The making of “a product to be proud of”:
An ethnographic examination of the role of the physical curriculum in the social construction of elite bodies and the social stratification of the elite educated student

Margaret Kennedy
Department of Sociology
University of Limerick

Submitted in part fulfilment of the academic requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD).

Submitted to the University of Limerick
October 2014
Table of Contents

AUTHORS DECLARATION………………………………………………………….IX

ABSTRACT ..........................................................................................X

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....................................................................XI

LIST OF FIGURES ..................................................................................XII

1 INTRODUCTION ....................................................................................1

1.1 MOTIVATION FOR UNDERTAKING THIS RESEARCH .......................3

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTION......................................................................5

1.3 THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION .......................................................6

1.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ...........................................................8

1.5 METHODOLOGY................................................................................9

1.6 CHAPTER OUTLINE ...........................................................................12

2 METHODOLOGY ..................................................................................18

2.1 RESEARCH QUESTION.....................................................................18

2.2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH .................................19

2.3 RESEARCH DESIGN.........................................................................20

2.3.1 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH.............................................................20

2.3.2 ETHNOGRAPHY............................................................................22
2.3.3 THE CHARACTERISTICS AND OBJECTIVES OF ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH .................................................. 23
2.3.4 ETHNOGRAPHY: BEYOND METHOD .................................................. 26
2.3.5 REFLEXIVE ETHNOGRAPHY ............................................................. 27
2.4 EDUCATIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY .......................................................... 33
2.5 STUDYING UP: ISSUES WITH METHODOLOGY .................................. 36
2.5.1 ACCESSING ELITE SITES ............................................................... 37
2.6 SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS ............................................................ 42
2.7 PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE .......................................................... 43
2.7.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ......................................................... 46
2.8 ETHICS IN ELITE SETTINGS ............................................................... 50
2.9 DATA COLLECTION PROCESS ........................................................... 56
2.9.1 PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION ............................................................ 57
2.9.2 PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION: THE PROCESS ................................. 59
2.9.3 THE MECHANICS OF FIELDWORK ................................................. 60
2.9.4 INTERVIEWS IN THE FIELD .............................................................. 63
2.9.5 CULTURAL ARTEFACTS ................................................................. 67
2.10 ANALYSIS AND WRITING UP ............................................................ 69
2.11 VERIFICATION PROCEDURES, TRANSFERABILITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS ........................................... 74
2.11.1 PROLONGED ENGAGEMENT AND PERSISTENT OBSERVATION ...... 74
2.11.2 TRIANGULATION ............................................................................. 75
2.11.3 PEER REVIEW AND DEBRIEFING ................................................. 75
2.11.4 CLARIFICATION OF RESEARCHER BIAS ....................................... 76
4.6 ELITE SCHOOLING IN IRELAND.........................................................108

5  THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE BODY..............................115

5.1 THE BODY IN SOCIOLOGY ...................................................... 116

5.2 THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE BODY............................117

5.3 THE CONCEPT OF EMBODIMENT...............................................119

5.4 THE CULTURAL PERFORMANCE OF BODILY TECHNIQUES.........121

5.5 THE BODY AS A FORM OF CAPITAL ........................................123

5.6 THE ROLE OF HABITUS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF
   BODILY DISPOSITIONS..........................................................127

5.7 HOW OUR BODILY DISPOSITIONS PRODUCE BODIES OF
   DIFFERENT VALUE.............................................................130

5.8 THE ROLE OF SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY
   IN THE EMBODIMENT OF SOCIAL CLASS STATUS...................... 135

