and for expedience sake they may allow their children to travel independently. This creates a culture where it is more acceptable for children to be out alone, and even parents who have the means to transport their children may still allow them to be independent as a result of child peer group pressure.

The local environment in the village was perceived as safe and this certainly impacted on the mobility of the children living there. The children in the rural area were less restricted within their immediate home area but very unlikely to journey beyond it. The inner city and the suburbs were all considered more dangerous places to live.

Past studies have shown significant differences between the permitted mobility of boys and girls. Today there is concern for the safety of both sexes and even some cases of the girls being allowed to do more because they are considered more sensible and mature at this age. However, there were still indications of a male bias in some respects, the boys enjoying the 'freedom to roam' within a designated area whilst girls tended to make linear journeys to particular destinations. This observation enabled a new model to be devised which demonstrates the gendered nature of home ranges. The children showed an awareness of issues of gender equality and expressed a desire to be treated equally. Despite this the traditional roles were still evident in some areas. Virtually all the working class girls were allowed to go to the local shop on their own and many talked of running errands for their mother.

This information is important to those concerned with children's education and safety. Increasingly children lack experience of their lived environment and assumptions about their knowledge and awareness of the natural world, the geography of their home area, and experiences of the outdoors must be reassessed. There is little opportunity to practice road safety, so safety does not become 'second nature' before the quixotic teenage years. When children eventually gain more freedom, often on transfer to secondary school, they are at their most vulnerable in traffic as statistics show. There are issues here which require more in depth study to protect the development and safety of today's children.

Children have been increasingly contained because the environment is perceived as more dangerous than in the past. Identifying those dangers which particularly concern children and their parents is a first step in understanding the changes that have taken place. The findings of this study support other work which have shown that many now perceive

'stranger danger' as *most* problematic, replacing fear of traffic injury. This is despite the fact that traffic injury is statistically by far the greatest threat to a child's safety. Traffic was not a significant inhibitor of the children's environmental experiences because they were confident that they knew how to deal with it. 'Stranger danger' was a vague, ill-defined threat that did not inhibit their activities. Their greatest concern when they were out alone or with friends came from interaction with young people, variously referred to as 'teenagers', 'youths' or 'gangs', many of whom were known to the children. Other issues which caused the children and their parents some concern were drugs, the dark and accidental injury.

Much of children's lives are spent learning and repeating lessons dictated by adults. It is therefore not surprising that the fears they most readily identify are those of the adults. That their day-to-day concerns differ, and only surface when time is spent listening to their experiences, illustrates children's uncertainty that their concerns will be of importance or interest. These findings emphasise the importance of listening carefully to children's stories of their lives. It is the only way in which we can begin to appreciate their realities.

The danger which parents and children identified as of greatest concern, 'stranger danger', has only recently become such a dominant issue. Up until now it has not been explored in a cultural context in any depth. Examining how this discourse has evolved contributes to the understanding of its impact. An analysis of the issue in the context of current dominant discourses highlights the various determinants which have been shown to have contributed to the current climate of fear. The current ideologies surrounding law and order, the family, sexuality and the construct of childhood within society have all impacted on the issue of 'stranger danger'. This has involved institutions such as the media, the police, the educational establishment and the Government. The 'stranger danger' moral panic has directly and indirectly generated a variety of punitive legislation against paedophiles, parents and children and had a significant impact on the nature of parenting.

Whilst the mobility of children is arrived at via a negotiating process between the children and their parents, it is the parents who ultimately approve the extent of the home range. Their role requires them to monitor their child's activities and in recent times this has meant more and more providing direct supervision when the children are outside the home. The paradoxical holiday behaviour that this research exposed suggested which determinants were influential in shaping this aspect of parenting.

Parents allowed their children more freedom in holiday locations and they considered this as beneficial to the children. They did not perceive the holiday environment as dangerous as their home environment which led to a more liberal regime. Holiday environments contain more strangers than the home environment, so, despite their expressed concern about 'stranger danger', it may ultimately be less significant in their decisions than they indicated. The holiday environment is perceived as safe because: it is not tainted by stories of dangerous incidents, parents have not imagined their child abducted in the setting, it is usually free from the 'signs' of disorder such as graffiti, and it has been selected to be a utopian holiday space. In addition parents are under less pressure from peers when they are away from home. They are not constrained by their desire to appear 'good parents' before their familiars. These issues are important since they indicate that not only do parents wish their children to have greater freedom but that, when the parents' perception is that the environment is secure, they implement this.

