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# ***Everyday Cultures*** Working Papers

**no. 4**

## **STRANGERS IN THE CITY** The Structure and Significance of Children's Fears of Urban Outsiders

**Karen Wells**

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### **About the author**

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The working paper series on *Everyday Cultures* disseminates research developed within the National Everyday Cultures Programme. We welcome comments about the work published.

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## **Editorial Presentation**

In Working Paper no. 4 Karen Wells discusses the everyday of young children in relation to their perceptions and narratives of the risks strangers pose to them. Contemporary London provides the context for her investigation of working-class children in a primary school in North London and her observations of how children use space in two areas of South London. This multi-sited study employs diverse methods: focus groups, interviews, visual materials, children's own writings, and secondary sources. The project was funded by the National Everyday Cultures Programme (NECP) and fieldwork was carried out during 2000.

Are the fears of children in their everyday lives the same as those of the adults around them? Wells suggests that when children speak of drunks and drug dealers, prostitutes, paedophiles and perverts they are not expressing a shared meaning with those terms when employed by adults. Their particular vulnerabilities and knowledges in relation to socially marginalised adults are expressed in an ambivalence of delight of transgressing boundaries (as when they show they 'know' about these people and things) and of fears about the fragile character of adult self-control. Their expression of these worlds of the 'stranger' is, however, almost entirely divorced from their everyday experiences.

Wells interprets the meanings that deviant strangers have for children by drawing from approaches that allow her to explore the personal, the cultural and the social levels of expression of children's fear in urban spaces. She finds that fears were related to particular *practices*, not particular *bodies*. When analysed through the lens of psychological theory, the material collected in the investigation showed that children perceived that their care was also an act of power of adults over them. Their safety depended on the self-discipline of adults and they were aware that this self-discipline was far from assured. Drawing from cultural theory frameworks the analysis encounters 'strange practices' and 'dirt' confined within boundaries associated with separations of spaces between communities. The intersection of personal and cultural boundaries therefore secures control by adults over the children's occupation of public space. Children fear the transgression of the boundaries of public space, when 'strange practices' occupy this setting.

## **EBS**

## **Strangers in the city: the structure and significance of children's fears of urban outsiders**

**Karen Wells**

### **Abstract**

This paper explores children's fears of unknown adults in public spaces. The culturally diverse identities of the largely working-class participants unsettles a simple mapping of the figure of the stranger onto black, working-class or male identity. I suggest that these children's fears were not related to specific bodies but to specific everyday practices. In particular unknown adults violating private/public dichotomies evoked a range of negative emotions from disgust to terror.

\*

## Introduction

In this paper I explore the structure and significance of fears of urban outsiders, as expressed by a culturally diverse group of working-class children. This can be understood as operating on three levels: the personal, the cultural and the social. The paper considers these through their related theoretical approaches: from psychology, cultural theory and the sociology of risk. The application of these approaches to the research data suggests that fear of adults engaged in 'strange practices' in public space are devices through which children manage their psychic and cultural integrity in urban space. These are also means through which children's engagement in public space is shaped and constrained.

The research was carried out over six months in the winter of 2000.<sup>1</sup> Three forms of data were collected. Representations of life in the city produced in different media by 47 school students in year 5 (ages 9 and 10), focus-group interviews with 15 of these participants and observations of children's use of public space in three sites in London (Brixton Town Square, Brixton's central park and the South Bank). The participants were accessed through a local primary school. This school was chosen for two reasons. Firstly, I wanted to carry out the research in a working-class, culturally diverse locale. The working-class child's voice in the literature on childhood is a very subdued one. Working-class childhood tends to be pathologized for its departure from a normative model of bourgeois western childhood (Steedman, 2000). There is also an assumption that ethnically diverse working-class neighbourhoods are riven with conflict between ethnic groups.<sup>2</sup> In selecting a culturally diverse, working-class neighbourhood<sup>3</sup> I hoped to give voice to working-class children's experiences of living in the city and to understand how children negotiate cultural difference in their everyday lives. Secondly, the age group chosen for this research has been relatively neglected in both developmental psychology, which tends to focus on early childhood, and in the sociology of childhood, which is dominated by accounts of late childhood (James et al., 1998:177).

The data collection began with a visit to each classroom. After a lengthy introduction I asked the participants to ask each other, in groups of 2 or 3, the question, 'do you like living in London and why?' They wrote down their responses and I collected them at the end of the meeting. I set the question in a way that I hoped would emphasize the possibility that children might enjoy living in London to counter the conventional view of children's relationship to urban space. Despite this possible bias over half (27/45) of the children who responded said that they did not like living in London. These responses were gendered, with girls citing fears of strangers, paedophiles, prostitutes, perverts and of being unsafe, as well as of kidnapping and rape. Both boys and girls expressed concern about drug dealers and drunks and about pollution, dirt and graffiti. Following this I distributed a set of resources for the fieldwork research. These resources were disposable cameras, notebooks and pens, drawing books with pencils, rubber and glue. A third of the participants were to take away each of these resources. I gave each participant a brief guide about what to do with the materials. I suggested that they might think about what they did in London (including their local district), where they went, who they went with, what their favourite places were what they enjoyed and what they disliked about living in London. I collected the completed accounts, and cameras, after three weeks. Of the 57 participants who had taken cameras, notebooks, or collage books, 47 returned them. The corpus of data now consisted of 20 sets of photographs, 12 written accounts and 15 collage books.

Following a preliminary analysis of this data, 15 of the participants (one group of 6 and three groups of 3) were involved in focus-group interviews in which their accounts were used to encourage the children to elaborate on their experiences of urban living. In this stage of the research the catalogue of fear, violence, and pollution that was such a striking feature of the first stage was rather unevenly elaborated. For all participants, dirt remained a dominant theme in visual and written accounts and in interviews. Fear of strangers appeared in very contradictory ways in both media accounts and interviews. While it was mentioned in the children's media accounts it did not apparently intrude on their everyday lives. It was mentioned only in the written accounts and was frequently juxtaposed against mundane and even pleasant comments about other aspects of city life. Claudette, for example, wrote in her notebook: '[in London]...there are kidnappers, rappists, and raceists<sup>4</sup>. Lastly we have had a problem with petrol and fuel'. Janet, in a similar juxtaposition of the horrific and the mundane, wrote that there are '...kidnapper and they are some rapers [rapists]. London is dirty, mess, filthy and ruty. But your know one thing in London it is a nice place to live...London have got lots of parks and it have got lots of shop'.