5.9 CORPOREAL KNOWLEDGE IN SCHOOLING................................. 139

5.9.1 PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORT IN SCHOOLING ..........142

5.9.2 THE PHYSICAL CURRICULUM IN ELITE SCHOOLING ..........144

5.10 CREATING BODIES OF DISTINCTION IN ELITE SCHOOLING .......149

5.11 ELITE AND DESERVING.........................................................154

6  TOTALLY ELITE........................................................................157

6.1 CULTURAL ASSIMILATION ...................................................... 157

6.2 CLASS BOUND SEGREGATION..................................................159

6.3 PHYSICAL DISTINCTIVENESS...................................................164
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>RATHWOOD COLLEGE UNIFORMITY</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>INTIMATE BONDS</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>HALLMARKS OF HOME</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>VOCATIONAL TEACHERS</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>SOCIAL SELECTIVITY</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>DISCONNECTION FROM PAST LIFE</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>LACK OF A TRADITIONAL HIERARCHY</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>PHYSICAL DISTINCTION</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>PHYSICAL CURRICULUM</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>SPORTS ‘HEAVEN’</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>NO DEBATE REQUIRED</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORTING PROGRAMME</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>PHYSICAL EDUCATION</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>SCHOOL SPORT</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>SPORT AS A CULTURAL MARKER</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>EXCELLENCE VERSUS INCLUSIVITY</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>CREATING DISTINCTIONS ON THE PLAYING FIELD</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.10.1</td>
<td>JOY IN PARTICIPATING</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.10.2</td>
<td>OPTING OUT, AGAINST THE SCHOOL ETHOS</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.10.3</td>
<td>‘DOING IT FOR THE TEAM’</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.10.4</td>
<td>DESIRE TO WIN, BUT NOT AT ANY COST</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.10.5</td>
<td>SELF-MASTERY</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
BIBLIOGRAPHY ...................................................................................................... 298

APPENDICES ........................................................................................................

APPENDIX 1: INFORMATION LETTER, CONSENT FORM .........................

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW GUIDE ......................................................................
AUTHOR’S DECLARATION

I, Margaret Kennedy, certify that this thesis, which I now submit for assessment on the programme leading to the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) is my own work and has not been submitted for any academic purpose other than in partial fulfilment for that which is stated above.

Signed: _________________________

Date: 10 October 2014.
This thesis contributes to our understanding of the social reproduction of human bodies. Where in looking beyond the body’s role as “a mere input mechanism for informations that the brain then makes sense of” this thesis argues “the body can itself be the site of inquiry” (Khan 2011, p.116). From this perspective, the body is recognised as “a social entity on which social beliefs, social values and social practices are inscribed” (Gard & Wright 2005, p.175). In doing so, this thesis reveals how “the management and development of the body is central in its own right to the production of cultural and economic capital and the attainment and maintenance of status” (Shilling 1992, p.3).

Consequently, as an important site for the acquisition of bodily dispositions, this thesis recognises the important role the school one attends plays in determining much of an individual’s future, with the cultural preferences within different schools having the potential to produce bodies of differing value. Yet while there is some awareness of the manner in which the dominant classes manipulate the distribution of cognitive knowledge, the role corporeal knowledge plays, is not acknowledged or understood. While academic advantages (like smaller class sizes, or private tuition) are acknowledged as impacting on academic results (Lynch 1989; Lynch and Lodge 2002; Smyth 2008; Smyth and Hannon 2007; Butler 2009) and thus on future careers, advantages in corporeal terms are not considered of any major or lasting significance. A lack of appreciation, that I would argue is at least partly attributable to “the mechanisms by which these advantages are transmitted” being “imperfectly understood” (Lareau 2002, p.747), a situation which is clearly exacerbated by cognitive knowledge being “fairly easy to disseminate and to display,” while corporeal knowledge remains a much more ill-defined, nebulous concept (Khan 2011, p.64).

Elite schools, long recognised as key institutions for the transmission of a range of social advantages, also excel at the transmission of corporeal knowledge. In fact, it can be argued that much of the ability of dominant groups to define their bodies and lifestyles as superior can be attributed to the emphasis elite schools place on developing physical capital in their students (Light & Kirk 2001). For this reason, I would argue that to truly understand the reproduction of privilege, greater attention must be paid to elites corporeal disciplining (Khan 2011). Thus, this thesis seeks to demonstrate how through the transmission of corporeal knowledge and more specifically, the physical curriculum in elite schools, privileged groups develop particular bodily dispositions and particular views of their bodies which serve to reinforce their class positions. Demonstrating how physical capital (in the form of body dispositions) is socially produced through a series of cultural processes, this thesis reveals the strong relationship between elite education and the social production of ‘valued’ bodies, and in so doing casts light upon the embodied mechanisms that ensures the reproduction or transformation of the elite social world.
I wish to offer my heartfelt thanks to the people who have given support and assistance along the way, and who were instrumental in the completion of this thesis. First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest thanks to my two supervisors, Dr Martin Power and Dr Ann MacPhail. Your unwavering support and enthusiasm made what might have been an arduous process, a really enriching and enjoyable experience for me. I am very proud of what we have achieved together, thank you both. To Martin in particular, I owe a special debt for accepting me as your first Master’s and PhD student to supervise, I will always be grateful to you for putting your faith in me and for the consideration and kindness you have always shown to me.