Most children are sensitive to their parents' concerns for their safety. However, many feel confident in their own ability to cope with a greater mobility than they are allowed. The boundaries negotiated with parents are therefore sometimes transgressed by the children and they are punished for it if they are discovered. There is collusion between some adults and the children over the set limits, with adults turning a blind eye to some of the trespass beyond the set boundary. This is true particularly of the parents of boys who often anticipate more 'naughty behaviour'.

The children are not restrained in the use of their home range by the dominant fears of strangers or traffic. However, there are often micro-spaces within their range which have been appropriated by older children, and which they avoid. The exclusion may only occur at certain times or the 'signs' which the teenagers have used to appropriate the area may be so potent as to exclude the youngsters altogether. Other boundaries often not recognised by adults are those imposed by the children themselves associated with their constructed mythologies of their environment.

This research has shown that children's identification of favourite and dangerous places may not match the perception of others. In implementing plans for the environment the way children experience that environment are rarely considered and their voices are rarely heard as part of planning processes. As they are increasingly excluded from the world outside

their home they will become less relevant in the process, and the cycle of deprivation will continue.

The concluding chapter identified many studies which showed that children are suffering, physically, mentally and intellectually, from their increasing containment. Children need to spend more time outside the home in order to increase their physical ability and thus prevent the growing incidence of obesity and associated ill-health. They need to spend time freely interacting with other children in challenging situations to help develop the emotional literacy they require for mental and emotional stability. Their cognitive and imaginative development is being stunted by their lack of environmental experience and they may be ill-prepared for 'the street' when they reach an age when their parents can no longer constrain them.

A generation ago, according to the evidence of the parents, many children in the research age group spent time experiencing and exploring their environment independently. Such activity has been shown to be important to mental and physical health as well as providing valuable social interaction and learning opportunities. Today the 'culture of fear' has severely curtailed this activity for most children. Risks, that have always existed, are amplified and made to appear commonplace by media exposure. 'Strangers' have provided the focus for a moral panic which has not come and gone as others have done in the past but simmered continually, with occasional more vociferous eruptions. The more likely causes of child injury receive little attention; control of traffic is too costly and unpopular and the idea of assault by family or friends unpalatable.

This climate of fear has led to restrictive parenting practices. Institutions have encouraged child containment through teaching, publications and legislation. Social pressures have reinforced this paradigm. Parents not only fear for their children, but are also fearful of their reputations as good and responsible parents, so they confine their children as much as possible, and chaperone them on most occasions when they journey outside the home. The culture of blame which holds parents responsible for any mishap to their child is an added pressure to conform with these practices. Parents prefer their children to be secure in adult supervised activities rather than indulging in independent play - although the concern has now extended to include those adults in supervisory roles.

The effect of this on children has been discussed and other consequences of the changing geographies of children include the impact greater use of the motor car with its the negative implications for the environment, the increase cost in parenting through spending on personnel or public transport and children's leisure activities, the increased pressure on adult time to monitor their children's lives and increased tensions within the home as its space is disputed within families. All these add weight to the necessity of an agenda for change.

The children's desire for greater freedom, their parents' nostalgia for their own childhoods and recognition that their children are being deprived of something valuable are all hopeful signs that the situation could be improved. In the short term, we can only hope for change within the existing paradigm. The environment will remain a dangerous place, but oases of safety may be constructed within which children may be allowed more liberty. Supervised parks and safe routes to school are two practical examples of ways forward. Closer consultation with children and their parents will identify the issues they are concerned about and the solutions that they consider might work.

In the longer term radical solutions are required to shift the paradigm and create an environment from which children are no longer excluded. This would require an acceptance that public space is not just the preserve of adults but should be available to all age groups. Practical measures would be necessary to counter the traffic problem with measures from some continental countries, such as Denmark, implemented to create traffic free zones. Tackling the moral panic surrounding strangers requires a change in emphasis from the institutions which have been responsible for initiating it. The media, the police, the schools the local authorities and the Government have all been instrumental in creating the panic. Only when they become convinced of the value of children's independent experience will the processes of change begin. A new hegemony must emerge which values the freedom of the child and only then will trend towards 'factory farming' our children be stopped.