Cognisant of the school context in which the participants' representations of the city were produced, I sought to complement this data with observations of children's use of public spaces. I chose three sites in London to observe children's use of public space: the walkway at the South Bank, the town square, Brixton in South London and the local park. I chose these sites for their free access, in principle and to a greater or lesser extent in practice, to adults and children of diverse ascriptive identities (class, race, gender, age). The South Bank's presentation as a public space is confirmed by the free access of its walkways and some indoor spaces (exhibition spaces, performances) but is belied by the overall emphasis on consumption spaces (cafes, bookshops, art gallery, cinema). The Oval, Brixton, is a town square bordered by an independent cinema and the public library on one side and by two major roads circumscribing Brixton's main shopping area on two sides. On the fourth side is a minor road dividing the Oval from a newly landscaped square named Windrush Square. In the square there is a large tree, several benches, a water fountain and a statue of Henry Tate, the sugar merchant whose fortunes were built on slavery. The statue, the library (also called the Brixton Tate) and the name of Windrush Square are testament to the substantial and long-standing international connections of this neighbourhood. The third site, also in Brixton, is a large public park some ten minutes walk from the main shopping area. It is typical of city parks in the range of facilities on offer (playground, tennis courts, café, etc.). Like the neighbourhood that the participants lived in in Brixton, it is characterized by a mostly working-class, ethnically diverse population. Over a period of six months I observed the interaction of children and adults in these spaces and mapped the different uses that children and adults made of them.

## Children's fears in urban space

Research on fears about children's engagement in public space have focused on parental anxiety and the impact of anxiety about risk on parents' caretaking practices in relation to children's temporal and spatial range. It has been suggested that fear of sexual attack and abduction is the most prominent fear that parents hold for their children's safety in public space. Scot et al. comment that 'fear of attack by strangers was seen as the single most significant risk to children when they ventured outside the home and in the case of girls this was identified as a specifically sexual risk' (1998:683). Valentine (1997) suggests that while risk assessment is gendered both boys and girls are increasingly thought by parents to be equally at risk of sexual abduction. Boys are thought to be additionally at risk of bullying, random male violence and racial attack. Many of the participants in her study, however, do not specify what type of risks they fear their children are exposed to. They speak instead of unspecified dangers and of keeping children safe. However obliquely these fears are expressed, they evoke the fear of risk to their children's bodily and psychic integrity at the hands of strangers. The unwillingness to name this risk is itself significant for understanding why these fears are not allayed by the statistical improbability of the perceived risk occurring. This gap between the fear of risk and the calculation of risk is echoed in other studies that have addressed children's fears. Tarifa and Kloep (1996), in one of the few studies to approach children directly, comparing Albanian and Swedish children, found an inverse relationship between fears and material risks. Not all risk assessment is overstated or unrelated to risk occurrence. While fear of abduction by strangers features strongly in parental assessment of the risks children face, the risk of injury in traffic accidents is also a dominant motif in parental risk anxiety. This risk however does not carry the psychic dread and horror that is freely associated with fear of strangers. In practice, of course, the risk of death and injury in road traffic accidents is statistically much higher than the risk of violence at the hands of strangers (Hillman et al., 1990).

My research echoes these earlier studies in the participants' preoccupation with fear of strangers. In general participants expressed a dislike and fear of socially marginalized adults. Some of the children elaborated on the risk they felt these people presented, in particular of kidnapping and rape. However, for the most part, these fears are not elaborated on and, as with Valentine's (1997) study, are left as a generalized danger.

The children involved in this research were very specific about the categories of people whose presence in public space they objected to: drug-dealers and drunks; strange people, strangers and mad men; paedophiles, prostitutes and perverts. What is less clear is what these words signify in everyday practice. Mad-men and perverts are empty categories, the specific meaning of which can only be established in context. While other labels may seem more precise, it is unlikely that being drunk is enough in itself to cause concern. Indeed, as one participant's account clearly invokes, familiarity obviates the fear attached to drunks and 'drug-dealers':

But one of them they're like. He doesn't take them all the time and he's not scary or anything, he just takes it and he couldn't really help it. I know his name. (Glen, focus-group interview)

Similarly, it is possible that participants know what a prostitute does, but it is less likely that they could identify a prostitute working on the street.<sup>5</sup>

I uncover what participants mean when they speak of drunks and drug-dealers and of prostitutes, paedophiles and perverts. I suggest that the use of a shared language between adults and children should not be taken to imply a shared meaning in the concepts we use. Children's different experiences of people in urban space, their different vulnerabilities and their different knowledges about what it means to be drunk or to be a prostitute suggest that these words also carry different meanings for them than they do for adults. In particular drunks, drug-dealers, and, indeed, mad men, are figures for children who seem to embody both the delight and the danger of transgressing boundaries and their fears about the fragile character of adult self-control. Paedophiles and prostitutes are words that are apparently almost entirely divorced from everyday experiences for these participants, and are used by them, especially by girls, to legitimize and create a space for talking about sexuality.

## Drunks and drug-dealers

What is the significance of children's fears of drunks and drug-dealers? A discussion between two participants in a focus-group interview illustrates this. Kate opened the discussion by talking about a man who lives in a street that she had taken a photograph of,

...there's this man who lives there and he's a bit mad because he drinks a lot. And he's always got like bottles of drink and stuff and he smokes and everything And the he...I'm a bit scared of him because he's just walking around. And sometimes when he smashes a bottle, yeah. He's just walking around with the smashed bottle.

I just walk away from him because I'm a bit scared of him. (Kate)

Kate claims the man is a bit mad. Mad, of course, has a very loose meaning in everyday speech. It can mean someone who is in an episode of mental illness, although that's more likely to attract the more veiled, not very well or pejorative, even abusive, abbreviations of medical terms, as in psycho or schizo. Mad is more likely to be used to mean someone who doesn't do what the speaker thinks is appropriate. So, laughing without restraint, in particular at something other people don't find funny might attract the statement you're mad. In other words it can be a fairly mild claim, made even more so here by the adjective a bit. She goes on to say, 'because he drinks a lot'. So his inappropriate behaviour, his rule-breaking is accounted for by the fact that he drinks. This is not quite enough however to explain his action. Kate is likely to know other adults who drink and who do not exhibit mad behaviour. So she expands on the claim by saying that 'he drinks and stuff' and 'he smokes and everything'. Kate, who elsewhere in the interview, and in her photographs, displays a great deal of confidence about walking through the city, then makes a series of statements about

his behaviour which evoke a strong sense of unease. She begins by saying, 'I'm a bit scared of him'. Her first reason is 'because he's just walking around'. This is an interesting statement because it incorporates an ordinary action in a set of claims that together constitute a frightening episode. Although he is walking around, he is doing so within a very small area. In this he transgresses two of the norms of using contemporary urban public space. Firstly, he is walking but he is not going anywhere. Secondly, the small-scale of his movement means he is effectively settling the space he occupies. There then enters the threat of violence, 'when he smashes a bottle', and the menacing image of him 'just walking around with the smashed bottle'. She concludes: 'I just walk away from him because I'm a bit scared of him'. Glen, Kate's best friend, then adds: 'But you should run away from him because he['s saying] 'do you wanna play man, d'you wanna play?'" The man Glen is speaking about is not the same man Kate is speaking of, but Glen merges the two together. He says:

'No [it's not the same person] its like the same person but they walk around with bottles and everything...There's loads of them and they just have drugs and they walk across the road [without looking]'

In these accounts Glen and Kate evoke a feeling somewhere between unease and terror. The acts of transgression they describe are rather minor: crossing the road without looking, walking around in the same spot, being in a group ('there's loads of them'). Yet the discomfort they produce in the children is palpable.

Observation of public spaces confirmed the impression Kate and Glen gave that children are uncomfortable in public places where unknown adults are drinking. One of the sites of observation for this research is a public square in Brixton, south London. The square has a fountain, a large tree, several benches, and is enclosed by a wall on two sides, a grass bank on another side and a wall planted with shrubs on the fourth side. It is typical of the small, enclosed and potentially secretive places children often make use of, particularly in cities (Ward, 1978, Wells, forthcoming). Yet, in this particular locale, children make virtually no use of the space. Adults rarely cross it when they are with children and children on their own, for example leaving the Saturday morning pictures, which is separated from the square by a pathway, also avoid the square, making little use of it. The people who do make use of the space have settled it literally with their bodies, they sit in it and walk around in it and some sleep in it. They drink in it, chat with one another, occasionally someone will dance around it. By and large the few people who cross the square, and the even fewer who sit down there, and the drinkers who have claimed it as their space, ignore one another. For adults with children there is the additional concern to convey to the young their disapproval, to protect them, to set taboos. The repetition of the presence of these marginal adults has enabled them to achieve a critical mass that allows them to claim the square for themselves.

### **Paedophiles and prostitutes**

Other participants included 'drunks' in an extended catalogue of the adults they feared encountering in the public spaces of the city. In the extract which follows from a peer-group interview, three of the girls ask each other the question, 'do you like living in London and why'.

Remi: I don't think London is safe because you could get killed on the road or get taken away from [i.e. by] a stranger.

Nkechi: I don't think London is safe because there are pedofiles or prostetutes.

Shahida: I don't like London because there's too much rain.

Remi: I think its not safe because at night pedofiles come around areas and could take someone.

Shahida: I think its not safe to play in the night.

Nkechi: I think its not safe because anyone can come and take you.

Nkechi: sometimes because in some places its nice and clean.

Shahida: Sometimes because its cold in London and you want to go back to my country.

Remi: I don't like living in London because it is dirty city and there's weirdos.

These rather stereotyped observations by the children of why they do not like the city are not followed up in the accounts of everyday life that they produced in various media in the second stage of the research. Amber and Samina offer particularly clear examples of how a discourse about sexualized threats was not expanded on in accounts of everyday life. In her peer interview (see extract below) Amber juxtaposed the 'beautiful and nice' with her hatred of 'prostitutes, drunk people, drug pushers, busy areas, padeiophills'. In her account of everyday life, a collage production created over three weeks, she evokes images only of the beauty and hyper-sensory experience of the city. Those girls who in their peer-group interviews suggested the most unequivocal disgust and fear of public space (Natasha, Claudette and Samina) made no reference in a ninety minute interview to any dangerous figures. Indeed, in focus group interviews Nkechi, who claimed in her peer interview a fear that 'anyone can come and take you', expresses the view that their everyday lives are boring, so that one of the objectives of their games is to seek out excitement by playing 'knock-down-ginger'. This seeking out of excitement by drawing in strangers sits uneasily with the antipathy to strangers expressed elsewhere in this focus group interview.

Amber's ideas:

Do you like living in London = yes.

Why = because it is beautiful and it is nice to live in.

What do you hate about London = I hate prostitutes, drunk people,

Drug pushers, Busy areas,

Paediophills.

Samina's ideas:

Do you like living in London = some of it and not some.

What do you hate about London = I hate busy roads, drug dealers,

Prostitutes, paediphills,

Dirty areas, nasty boys.

This juxtaposition of the horrific and the mundane, along with the apparent absence of threatening figures in children's everyday public lives suggests that these participants' fears about strangers were concerned with something rather more complex than simple risk calculation. I now turn to the possible interpretations of the meaning that deviant strangers hold for these children, elaborating on the approaches of social psychology, cultural theory, risk theory and governmentality.

### Psychological explanations of the significance of children's fears

Two concepts in psychology are particularly relevant for understanding the participants' fears of particular figures in urban public space. These are the closely related ideas of 'abjection' (Kristeva, 1991) and *unheimlich* (Freud, 1919/1978). Abjection is premised on the assertion that human subjects accomplish a sense of psychic integrity, of emotional and social well-being, by splitting-off what we experience in ourselves as unpleasant, dangerous and, especially, disgusting parts of the self. These disassociated parts are then projected onto other individuals, using some schema of socially ascribed characteristics, often those that are 'written on the body' (skin colour, gait, height, weight, etc.). Julia Kristeva's work (1982, 1991) presents responses to the stranger as the archaic, narcissistic self projecting out of itself what it experiences as dangerous or unpleasant in itself. In this account, as with that offered by cultural theory, the insider (the self, or the community of selves) depends for its integrity on the existence of an outsider. Little attention is paid in this literature to why particular bodies are marked out as strangers. Sara Ahmed's (2000) insight that psychological explanations fail to situate strangers in an historical context structured by power is relevant here. Rather, these explanations seem to reverse the weight of explanation. The ontological need for an abjected other is taken as necessitating the differentiating of the social body. The ways in which difference is produced by looking at bodies in specific historical and social contexts is not attended to. It therefore takes 'race' and 'sex' to be facts about people's embodied selves rather than as identities constructed within social worlds (Butler, 1993). It implies that real differences between people are seized upon by the Self to justify the claim that particular bodies are Other. In the psychological account difference is a given, which may be used in the identification of who counts as 'other'. It obscures the ways in which difference is structured in and by power, and is not simply or ontologically written on the body. In doing so it assumes that in all social contexts the same people will be marked out as strangers. In particular, it takes for granted that migrants and their descendants, particularly where they are visibly different from the majority population, will take on the role of 'the stranger'.