I would also like to thank Dr Eoin Devereux for feedback on earlier chapters, your constructive and insightful comments were always appreciated. Thanks also to Anne Mc Carthy, the always helpful Departmental Administrator who somehow managed to have the answer to every question I troubled her with. My gratitude is also extended to Christine Guillen for being one of the few people who would let me ramble on for hours about this research and for her valuable proof-reading of this thesis.

I am also truly indebted to the community at ‘Rathwood College’ for their willingness to be involved in this research and for the trust they placed in me, allowing me share their world for a time.

A huge thank you to my sons Jack and Matthew, who during their childhood years have endured, mostly with great patience, their mother undertaking an undergraduate and two post graduate degrees. I know you both doubted that I would ever finish this research! Finally thanks to my husband Will for your support and belief in me. I hope I made you and our sons proud.

I gratefully acknowledge the funding received towards my PhD from the Irish Social Sciences Platform.
List of Figures

Figure 2.1 Data collection methods.................................................................58

Figure 2.2 Emergent themes from data analysis..............................................74
Chapter One

Introduction

This thesis contributes to a broader understanding of the social reproduction of the human body. In looking beyond the body’s role as “a mere input mechanism for informations that the brain then makes sense of” this thesis argues that “the body can itself be the site of inquiry” (Khan 2011, p.116). From this perspective, the body is recognised as “a social entity on which social beliefs, social values and social practices are inscribed” (Gard & Wright 2005, p.175), or as “a screen upon which social and cultural concerns are projected” (Freund 1988, p.839). I would argue that only with this alternative view of the body, can a real understanding emerge of the profits that are to be gained from the acquisition of a socially ‘valued’ body (Bourdieu 2000). To this end, in addition to highlighting its role as a “location for social classification,” this thesis holds firm to the conviction that the body is also “actually generative of social relations and human knowledge… a material phenomena which shape[s], as well as being shaped by, its social environment” (Shilling 2003, p.ix).

Consequently, as an important site for the acquisition of bodily dispositions, the school one attends plays an important part in determining much of an individual’s future, with the cultural preferences within different schools having the potential to produce bodies of differing value. Yet while there is some awareness of the manner in which the dominant classes manipulate the distribution of cognitive knowledge for their own end,
the role corporeal knowledge plays, is neither acknowledged or understood. While academic advantages (like smaller class sizes, or private tuition) are acknowledged as impacting on academic results (Lynch 1989; Lynch and Lodge 2002; Smyth 2008; Smyth and Hannon 2007; Butler 2009) and thus on future careers, advantages in corporeal terms are not considered of any major or lasting significance. I would argue that this lack of appreciation of corporeal advantage is at least partly attributable to “the mechanisms by which these advantages are transmitted” being “imperfectly understood” (Lareau 2002, p.747), a situation which is clearly exacerbated by cognitive knowledge being “fairly easy to disseminate and to display,” while corporeal knowledge remains a much more ill-defined, nebulous concept (Khan 2011, p.64).

It is clear however, that elite schools, long recognised as key institutions for the transmission of a range of social advantages, also excel at the transmission of corporeal knowledge. In fact, it can be argued that much of the ability of dominant groups to define their bodies and lifestyles as superior can be attributed to the emphasis these school place on developing physical capital in their students (Light & Kirk 2001). For this reason, I would argue that to truly understand the reproduction of privilege, greater attention must be paid to elites’ corporeal disciplining (Khan 2011). Accordingly, this thesis seeks to demonstrate how, through the transmission of corporeal knowledge - and more specifically on the very rich physical education and sporting programmes in these schools - privileged groups develop particular bodily dispositions and particular views of their bodies which serve to reinforce their class positions. As a consequence of which, class privilege becomes, quite literally, inscribed in the flesh of the elite
1.1 Motivation for undertaking this research

I came to this research as a result of a concern with the lack of empirical research into elite schooling, an interest that was initially prompted by an article in an Irish newspaper, which paid homage to a group of individuals it identified as those with the most power and influence in Irish society, amongst whom were individuals from the world of politics, business and the legal profession. In effect, this article profiled Ireland’s ‘leaders’ or ruling elite. It was however a marked similitude in the biographical information provided on each of these individuals that initially piqued my interest. I noted a recurring pattern in their educational history, with the biographical details revealing that not alone had the majority attended private fee-paying schools, but the majority had been educated in a very small pool of the most exclusive of Ireland’s private schools. As central institutions in the process of elite socialisation, I felt it was reasonable to conclude that very particular attitudes and values are inculcated in these schools. I consider this problematic when one considers the amount of influence these individuals have in Irish society.