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Appendix 2

QUESTIONNAIRE ON CHILDREN'S TRAVEL

Name Emma C

Age 9

Have you ever been on a bus (apart from the school bus)

- By yourself
With friends

Have you ever travelled by train

- By yourself
With friends

Do you own a bike?

- Yes
No

How far are you allowed to ride your bike by yourself?

- Near your house
Around the local area
Further away

When you travel to school do you ever..

- Walk alone
Walk with friends
Cycle alone
Cycle with friends
Bus alone
Bus with friends

If you go and visit friends do you ever...

- Walk alone
Walk with friends
Cycle alone
Cycle with friends
Bus alone
Bus with friends

If you ever go swimming do you...

- Walk alone
Walk with friends

- Cycle alone
- Cycle with friends
- Bus alone
- Bus with friends

If you take part in any out of school activities do you ever..

- Walk there alone
- Walk with friends
- Cycle alone
- Cycle with friends
- Bus alone
- Bus with friends

If you ever go to the cinema without an adult do you..

- Walk alone
- Walk with friends
- Cycle alone
- Cycle with friends
- Bus alone
- Bus with friends

If you visit the nearest shops do you ever..

- Walk alone
- Walk with friends
- Cycle alone
- Cycle with friends
- Bus alone
- Bus with friends

If you ever visit Nottingham town centre without an adult do you...

- Walk alone
- Walk with friends
- Cycle alone
- Cycle with friends
- Bus alone
- Bus with friends

Can you name the longest trip you have ever made by yourself?

down to the P.O.

How do you feel about going anywhere on your own?

- Like it
- Don't mind
- Don't like it

Would you like to be able to go further than you are allowed at present?

Yes
NO

If you are going somewhere near by yourself do you..

Ask permission
Tell someone
Just go

If you want to go on a longer trip - like to the swimming pool or Nottingham centre - do you

Ask permission
Tell someone
Just go

Can you name anywhere near your home where you think it is safe to play? down by the
Park

Can you name anywhere near your home where you think it is unsafe to play? down by the
Main road.

*Appendix 3a**Details of Participants in Questionnaire Survey*

School Name	Location	Boys	Girls	Total	
Jesse Grey School	middle class suburb	27	28	55	
Tollerton School	village	33	27	60	
Northgate School	inner city	29	27	56	
Gladehill School	transitional	31	30	61	
Henry Whipple School	working class suburb	24	27	51	
		Total	144	139	283

Appendix 3b

Results of Questionnaire -Total Responses

		Number	%
Have you ever been on a bus apart from the school bus	By yourself	74	26
	With friends	148	52
Have you ever travelled by train	By yourself	9	3
	With friends	59	20
Do you own a bike?	Yes	265	93
	No	16	5
How far are you allowed to ride your bike by yourself?	Near the house	52	18
	Around the local area	108	38
	Further away	99	34
When you travel to school do you ever..	Walk alone	164	57
	Walk with friends	180	63
	Cycle alone	6	2
	Cycle with friends	5	1
	Bus alone	9	3
	Bus with friends	7	2
If you visit friends do you ever..	Walk alone	225	80
	Walk with friends	170	60
	Cycle alone	131	46
	Cycle with friends	92	32
	Bus alone	13	4
	Bus with friends	23	8
If you ever go swimming do you	Walk alone	46	16
	Walk with friends	149	52
	Cycle alone	24	8
	Cycle with friends	36	13
	Bus alone	12	4
	Bus with friends	61	21
If you take part in any out of school activities do you ever..	Walk alone	62	22
	Walk with friends	111	39
	Cycle alone	25	9
	Cycle with friends	37	13
	Bus alone	4	1
	Bus with friends	32	11