Notwithstanding these doubts about how psychological theory apparently takes 'race' and 'foreignness' to be essential rather than relational identities, the merging of black identity with the figure of the stranger is a material effect of racism. Goffman (1971) showed that interaction between unknowns in public space is highly ritualized. The purpose of these rituals is to establish that there is no cause for alarm. Ritual, however, is not innocent of power. Firstly, the culturally specific character of ritual and its largely non-linguistic or bodily expression makes its competent performance by outsiders very difficult. Secondly, the performance of black identity may involve the transgression of culturally dominant cues. Thirdly, how these transgressions are read (as threatening or not) is dependent on the complex interplay of race, gender, class and age. However, while a convincing case can be made that black people in public space are often ascribed stranger-status (Ahmed, 2000), in specific locales other characteristics may be more salient than 'race' in the ascription of stranger identity. In some locales where black people have successfully claimed a 'right to the city' (Lefebvre, 1996) the connection in North American and European space between black identity and the stranger has been broken.

This local determination of what is marked as strange is particularly useful in understanding the fears of urban children in public space. In the socio-geographic context of this research it would be very difficult to conjoin black identity with strangeness. I have mentioned that the research locale is situated on the borders of two London boroughs with ethnically diverse populations. The ethnic minority population of the boroughs overall is about 40 per cent. Nearly half of the participants in this research were black (including of African, African-Caribbean, British and American origin), about one-fifth were white and about one-third Asian (including of Turkish, Indian and Vietnamese origin.) That black or Asian identity would not invite an automatic association with 'strangeness' is not to suggest that race and racism are not salient features of these children's lives at both structural and affective levels. Nor



is it to suggest that stranger is never a racialized category. However, in this material it is not their socially ascribed identities that mark particular people out as strangers, but specific practices that are not explicitly racialized. They are, however, sexualized and gendered, but as heterosexual and male. Indeed, the participants' silence about the 'race' of these strange protagonists suggests their racialization as white (Back, 1996:54). In the following section I apply Kristeva's theory of abjection to the participants' fears about drunks and drug-dealers.

### *Strangers defined by particular practices – drunks and drug-dealers*

While these children's fear of strangers seems to uphold the thesis of cultural theory that exclusion is a precondition of belonging, it challenges the claim that these exclusions must be embodied. For, although these children are very specific about what strange is a synonym for, they do not articulate how a stranger might be identified. This gap between the concept of the stranger and the failure, inability, or, perhaps, refusal to embody the concept in an identifiable figure, is revealed by the children's general claims about fear of strangers alongside an absence of accounts of embodied strangers in their representations of their everyday lives.

Drunks transgress social, spatial and corporeal boundaries. Indeed, it is because of these transgressions that an explanation is sought for their behaviour and the drinker is marked out as 'a drunk'. At the heart of the idea of transgression are the experiences of excess and of indulgence, experiences that challenge the demands of a disciplined body (Stallybrass and White, 1986). In some contexts, such as festivals and parades, these transgressions are indulged, even celebrated, because they are socially and spatially appropriate. However, outside of these contexts, public drinking is often considered to be neither spatially nor socially appropriate. Drinking in public spaces without the legitimating context of a festival involves first of all a transgression of spatial boundaries. The occupation of public space, rather than the swift movement through it, and being in groups are the spatial transgressions that Kate and Glen specifically commented on when discussing their fears of drunks (see above). Being drunk also loosens the inhibitions of the drinker, a weakening of social discipline that is exacerbated by already being outside of dominant social norms. Kate and Glen also draw attention to this when they recount how drunks speak to them and attempt to engage them. These social transgressions involve touch, gesture, speech and eye contact. Moreover, being drunk in public space often involves transgressing corporeal boundaries, a transgression that is compounded for those drinkers who are homeless and by the lack of private space to eat in and wash in. 'Drunks', in general, transgress corporeal (attending to the body in public), social (touch, speech, gesture, eye contact) and spatial boundaries (constant movement in small spaces and being in groups) through specific acts.

These transgressions are not, of course, exclusive to 'drunks'. Similar transgressions are evident in the public behaviour of young children. Pissing in public is allowed to the young child, even girl children, in a way that it is not for older children. Young children routinely talk to, touch, and look at people they don't know. Children use space in way that it is not designed for. These anarchic, transgressive acts mark the child out as undisciplined. In young children their lack of discipline is excused by an assumption of innocence. It is assumed that as they get older they will learn to live within social, spatial and corporeal boundaries or conventions. If they do not, then sanctions for transgression are commonplace, from both family and 'unknowns' (Cahill, 1990). The participants in this study are at an age (10–11 years) when children, for the most part, accept the ties that bind. Notwithstanding these doubts about how psychological theory apparently takes 'race' and 'foreignness' to be essential rather than relational identities, the merging of black identity with the figure of the stranger is a material effect of racism. Goffman (1971) showed that interaction between unknowns in public space is highly ritualized. The purpose of these rituals is to establish that there is no cause for alarm. Ritual, however, is not innocent of power. Firstly, the culturally specific character of ritual and its largely non-linguistic or bodily expression makes its competent performance by outsiders very difficult. Secondly, the performance of black identity may involve the transgression of culturally dominant cues. Thirdly, how these transgressions are read (as threatening or not) is dependent on the complex interplay of race, gender, class and age. However, while a convincing case can be made that black people in public space are often ascribed stranger-status (Ahmed, 2000), in specific locales other characteristics may be more salient than 'race' in the ascription of stranger identity. In some locales where black people have successfully claimed a 'right to the city' (Lefebvre, 1996) the connection in North American and European space between black identity and the stranger has been broken.

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While these children's fear of strangers seems to uphold the thesis of cultural theory that exclusion is a precondition of belonging, it challenges the claim that these exclusions must be embodied. For, although these children are very specific about what strange is a synonym for, they do not articulate how a stranger might be identified. This gap between the concept of the stranger and the failure, inability, or, perhaps, refusal to embody the concept in an identifiable figure, is revealed by the children's general claims about fear of strangers alongside an absence of accounts of embodied strangers in their representations of their everyday lives.