I chose to focus exclusively on second level education, as I would argue that the choice of one’s second level school is much more of a key determinant of a student’s future outcomes than the pre-school, primary school or third level institution one attends. I strongly believe that it is the skills learned and friendships and networks that are formed at second level that will not only determine which, if any, third level institution one attends, but also the third level courses selected to study and the clubs and
networks one engages with, in the university environment.

Having chosen to send my own sons to a local vocational school, I became very sensitive to the extent to which vocational schools still adhere to their original function, as a technical or training school. Being acquainted also with many people whose children attend private and elite secondary schools, I was aware that the education being provided in these schools contrasted sharply with the vocational education I was familiar with. These differences, I strongly believe, are evidence of the ‘hidden curriculum’ (Bowles and Gintis 1976; Drudy and Lynch 1993; Gewirtz and Cribb 2009; Connell 1993; Cornbleth 2012; Margolis 2001) in operation. Furthermore, despite physical education being typically portrayed as a necessary element of the school curriculum with participation associated with a host of positive educational, social and developmental outcomes (Camp 1990; Gerber 1996; Zaff et al. 2003), I became aware that there were dramatic differences in the provision of physical education between elite and non-elite schools. With two teenage sons attending two non-elite secondary schools (where particularly in one of these schools, the provision of physical education (apart from hurling) was practically nonexistent) I wanted to know why there appears to be such a disparity between the content and provision of physical education in elite and non-elite schools, and to fully grasp the true implications of this situation for all those educated in the Irish educated system.

As the Irish education system has come under unprecedented pressure from government cutbacks in recent years (Lynch 2014), I believe that it is now more
important than ever to critically re-examine the issue of elite schooling. While elite schools have continued to secure generous state funding, the most disadvantaged schools and disadvantaged students have endured the harshest cutbacks (see for example Lynch 2014; Education International 2009; Lillis and Morgan 2012; Power et al. 2013). Despite Ireland “having a lower average investment in education compared to other OECD countries even prior to the economic crisis (4.6% of GDP compared to an OECD average of 5.8%), cuts in education have taken place at all levels (primary, secondary, higher education) and including adult education and research” (Education International 2009, p.4). Despite the majority of schools struggling to cope with these cutbacks, elite schools appear in the main to have weathered the storm with remarkable ease where, notwithstanding an increase in fees in the majority of elite schools, there has been little or no reduction in enrolments in these schools (Mc Dermott 2010). I argue this is largely due to affluent families cognisance of the important role elite education plays in the reproduction of their privilege.

1.2 Research question

The principal aim of this ethnographic research is to develop a greater understanding of the nature and significance of the physical curriculum in shaping the corporeal identities of students in elite boarding schools. With an explicit focus on the role that physical education and school sports play in this process, this thesis explores if and how the corporeal dimensions of elite schooling act to reproduce existing cultural and social relations (Light and Kirk 2001).
Thus the first research question addressed in this doctoral thesis is:

- What role does the physical curriculum in elite schools play in the social construction of elite bodies?

While the key research question focuses specifically on the physical curriculum, the research also explores what role, if any, the culture of the elite boarding school plays in generating the social stratification and self-reproduction of the elite. The second research question addressed is:

- Do the day to day practices within the elite boarding school foster a strong identification and connection with the elite school community, and accordingly facilitate the social stratification of the elite educated student?

The core objective of this original research is to contribute empirically and theoretically to the existing body of knowledge on these two themes.