If you ever go to the cinema without an adult do you..	Walk alone	18	6
	Walk with friends	34	12
	Cycle alone	5	1
	Cycle with friends	11	4
	Bus alone	9	3
	Bus with friends	91	32
If you visit the nearest shops do you ever..	Walk alone	203	71
	Walk with friends	205	72
	Cycle alone	132	47
	Cycle with friends	119	42
	Bus alone	10	3
	Bus with friend	16	5
If you ever visit Nottingham centre without an adult do you..	Walk alone	7	2
	Walk with friends	23	8
	Cycle alone	8	3
	Cycle with friends	20	7
	Bus alone	19	6
	Bus with friends	100	35
Can you name the longest trip you have ever made by yourself	Short/Never	110	38
	Local area	85	30
	Further away	77	27
How do you feel about going anywhere on your own?	Like it	108	38
	Don't mind	143	50
	Don't like it	29	10
Would you like to be allowed further than you go at present?	Yes	185	65
	No	93	34
If you are going somewhere nearby do you...	Ask permission	138	49
	Tell someone	110	39
	Just go	30	10
If you want to go further by yourself do you...	Ask permission	168	59
	Tell someone	41	14
	Just go	5	1
Total participants		283	

Appendix 3c

Questionnaire Results - By Gender

		%Boys	%Girls
Have you ever been on a bus apart from the school bus	By yourself	38	36
	With friends	51	53
Have you ever travelled by train	By yourself	4	4
	With friends	19	15
How far are you allowed to ride your bike by yourself?	Near the house	19	18
	Around the local area	33	44
	Further away	47	28
When you travel to school do you ever..	Walk alone	64	52
	Walk with friends	64	65
	Cycle alone	3	1
	Cycle with friends	2	1
	Bus alone	4	4
	Bus with friends	2	4
If you visit friends do you ever..	Walk alone	76	83
	Walk with friends	57	66
	Cycle alone	51	42
	Cycle with friends	31	34
	Bus alone	4	5
	Bus with friends	6	11
If you ever go swimming do you	Walk alone	19	14
	Walk with friends	43	63
	Cycle alone	10	6
	Cycle with friends	16	9
	Bus alone	4	4
	Bus with friends	19	25
If you take part in any out of school activities do you ever..	Walk alone	27	17
	Walk with friends	38	41
	Cycle alone	13	4
	Cycle with friends	15	11
	Bus alone	2	0
	Bus with friends	11	12
If you ever go to the cinema without an adult do you..	Walk alone	8	4
	Walk with friends	15	12
	Cycle alone	3	0
	Cycle with friends	6	2
	Bus alone	4	3
	Bus with friends	27	37

		%Boys	%Girls
If you visit the nearest shops do you ever..	Walk alone	69	75
	Walk with friends	65	80
	Cycle alone	50	60
	Cycle with friends	40	61
	Bus alone	3	6
	Bus with friend	5	9
If you ever visit Nottingham centre without an adult do you..	Walk alone	5	0
	Walk with friends	8	11
	Cycle alone	4	2
	Cycle with friends	10	5
	Bus alone	8	8
	Bus with friends	33	53
Can you name the longest trip you have ever made by yourself	Short/Never	38	40
	Local area	33	27
	Further away	28	26
How do you feel about going anywhere on your own?	Like it	45	31
	Don't mind	45	56
	Don't like it	9	12
Would you like to be allowed further than you go at present?	Yes	76	56
	No	23	43
If you are going somewhere nearby do you...	Ask permission	45	53
	Tell someone	40	38
	Just go	15	6
If you want to go further by yourself do you...	Ask permission	60	59
	Tell someone	13	17
	Just go	3	0
Total numbers in each category:		144	139

*Appendix 3d**Questionnaire Results -By Socio-economic Group (%)*

		W/C*	M/C*	Trans*
Have you ever been on a bus apart from the school bus	By yourself	38	8	37
	With friends	66	35	59
How far are you allowed to ride your bike by yourself?	Near the house	11	23	21
	Around the local area	27	50	34
	Further away	54	22	26
When you travel to school do you ever..	Walk alone	65	63	55
	Walk with friends	75	63	66
	Cycle alone	2	0	4
	Cycle with friends	2	0	3
	Bus alone	6	0	4
	Bus with friends	6	0	1
If you visit friends do you ever..	Walk alone	82	76	80
	Walk with friends	69	49	63
	Cycle alone	40	60	31
	Cycle with friends	38	35	18
	Bus alone	4	0	3
	Bus with friends	8	1	3
If you ever go swimming do you	Walk alone	20	6	27
	Walk with friends	77	20	68
	Cycle alone	13	2	11
	Cycle with friends	17	8	11
	Bus alone	6	1	4
	Bus with friends	30	10	27
If you take part in any out of school activities do you ever..	Walk alone	24	27	11
	Walk with friends	52	30	34
	Cycle alone	8	10	6
	Cycle with friends	14	13	11
	Bus alone	2	0	2
	Bus with friends	20	3	13
If you ever go to the cinema without an adult do you..	Walk alone	6	0	16
	Walk with friends	20	0	18
	Cycle alone	3	0	3
	Cycle with friends	5	1	5
	Bus alone	2	1	2
	Bus with friends	40	9	40