Drunks transgress social, spatial and corporeal boundaries. Indeed, it is because of these transgressions that an explanation is sought for their behaviour and the drinker is marked out as 'a drunk'. At the heart of the idea of transgression are the experiences of excess and of indulgence, experiences that challenge the demands of a disciplined body (Stallybrass and White, 1986). In some contexts, such as festivals and parades, these transgressions are indulged, even celebrated, because they are socially and spatially appropriate. However, outside of these contexts, public drinking is often considered to be neither spatially nor socially appropriate. Drinking in public spaces without the legitimating context of a festival involves first of all a transgression of spatial boundaries. The occupation of public space, rather than the swift movement through it, and being in groups are the spatial transgressions that Kate and Glen specifically commented on when discussing their fears of drunks (see above). Being drunk also loosens the inhibitions of the drinker, a weakening of social discipline that is exacerbated by already being outside of dominant social norms. Kate and Glen also draw attention to this when they recount how drunks speak to them and attempt to engage them. These social transgressions involve touch, gesture, speech and eye contact. Moreover, being drunk in public space often involves transgressing corporeal boundaries, a transgression that is compounded for those drinkers who are homeless and by the lack of private space to eat in and wash in. 'Drunks', in general, transgress corporeal (attending to the body in public), social (touch, speech, gesture, eye contact) and spatial boundaries (constant movement in small spaces and being in groups) through specific acts.

These transgressions are not, of course, exclusive to 'drunks'. Similar transgressions are evident in the public behaviour of young children. Pissing in public is allowed to the young child, even girl children, in a way that it is not for older children. Young children routinely talk to, touch, and look at people they don't know. Children use space in way that it is not designed for. These anarchic, transgressive acts mark the child out as undisciplined. In young children their lack of discipline is excused by an assumption of innocence. It is assumed that as they get older they will learn to live within social, spatial and corporeal boundaries or conventions. If they do not, then sanctions for transgression are commonplace, from both family and 'unknowns' (Cahill, 1990). The participants in this study are at an age (10–11 years) when children, for the most part, accept the ties that bind them and have successfully accommodated the social and cultural conventions of spatial practices. If they reject these conventions again in the liminal time of their teenage years, that is still a long way off. For now the anarchic behaviour of both the young child and the teenager are largely unavailable to them.

Kristeva's theory of abjection may then offer a partial explanation of these children's fears of drunks. The rejected part of themselves, their younger, undisciplined bodies, are easily projected onto these others whose behaviour echoes their earlier freedoms. At the same time, perhaps, children may resent the space that adults claim to transgress boundaries and to reject the discipline culture and society would impose on the body, when they have themselves so recently disciplined their own bodies to accept social, spatial and corporeal restraints. These echoes of freedom and bodily excess do not generate pleasure but perhaps terror and confusion. The part of the self that has been split off is not just separate, it is defiled, it has been rejected. This rejection does not, however, exhaust the meaning of children's responses to undisciplined adults. In their engagement or responses to these characters, children also exhibit their terror of what Freud calls 'the uncanny'.

If one route to the management of the defiled self is to project these parts onto others, this involves a simultaneous repression of the rejected self. It is a cliché of psychoanalytic theory that the 'repressed will return'. Freud's notion of *unheimlich*, glossed into English as 'uncanny', is an attempt to grasp this sense that the repressed is always finding ways of being expressed. *Unheimlich* is '...the name for everything that ought to have remained ...secret and hidden but has come to light' (Freud, 1919:227). This '...uncanny effect is often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced, as when something we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality' (Freud 1919:244). The appeal of horror as a genre may be understood as a fascination with the return of the repressed. This seems to particularly resonate with the young child's attachment to fantasy horror as expressed in fairy tales and myths.

In folk tales lurk both the fear of abduction and the fear that children will be enraptured by the rule-breaking anarchy of socially marginal figures. Examples of this include Pied Piper, Little Red Riding Hood, Hansel and Gretel. These stories speak to children's fear of adults losing their self-control, laying bare the power adults, even socially marginal adults, have over children. They express and produce a sense of the uncanny; that what exists in the world cannot be steadfastly separated from stories, dreams and fantasy. These tales express the extent of adult power over young lives and the fragility of the constraints on that power (Jack Zipes, 1999). For children it is this power that renders drunks as terrifying figures. When the shock of unfamiliar behaviour in adults is compounded by the child's inability to bargain for their safety by virtue of being 'kin', however loosely defined, then even the most minor of transgressive acts (crossing the road without looking) become imbued with a terrible significance.

### *More strange practices: paedophiles, prostitutes and perverts*

If fear of drunks can be understood as an expression of the uncanny, in which the unrestrained, irresponsible, untamed adult regarded as imaginary appears in reality, can the concept of *unheimlich* offer any insight into children's comments about paedophiles, prostitutes and perverts?

In the children's accounts about living in the city there was, as I noted earlier, a juxtaposition of the mundane and the horrific. Shahida's remarks on the rain and the cold are registered in the same tone as Nkechi's comments about paedophiles and prostitutes. Similarly, Nkechi moves from a claim that 'anyone can come and take you' to the lighthearted, 'in some places it's nice and clean'. It is also noticeable that there is no direct expression of fear in these accounts. They emphasize their view that London is 'not safe' because of the presence of paedophiles, but they do not, for example, speak directly of their fear of these figures. This, again, underlines a sense of distance between the ostensible subject of the account (the paedophile) and the threat which this figure embodies of sexual violence against children. Likewise, the collapsing together of different sexual outlaws, those who pose a direct threat to children's bodily integrity (paedophiles), those who do not (prostitutes) and those who may (perverts) brings into question the extent to which these accounts are inflected with fear. It is also worth noting that when the participants were writing down their interview responses one group of girls called me over to their table to tell me that in writing down the words paedophiles and prostitutes they were not 'being rude'. This suggests that they were more preoccupied by the illicitness, the sexualized character of these tropes, than with the danger they represented to the girls' bodily integrity and safety.

What unites the figures of the paedophile, prostitute and pervert, is their sexualized character. For the children to even use these names and to suggest in doing so that they know what they mean, is, in itself, a transgression. If the girls' attention was not on questions of safety and bodily integrity but on sexual illicitness, expressed, for example by the defence that 'we're not being rude', then these names may be an oblique expression of rejected/repressed sexual interest and desire. Clearly, paedophiles do pose a threat of sexual violence to children, but children are not necessarily aware of what this threat means. In the discussion of children's fears of drunks, above, their sense of terror was palpable. That sense of terror is largely absent in their remarks about paedophiles. Their preoccupation with these figures appears to have more to do with the potential for using these words (paedophiles, prostitutes and perverts) to obliquely refer to sexual interest, or at least to bring illicit language, on a par with swearing, into the classroom. It is often remarked on in the literature on the risks children face in public space, that the language used to describe this risk is very oblique. Stranger-danger programmes are very evasive about the specific type of danger the child should be avoiding. Likewise, adults discussing their fears for their children's safety, tend to avoid naming these fears. The possibility that words like paedophile, prostitute, pervert, hold different meanings for children and adults is obscured by the flawed assumption that providing we share a language, the words we use have shared, and transparent, meanings.