1.3 Theoretical contribution

This thesis supports existing arguments that the education system as it presently stands serves as a means to reproduce society’s inequalities with culture as the key form of stratification (Bourdieu 1984; Bourdieu & Passeron 1990: 1979; Kohn 1989; Collins 1975; Lamont 1992). This empirical research supports existing literature (Bourdieu 1984; Lareau 2002: 1996: Kohn 1989; Collins 1975; Lamont 1992) in recognising that not alone do differences in socialisation processes in schooling ultimately lead to the creation and maintenance of distinctive values and conceptions of the world, but also how these apparently ‘normal’ cultural ‘behaviours’ or ‘choices’ help to maintain social stratification (Winkle-Wagner 2010, p.4). This thesis provides compelling evidence that
elite boarding schools play a key role in maintaining this cultural stratification. In undertaking extended field research in an elite boarding school in an Irish setting, this thesis makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the role that these schools play in generating and maintaining these cultural preferences among Irish dominant groups. Given the dearth of literature on the day to day practices within elite schools, these findings are especially important in deepening our understanding of how ‘advantage’ is operationalised, throwing fresh light on the subtle mechanisms by which elite students come to be furnished with a host of cultural advantages.

In its specific focus on the transmission of corporeal knowledge, this thesis makes a theoretical contribution to our understanding of the sociological role of the body in schooling. In recognising education as extending beyond formally organised learning experiences in schools, this thesis calls attention to the hidden ‘physical’ curriculum that is in operation in schooling. Thus, in highlighting the reach of the hidden curriculum beyond the classroom, this thesis draws attention to the elements of socialisation that take place in the physical education and sporting practices, that despite Kirk (2010; 2002), Light (2008; 2001), Bain (1985; 1976; 1975) and Shilling’s (2003; 1993a; 1993b; 1991) insightful contributions, is an issue that has remained largely unexamined. While the existing literature (Fahey et al 2005; Evans, Rich and Davies 2004; Laker 2003; Kirk & Tinning 1990; MacPhail et al. 2005; MacPhail et al. 2008; MacPhail and Halbert 2005; Halbert and MacPhail 2010; 2005; Siedentop & Tannehill 2000; Lund & Tannehill 2010; Foster 2000; Whitehead 2000; Wright et al. 2009; Bailey 2009; 2005) is rich in descriptions of the key concerns and specific outcomes for adolescents engaged
in physical education programmes, this thesis is distinctive in its systematic inspection of the cultural and social class dynamics of such programmes. With little attention being paid to what extent the physical curriculum in second level schooling are social class specific, this had resulted in a relative dearth in the literature on the relationships between institutionalised regimes of physical activity in educational settings and young peoples’ lived experiences of class and culture.

This thesis makes an important and original theoretical and empirical contribution to our understanding of the social reproduction of human bodies. In revealing the strong relationship between elite education and the social production of ‘valued’ bodies (Stevens 2009), this thesis reveals the embodied mechanisms that facilitates the production and reproduction of the elite social world. This allows elite groups “to define their bodies and lifestyles as superior, worthy of reward, and as, metaphorically and literally as the embodiment of class” (Shilling 2003, p.122).

1.4 Theoretical framework

The method of analysis I employ throughout the dissertation relies mainly on a theoretical framework derived from conflict theory, using a range of conceptual tools derived from the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Chris Shilling. Bourdieu’s theory of culture offered valuable insights into how dominant groups operate and the role of culture in the maintenance of the existing power structure. Utilisation of Bourdieu’s theoretical concepts of habitus and cultural capital provided the necessary tools for discussing social stratification, in the process revealing how members of the dominant
classes acquire the knowledge necessary to maintain their privileged position. The third conceptual tool employed is Shilling’s development of Bourdieu’s ‘embodied’ capital as a form of capital in its own right, an adaption that allowed me to theorise on how capital can be accrued and accumulated in our bodies. I would argue that the combination of these conceptual tools provided far more explanatory power than any one single framework.

1.5 Methodology

A qualitative research methodology was chosen because of its potential to yield data that can provide depth and detail, creating a deeper understanding of the phenomena under investigation (Patton 2002). This approach offers a far greater potential to gain a true insight into the perspective of those who participate in this study. Open, nuanced rich descriptions of different aspects of the participants’ life world were sought, to gain this insight or ‘window’ into the life of the cultural group being investigated. Despite initial misgivings about undertaking an ethnographic study, I quickly became convinced that ethnographic methods were the most appropriate methods for exploring the issues that I wanted to research. I understood that to achieve a fuller understanding of the culture I wished to investigate, interviews alone would not suffice. The “ethos of fieldwork holds that in order to fully understand and appreciate action from the perspective of participants, one must get close to and participate in a wide cross-section of their everyday activities over an extended period of time” (Emerson et al. 1995, p. 14). O’Reilly (2004, p.1) argues that because ethnography is “a methodology that acknowledges the complexity of human experience” in order to grasp what social agents
experience as meaningful and important, it demands long-term intimate engagement with the culture being researched. During my time in the field, I was committed to “getting close” to the activities and everyday experiences of the people in the group being investigated (Emerson et al 1995, p.3).