		W/C	M/C	Trans
If you visit the nearest shops do you ever..	Walk alone	85	63	64
	Walk with friends	77	70	69
	Cycle alone	47	56	31
	Cycle with friends	43	50	25
	Bus alone	4	3	5
	Bus with friend	5	4	11
If you ever visit Nottingham centre without an adult do you..	Walk alone	7	0	0
	Walk with friends	19	0	3
	Cycle alone	5	0	3
	Cycle with friends	13	1	6
	Bus alone	11	3	5
	Bus with friends	61	10	36
Can you name the longest trip you have ever made by yourself	Short/Never	28	40	54
	Local area	26	36	23
	Further away	41	20	16
How do you feel about going anywhere on your own?	Like it	39	37	39
	Don't mind	48	55	49
	Don't like it	13	7	11
Would you like to be allowed further than you go at present?	Yes	60	72	63
	No	40	28	37
If you are going somewhere nearby do you...	Ask permission	41	56	49
	Tell someone	45	38	32
	Just go	13	3	20
If you want to go further by yourself do you...	Ask permission	58	68	59
	Tell someone	23	0	19
	Just go	4	0	0
Total Numbers in each category:		107	115	61

*W/C = Working Class

*M/C = Middle Class

*Trans = Transitional

Appendix 3e

Questionnaire Results - By environment

		%Rural	%Suburb	%City
Have you ever been on a bus apart from the school bus	-			
	By yourself	6	31	30
	With friends	36	53	64
How far are you allowed to ride your bike by yourself?	Near the house	13	23	9
	Around the local area	57	35	27
	Further away	14	32	55
When you travel to school do you ever..	Walk alone	70	61	58
	Walk with friends	62	70	67
	Cycle alone	0	2	2
	Cycle with friends	0	2	2
	Bus alone	0	3	6
	Bus with friends	0	3	4
If you visit friends do you ever..	Walk alone	83	76	83
	Walk with friends	46	62	68
	Cycle alone	66	50	36
	Cycle with friends	26	34	33
	Bus alone	0	4	7
	Bus with friends	0	6	15
If you ever go swimming do you	Walk alone	0	19	23
	Walk with friends	3	62	75
	Cycle alone	0	11	9
	Cycle with friends	3	17	9
	Bus alone	0	6	1
	Bus with friends	16	23	23
If you take part in any out of school activities do you ever..	Walk alone	23	22	20
	Walk with friends	31	40	46
	Cycle alone	15	7	7
	Cycle with friends	15	12	12
	Bus alone	0	2	1
	Bus with friends	2	11	21
If you visit the nearest shops do you ever..	Walk alone	66	68	89
	Walk with friends	66	65	73
	Cycle alone	58	43	46
	Cycle with friends	51	39	41
	Bus alone	0	5	3
	Bus with friend	0	9	1

%Rural %Suburb %City

If you ever visit Nottingham centre without an adult do you..	Walk alone	0	2	5
	Walk with friends	0	7	20
	Cycle alone	0	3	3
	Cycle with friends	0	8	11
	Bus alone	0	8	9
	Bus with friends	8	35	61
Can you name the longest trip you have ever made by yourself	Short/Never	25	46	34
	Local area	51	23	29
	Further away	20	28	34
How do you feel about going anywhere on your own?	Like it	31	41	38
	Don't mind	63	48	48
	Don't like it	5	11	13
Would you like to be allowed further than you go at present?	Yes	75	62	64
	No	25	38	36
If you are going somewhere nearby do you...	Ask permission	56	41	3
	Tell someone	49	37	13
	Just go	44	44	12
If you want to go further by yourself do you...	Ask permission	56	58	66
	Tell someone	5	17	16
	Just go	0	0	7
Total numbers in categories:		60	167	56