In attempting to apply psychological explanations to children's fears using the concepts of abjection and *unheimlich* I have suggested that children's fears of adults who transgress social, spatial and corporeal boundaries may be founded in these two processes. The splitting off of the rejected parts of themselves, their younger undisciplined bodies, produces that sense of horror that characterizes abjection when the self is confronted with an other who embodies the rejected self. The oblique recognition that these adults, being adults, are not so unlike the adults on whose care they depend, produces the terror that is invoked by a confrontation with the uncanny: something imaginary that now appears in reality. Also, there is that fascination with the abjected other that is provoked by the desire for 'the repressed to return', according to Freud. In this desire lies the children's yearning for excitement and anarchy. Some of these comments, the transgression of social, spatial and corporeal boundaries in particular, apply as much to fears of drunks as they do to fears about paedophiles. However, their knowledge about and contact with drunks is a part of everyday life in a way that their knowledge about paedophiles and prostitutes is not. Their talk about these strangers was almost entirely devoid of any sense of fear and of the danger of violence that paedophiles embody. These did indeed seem to be empty categories that, if they did any psychic 'work', merely opened up a space for girls to break taboos about sex.

It was however striking that when speaking of paedophiles, prostitutes and perverts this was often done alongside talk about dirt. In the next section I explore cultural explanations of children's fears and discuss the use of dirt as a cultural metaphor of boundary-setting.

### **Cultural explanations**

I have argued that drunks and drug-users represent for these participants the 'abjected other'. This abjection of those who transgress corporeal, spatial and social boundaries expresses their ambivalence about the work they have done to discipline their own bodies and live within social and spatial boundaries. I have suggested that as a counterpoint to this fear and loathing is the desire for the 'repressed to return'. However, this desire for the repressed to return is not an unalloyed pleasure, woven into it are feelings of the uncanny, of *unheimlich*. It is these feelings that evoke the palpable sense of horror that is evident in the respondent's comments about drunks. What should have remained 'secret and hidden but has come to light' (Freud, 1919:244) is that children's safety is dependent on adults self-control and that the exercise of this self-control cannot be taken for granted. Thus, the psychic health of the child is dependent on their being able to separate out adults who transgress social, spatial and corporeal boundaries, from other adults who can be depended upon to maintain these boundaries.

If psychological explanations assert that the other is created by the self in its struggle to maintain psychic integrity, then cultural theory writes this story at a larger scale. Cultural theory, particularly drawing on Douglas' work on pollution taboos, views the creation

of outsiders as a necessary device for the creation and maintenance of cultural groups. For cultural theory, without outsiders there can be no insiders. It is claimed, drawing on anthropological evidence, that the integrity of the cultural group is dependent on the existence of cultural boundaries. Strangers are simply the obverse of familiars. They are those who live, metaphorically or literally, at the margins of the cultural group. Exclusion defines senses of belonging. The materiality of exclusion patterns is determined in specific historical and social contexts. There can be no generalized account of who will embody the figure of the stranger.

While the explanation for exclusion that cultural theory offers is elegant in its simplicity, it is underpinned by an even greater fatalism than that of the psychological account of the stranger. For while that model ties the possibility of social emancipation to the accomplishment of psychic health, cultural theory has no way out from the categories of insider/outsider and of belonging/non-belonging. Who embodies these categories may change, but that they must be embodied is, for cultural theory, imperative.

However, the possibilities for embodiment are predicated on an uncomplicated coherence in the identity of insiders. In contexts of cultural diversity such coherence is far from obvious. Hannerz's (1980:216) observation that so long as strangers 'seem to be in a normal state...one largely ignores them' raises the questions of what can be viewed as 'normal' in contexts replete with difference.

That city life is replete with difference is a view that is challenged by a great deal of urban sociology. The impression cities give of linguistic, cultural, ethnic, economic and social diversity belies a tendency for urban space to be coded and divided. The urban village, in which a small space is transformed by local everyday practices into a highly particular place, captures this phenomenon. In this way, cultural theory would suggest, the city sustains the human need for generating community and exclusion, even in contexts that would seem to deny this possibility (Merry, 1981).

However, the insistence that urban space is coded and divided privileges accounts of settlement, and of private space, over accounts of movement and of public space. In the context of multi-cultural urban micro-locales individuals' strategies for creating insider identities are constantly challenged by the diversity of subjectivities brought together in particular contexts for specific purposes: schooling, work, travel, shopping, housing and so on. The transience of local space, partly generated by changes in housing markets, undermines the class-based character of micro-locales, while the attraction of city life to migrants generates a proliferation of linguistic and cultural styles. People may seek to insulate themselves from this diversity through maintaining non-place based or spatially stretched linguistic and cultural networks – a phenomenon that the concept of diaspora seeks to encapsulate. Nonetheless, much of the texture of everyday life in working-class districts, and particularly for working-class children, involves interactions with linguistic, cultural and social 'others'. While much of this interaction is superficial it is, none the less, essential and, for school-children at least, it occupies a significant part of their time.

Rather than being written on the body, strangeness is here ascribed to actions that are perceived to be incongruous in the context of urban public space. Drunks, drug-users and prostitutes can be identified as being different from other adults because they settle spaces that would otherwise be used as throughways. The tension between public space as a meeting place, whether for pleasure or for resistance, and the preference of authority for it to be treated as a space for moving through, is an enduring tension. It is a conflict that has, however, been largely won by authority. The discursive practices through which authority has accomplished its domination of public space include surveillance, policing and town planning. It also includes an ideology that has made the opposition private/public connotative of a series of other oppositions including settlement/movement, civilised/unruly, respectable/criminal, included/excluded self/other. So, simply the act of being settled in a public space marks the settler out as being implicated in other transgressions like being unruly, criminal, excluded, or other.

There is also an association made in these accounts between paedophiles, prostitutes and dirt. Remi's comment expresses this most clearly when she claims that London is a 'dirty city and there's wierdos'. Amber's expresses clearly both the juxtaposition of the pleasant and the violent while Samina's suggests the association between 'perverts' and 'dirt': 'prostitutes, paediphills, dirty areas'. The association of these marginal figures with 'dirt' reinforces the sense that one role these tropes play is that of enforcing boundaries through that classic cultural device, the pollution taboo (Douglas, 1994). Indeed dirt, and its management, proved to be a great preoccupation of all the children participating in this research (Wells, 2000).