Consequently an exclusively qualitative set of methodological tools was chosen. These included participant observation, field-notes, semi-structured interviews and focus groups, and a range of traditional and digital cultural artefacts.

The research was guided by purposive sampling (Lindlof 1995) with the sample chosen to provide conceptual richness. Accordingly, the potential field sites targeted for inclusion in this study were selected from a small group of elite second level schools. I have categorised these schools as elite schools due to them being among some of the country’s most exclusive fee-paying schools, based both on their fee structures and on their reputation. In the field, I initially adopted a ‘big net’ approach, observing a wide variety of activities and mingling and having conversations with as many members as possible (Fetterman 2010). As the research progressed I identified a number of individuals that I wished to focus on more and, in some cases, to interview. These participants were selected only after I had observed the culture and environment of the school for a period of time.

As the selection process is purposeful, it is not meant to be generalizable. The participants were selected for specific reasons as I sought informants that would be the
most informative and provide the richest data. Understandably, with the study focusing on the physical curriculum, the majority of the school staff who acted as central informants were involved in the provision of physical education and sport in the school. I also selected a first year group of students, shadowing the class one day per week during the second and third school term, and also conducting focus group interviews with the majority of this class. Additional data collection strategies included engaging with a range of cultural artefacts, including the school journal, two historical accounts of the school, and a range of photographs. The digital cultural artefacts engaged with included the school website, the school twitter account, and a number of academic blogs hosted by the academic staff in the school.

My analysis of the qualitative data collected was based on data reduction and interpretation of that data (Creswell 2007). Grounded theory was chosen as the most appropriate method of qualitative data analysis, due to the theory being inductively derived (Strauss and Corbin 1990, p.24). This emphasis on allowing themes emerge in the data is a process of analysis that, when successfully accomplished, result in conclusions that are not simply ‘an extension of the analyst’ (Bryman 2004, p.182). Proponents of this method of data analysis argue that by deconstructing the data, a deeper understanding of the phenomenon in question emerges (Cohen et al. 2000; Strauss and Corbin 1990).

Eight verification procedures were depicted by Creswell (1998), and are often employed to enhance the trustworthiness and transferability of qualitative research. It is
recommended that qualitative researchers engage in at least two of these procedures. In order to ensure the credibility of my research, I employed seven of the eight verification procedures as recommended by Creswell (1998, pp.201-203). The seven techniques employed were: prolonged engagement and persistent observation; triangulation; peer review and debriefing; clarification of researcher bias; member checks, rich thick description; and external audit (Creswell 1998, pp.201-203).

1.6 Chapter outline

Chapter two presents the methodology adopted for this project. Having discussed the rationale for the study, the research question, and the aims and objectives of the research in this chapter, I document the methodology adopted, discussing the research design, the conceptual framework and also the practical elements of the research. I then describe the qualitative methodological frame of my study, which draws on the traditions of ethnography, before introducing the theoretical perspectives that have informed my methodology. Entry to the site, data collection methods and the method of data analysis are subsequently discussed, before I offer my reflections on the research process. The chapter closes with a discussion on the verification procedures I undertook in order to improve the trustworthiness of my research.

Chapter three begins by profiling Rathwood College (pseudonym), the elite boarding school the fieldwork was conducted in. The chapter then presents the profiles of the central participants in the school. These included: the school staff and management, the fifteen first year students who I shadowed in the school, and two parents who also had a
role in the school (one an active member of the parents council and one who held a
temporary teaching position in the school).

Chapter four relates to the research question which explores the role of the elite
boarding school in the social stratification of the elite educated student. The chapter
begins with a discussion on how class privilege and the study of elites has been
neglected by social scientists in recent decades, a consequence of the sociological gaze
having rarely been directed ‘upwards’ towards the most privileged educational settings.
The chapter discusses how this reluctance to ‘study up’ has resulted in little being
known of the particular mechanisms employed in these schools that may privilege their
young charges. A theoretical analysis of education then follows with the exploration of
the dominant functionalist perspective, which is then followed by an analysis of the
conflict theory perspective on education. Theoretical tools from Bourdieu and Shilling
are then employed to demonstrate how elite advantage is constructed within the
education system, utilising the concepts of Habitus and cultural and physical capital in
this process. The chapter concludes with an empirical analysis of elite schooling in
Ireland, which reveals the distinctive characteristics of these schools and the role of a
strong meritocratic ideology in the reproduction of privilege among Irish dominant
groups.

Chapter five presents the literature related to the research question which explores
issues to do with the social construction of the body and the role of the physical
curriculum in elite schooling in this process. The chapter begins by examining the social
construction of the body in sociology, and enquires into the extent to which our embodied selves are produced and reproduced through the physicality of the body. Utilising Bourdieu’s (1985) concept of habitus the chapter explores how our bodily dispositions respond and evolve to our changing environment, revealing “how one comports oneself, physically, socially [and] emotionally” becomes “natural” and “normal” and synchronised to a large extent with those that share the same social location (McLeod and Yates 2012, p.90). Utilisation of Shilling’s (2003) adaption of Bourdieu’s concept of physical capital then gave insight into the ‘profits’ that are to be gained from the acquisition of the socially valued body. The chapter then explores the role of the physical curriculum in elite schooling in the construction of the socially valued body. In revealing the centrality of the physical curriculum in these schools since their inception, valuable insights are provided into the distinctive corporeal practices among elite groups.

Chapter six presents, analyses and discusses the research findings pertaining to the research question in which the cultural practices in the elite boarding school environment of Rathwood College are examined, and then situated in the wider elite education context. It begins by highlighting the cultural homogeneity evident in Rathwood College, a uniformity that was most observable in the physical appearance of the Rathwood student body, amongst whom there was (almost without exception) a total adherence to very strict cultural expectations regarding their bodily presentation. The chapter progresses to detail the specific characteristics of Rathwood College, which facilitate the embodiment of elite status. The chapter then draws attention to how the
distinctive socialisation processes in the elite school enkindles solidarity within the school community, as a consequence of which students primarily identify as members of an exclusive social network. The chapter concludes by detailing how a process of disconnection from their past life occurs as students come to identify more with their ‘Rathwood’ identity.

Chapter seven presents the key findings pertaining to the ‘physical’ dimensions of a Rathwood College education. The chapter then details the formal elements of the school’s physical curriculum and the physical education and sporting programme, underscoring the cultural distinctiveness of the programme and revealing the key concern with character development on the sports fields of the school. Then in one of the more significant findings to emerge from the data, the chapter calls attention to the role of the formal and informal physical curriculum in the cultivation of a range of distinctive bodily dispositions among the student body. Manifesting in their posture, gestures, facial expressions and in their relation to space, this essentially upper class embodiment conveys unambiguous information about these individual’s social class status. The chapter concludes by calling attention to the significant ‘profit’ that is to be accrued from the possession of the cultivated and confident demeanour that is nurtured and moulded through immersion in Rathwood’s intensive physical curriculum.

Chapter eight analyses and discusses the literature and the findings relating to the research question that enquires into the ‘physical’ dimensions of a Rathwood College education. The chapter begins by calling attention to the importance placed on the
physical curriculum in the elite school, the centrality of which is revealed in the rich sporting culture. In demonstrating the class specific nature of the physical curriculum in elite schools, the chapter highlights the ability of dominant groups to tailor the physical curriculum to their own express purposes. In revealing the explicit focus on high status activities in elite schooling, the function of the elite school physical curriculum as a mechanism to create distinctions between themselves and their non-elite peers was disclosed. The chapter then calls attention to the central role of sport and physical activities in the elite school as a training ground for character. Particular attention is paid to how this distinctive ‘physical’ socialisation becomes ‘inscribed’ on the body of those educated in these schools. This results in those who have been educated in an elite school conveying unambiguous information about their privileged class location through their non-verbal communication. The chapter concludes by exploring how the possession of these distinctive bodily dispositions are interpreted as being reflective of their bearer’s moral worth, rather than a socially acquired bodily technique, I argue that such an interpretation is influenced by a strong meritocratic ideology that allows and encourages the misrecognition of these corporeal ‘stamps’ of a privileged life, being adjudged as the ‘fruits of a good heart’.