Children returned repeatedly to talk about dirt and rubbish. A particular concern of theirs was that people who 'don't live round... where we live' pollute the locality. This was linked by them to the problem of holding people accountable for their actions in a 'big place'. These concerns are highlighted very clearly by Shamaya and Kim:

Shamaya: The council won't take the erm bags because they're not in black bags but people constantly just throw plastic bags and their rubbish in the dustbin shed.

Kim: Exactly.

Shamaya: Or wherever. That's got all rats round that areas now running around over front doors, in our gardens, and all that.

Karen: Is it just the rats that bother you about the rubbish or ...

Kim: It's not the rats ... its people who have no respect for where they're living and what they're getting, they don't put their rubbish in.

Shamaya: People take advantage of life most probably.

Kim: Black bags they put their rubbish in plastic bags and they will chuck it out in the street and expect someone to pick it

up after them because they think ‘oh, I don’t live round here so we can take advantage’....

Kim: [people] think ‘Okay I haven’t seen a bin and I can’t be bothered to put anything in my pockets ... so I’ll chuck it somewhere ... in the river ... because it’s a big place and ... people will not know who chucked it there.’

Particularly striking in this extract are the comments that emphasize people’s lack of accountability ‘people who have no respect’, ‘people take advantage’.

In *Risk and Blame*, Douglas (1992) applies these ideas of cultural boundary setting to the field of risk. She argues that risk is always a cultural project. To speak of individual risk calculation is to treat individuals as being out of culture. It is culture that has the task of identifying risks and attributing blame. The question of risk is not what is safe, but what is safe for this particular group. In an interesting, if overly structural, account of different cultural groups’ responses to risk, she suggests that one group (that she labels ‘voluntary’) is cognisant of low-probability and high-consequence risk. This may be a useful approach for understanding why children being abducted by strangers, is precisely the risk which caregivers and children are most concerned about, despite the low-probability of it occurring. Douglas notes that ‘two types of response and regime, labelled ‘hierarchy’ and ‘market’ are widely distributed and recognised...[but]...that the market-hierarchy dichotomy misses a third type of regime, noted in the anthropological literature, in which selective benefits are not available and coercive powers are weak’ (cited in Crook, 1999:167). This third type of regime Crook comments (1999:174), ‘...are especially drawn to a concern with low-probability, high consequence risks understood as the outcome of ‘cosmic plots’.

Two points can be noted here. Firstly, childhood is a perfect contender for the role of liminal outsider to the dyad of benefits realised through the market or control realised through hierarchy. Secondly, that the risk to children of violence by strangers is a perfect exemplar of a low-probability and high-consequence risk. It is to questions of risk assessment and risk management that I now turn, drawing on sociological frameworks.

### **The sociology of risk and the regulation of childhood**

In contrast to cultural theory’s steadfast insistence that ‘it is hard to maintain seriously that risk-perception is private’ (Crook, 1999: 169) the new sociology of risk seems to both accept and reject this claim. It accepts it in as much as it takes the emergence of the risk society to be a phenomenon structured by, or implicated in, the conditions of late industrialization. It rejects it by claiming that risk is now a matter for personal assessment. Ulrich Beck (1992), for example, claims that risk calculations have become the individual responsibility of the autonomous subject. Beck’s thesis that we are now in a new stage of modernity, characterized by the proliferation of incalculable risks has apparently gripped the sociological imagination and led to an expanding body of work that seeks to extend the concept of risk anxiety to more and more aspects of social life.

This focus on the individualizing of risk seems to offer little to developing our understanding of risk perception amongst children. A University of London study of ‘Children, parents and risk’ concluded that ‘Beck’s thesis probably applies best to well-off men... As to children, their social positioning is clearly that of a minority group, with little opportunity for independent choices’ (1996:111).

As remarked by Lupton (1999), Foucault’s work on governmentality, while very distinctive from Beck and Giddens’ attempts to theorise the individualizing of risk, also forms part of the sociology of risk. In a Foucauldian account of risk the emphasis would be on what is accomplished through ‘risk’ in the arenas of social control and the working of power relations between adults and children. This involves exploring why children are asked to engage with discourses on the low-probability and high-consequence risk of violence at the hands of strangers. It is widely assumed that children’s claims about their fear of strangers simply parrot the concerns of their parents. Children’s exposure to ‘stranger-danger’ programmes at school, high-profile cases of the murder of children by paedophiles and general media discourse about children’s vulnerability to assault and abduction by strangers reinforces this sense that children are ‘repeating what they’ve heard’. Children may well be repeating what they have heard from adults, but what they hear has material impacts on their occupation of public space. The effect of these concerns is to restrict children’s autonomy in public space. The paedophile replaces other demonic figures in social history that have threatened the safety of children. We read witchcraft accusations through the lens of a modern scepticism. Accusations of witches eating children were (or are) at best thinly disguised attacks on marginal but harmless people. Witchcraft accusations and fairy stories are of the same genre and fashioned from the same, unbelievable material. In contrast, it might be argued that paedophiles are a real threat to children’s safety. However, in the week that Sarah Payne was murdered by a stranger two other children were murdered. These children’s deaths did not, however, attract the sustained media attention that Sarah Payne’s murder did (Birkett, 2001). These children were killed by their father. He strangled and stabbed their mother to death and then went to collect their children from school. He took them home, stopping to buy them fish and chips on the way. At home he doped them with Nypol and strangled them both. Between 70 and 80 children are murdered each year by one of their parents. Ten per cent of all homicides are by the victim’s parents. Clearly, and as the statistics on the incidence of stranger-abduction show, it is not ‘real’ risk that is at issue here, but the particular risks that contribute to a claim that public space is dangerous and private space is safe.

If we take paedophilia fears, witchcraft accusations and folk tales about children’s abandonment, we have a corpus of stories that warn children about the, literally, fatal consequences of being left alone in public space. Through these stories, with full intent, adults insinuate into children’s consciousness a cognisance of their vulnerability. In the University of London study (1996) one parent interviewed expressed it like this: ‘he’s always running off – when we were in Woolworths...I did say to him, “do you want a nasty

man to get you and you'll never see mummy and daddy again?" (1996:69). Despite the emphasis on stranger-danger education, it is the imagination that is targeted here, the inculcation of dread that turns the subject inward to the equally mythical sanctity of family life. One child's confused account of her fears evokes well this sense of dread and silences about exactly what is to be dreaded:

Big fat perverts all around me. They're horrible and stuff. I don't like.

That's why I'm scared. I'm like okay. I dunno. I walk around in a rush and grab things and stay away. Because I heard on the news about Sarah [Payne]. She. She. Erm. Someone. Since that I just think about that and [inaudible]. (Anisa)

These injunctions against children claiming their spatial freedoms imply that children can protect themselves from sexual and physical violence. Is such a claim plausible? It echoes injunctions to women to dress and move through space and time in ways that will protect them from sexual violence. Like these injunctions it shifts the responsibility for violence from the protagonist to the subject. In doing so it ignores the child's structural and physical powerlessness relative to most adults. It also renders the stranger and public space as suspect and the familiar and private space as safe, such an association is belied by the statistical evidence. There has been an increase in recorded crimes against children, but three-quarters of the perpetrators are parents and other relatives. Children under one are at the most risk of being murdered, 5 to 15 year olds are the least likely of all societal groups to be murdered. Not until children are 15 or 16 does the danger from strangers exceed that from intimates (Jackson and Scott, 1999, p.92 citing Central Statistics Office, 1994 and 1995).

This specific form of childhood governance shadows the move in state power away from the direct coercion and physical violence meted out by the state to its subjects, towards the self-regulation and surveillance of the citizen-self that is the goal of the contemporary neo-liberal state (Gordon, 1991). In Europe, children's enforced exclusion from the public life of waged labour and their compulsory participation in schooling was accompanied by the representation of childhood as a special time in which the child should be protected from the concerns of adult life. This protection, however, is double-edged. It finds no legitimate place for children in public life and reserves for them the sphere of private life. It does not, however, exclude children from public space through legal violence but through the inculcation in the child of the habit of exclusion created by the fear of strangers.

## Conclusion

This paper explores the structure and significance of children's fears of unknown adults in public spaces. The culturally diverse identities of the participants, and the economically marginal and culturally diverse contexts of the research, challenge the simple congruence of the stranger with black, working-class or male identity that is characteristic of the psychological, cultural and sociological literature on strangers. Silences about what exactly children feared and how these fears did or did not impact on their occupation of public space also unsettle the notion that children's fears should be understood as a process of risk assessment and risk management. Analysis of a rich data set that included field notes, collages, photographs, written texts and interview transcripts suggest that these children's fears were not related to specific *bodies* but to specific *practices*. In particular people in groups, settling space – rather than moving through it – and generally violating private/public dichotomies evoked a range of negative emotions, from disgust to fear. These responses have been explored here through the lens of psychology, cultural theory and the sociology of risk.

In my use of psychological theory, I focused on the related concepts of abjection and 'the uncanny'. Abjection implies that their fear of and antipathy towards 'drunks' may express the projection onto others of those parts of themselves they have split off in the process of disciplining themselves to cultural norms of public behaviour. The second concept, 'the uncanny', expresses the fear involved in facing 'what should have remained secret and hidden but has come to light'. I suggested that this secret that has 'come to light' is that the care of children is simultaneously an act of power *over* children. Children's safety therefore depends on the self-discipline of adults, a self-discipline that is far from assured.

Turning to cultural theory, I expanded the analysis of fear of strangers from the personal to the cultural level. Drawing on cultural theory, particularly the work of Mary Douglas, I examined the uses of fear as practices of cultural boundary setting. I explored the close association in participants' accounts between particular 'strange practices' and 'dirt'. These associations share an emphasis on the pollution of space and of boundaries. Likewise, the identification of particular risks, especially around paedophiles, created a context in which beleaguered communities could close their boundaries. In the last section, I analysed the children's accounts and my observations of public space through an application of the sociology of risk. The individualizing of risk that Beck and Giddens argue characterises the post-industrial 'risk society' found little purchase here. However, another perspective from the sociology of risk, that of Foucault's governmentality, proved useful in understanding the ways that strategies of personal and cultural boundary setting are woven together to secure adult control over the management of children's occupation of public space.

In bringing together in this paper these three levels of analysis; the personal, the cultural and the social, I have sought to raise the complexity of the notion of 'stranger-danger'. In their everyday lives children display a fear of unknown adults who transgress the social, spatial and corporeal boundaries of public space. These transgressions are glossed as 'strange' practices and collapsed into the figure of the stranger. For these children, who live in culturally diverse contexts, the stranger is identified through the transgression of public space, stranger-status is not written on the body but performed by the body. The transgressions that attract the attention of these children as 'strange practices', and that they view with fear, include the settling of public space and the use of public space for 'private' practices.

**Notes**

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<sup>2</sup> For an elaboration of the complex ways in which ethnicity and class are mediated by young people in urban space see Back (1999).

<sup>3</sup> The neighbourhood is on the borders of the London Boroughs of Hackney and Haringey. The ethnic minority population of both boroughs is about 40%. Haringey is England's ninth most deprived borough according to the Government's Index of Deprivation of 1999. In 1998 unemployment was registered at twelve per cent, the fourth highest in London. Unemployment is particularly high amongst Black and ethnic minority households. About one-third of Hackney's population is from ethnic minorities. The largest ethnic minority group is of Black Caribbean and Black African descent. Over forty languages are spoken in schools. It is the second most deprived borough in England and has the highest deprivation at ward level in the country. Two-thirds of households have annual incomes of less than £10,000. In the research cohort of 57 children about one-third are boys and two-thirds girls. Nearly half of the children are Black (including African, African-Caribbean, British and American), one-fifth white and about one-third Asian (including Turkish, Indian and Vietnamese). The school does not keep records of the children's socio-economic status, but it would be reasonable to say that the majority of the children are working-class.

<sup>4</sup> I have not changed the participants spelling or syntax to conform to so-called Standard English. Only where I think the meaning may be unclear have I provided a 'translation' (e.g. disgusting for 'distin'). Nor have I adopted the academic convention of using [sic] where the syntax or spelling is other than Standard English. For a discussion of the rendering of ordinary language in academic texts see Marks, Shula (1987) *Neither an Experimental Doll*, London, Women's Press.

<sup>5</sup> In *Disposable People* Kevin Bales comments that girls in Northern Thailand when asked what a prostitute does said that she is someone who wears nice clothes. These girls have known other girls who worked as prostitutes and returned to the village to die of AIDS related illnesses. If they do not know what a prostitute is it is much less likely that the participants in this research would know whether a woman was working as a prostitute or not.

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