My concluding chapter provides a critique of the entire research process, and a brief overview of the key findings of this thesis. The chapter begins by reflecting on the findings related to the first research question posited in this thesis, which reveals the integral role the distinctive culture particular to the elite boarding school plays in the maintenance and segregation of dominant groups. The chapter then considers the
findings relating to the second research question, which in making explicit the distinctive ‘physical’ practices engaged in, in the elite school, revealed the central role of the physical curriculum in the construction of the Rathwood College scholar. The chapter then discusses the contribution this thesis makes to our empirical and theoretical understanding of the ‘hidden’ learning that take place in these schools through engagement in school-based physical activities and sports, and to the role of the elite boarding school in maintaining cultural stratification. The chapter concludes by addressing some of the limitations of this study and by formulating recommendations for future research in this area.
Chapter Two
Methodology Chapter

Introduction

In this chapter, I document the methodology adopted for this research project, discussing the research design, the conceptual framework and also the practical elements of the research. The first section re-visits the research question as well as the aims and objectives of the research. The second section describes the qualitative methodological frame of my study, drawing on the traditions of the school of ethnography, before introducing the theoretical perspectives that have informed my methodology. How access to the site was negotiated, my data collection methods and the chosen method of data analysis are subsequently discussed. The chapter closes with a section discussing the verification procedures I undertook in order to improve the trustworthiness of my research.

2.1 The research question

The principal aim of this ethnographic research is to develop a greater understanding of the nature and significance of the physical curriculum in shaping the corporeal identities of students in elite boarding schools. With an explicit focus on the role that physical education and school sports play in this process, this thesis explores if and how the corporeal dimensions of elite schooling act to reproduce existing cultural and social relations (Light and Kirk 2001). Thus the central research question addressed in this doctoral thesis is:
What role does the physical curriculum in elite schools play in the social construction of elite bodies?

In addressing this central research question, the expansive purview of the elite boarding school physical curriculum was revealed, the scope of which was found to extend quite significantly beyond the physical education and sports programme. It was found that in this elite boarding school environment the physical curriculum was found to encroach into all aspects of the student’s school life. From the compulsory daily attendance at church service, to communal dining, to all daily interaction within the community, all had carefully prescribed rules pertaining to the student’s bodily management and presentation. It was as a direct consequence of this expanded focus that a second research question emerged, as the observation of the social insularity of the school community and the distinctive cultural practices engaged in, in the elite boarding school became apparent. The second research question that is subsequently addressed is:

Do the day to day practices within the elite boarding school foster a strong identification and connection with the elite school community, and accordingly facilitate the social stratification of the elite educated student?

The core objective of this original research is to contribute empirically and theoretically to the existing body of knowledge on these two themes.

2.2 Aims and objectives of the research

The principal aim of this sociological research is to gain a greater understanding of the role that elite schooling plays in the social reproduction of elite groups in Irish society. Specifically, I endeavour to investigate the role that the physical curriculum plays in this
process, exploring if, and how, the corporeal dimensions of schooling act to reproduce the privilege of dominant groups. I seek to explore whether differing opportunities afforded to individuals (determined by their social class) produce bodily forms of different symbolical value. I would argue that the relevance and timing of this investigation is particularly pertinent. With the Irish State having endured a crippling economic recession in recent years, and inequality in Irish society having becoming more marked, I would argue that a greater understanding of the practices of dominant groups that continue to enjoy a virtual monopoly on advantage and privilege, and how consequential formal schooling is to this process, must be achieved. While there is some awareness of the manner in which the dominant classes manipulate the distribution of cognitive knowledge for their own end, the role corporeal knowledge plays in defining their bodies (and characters) as more ‘valued’ is not sufficiently understood.

2.3 Research design

2.3.1 Qualitative research

In developing this research study, I was faced with a number of methodological choices. The decision as to whether I should undertake this study from a quantitative or qualitative approach was easily reached. I do not believe that an understanding of the culture that I wished to investigate could be achieved using quantitative methods. As an avid believer in the need for human conditions to be experienced and documented rather than counted, I was very clear that I did not want this investigation to be a study of numbers and variables but rather one of experiences and narratives. Moreover, while qualitative research in the social sciences certainly cannot be said to constitute “a
homogeneous, unified field” (Mottier 2006, p.2), I would argue that it can be defined in general terms as an interpretive and naturalistic approach to its subject matter; an approach I believed that was necessary to gain a true understanding of the topic that I was exploring.

In qualitative research, gaining a rich and complex understanding of a specific social context or phenomenon typically takes precedence over eliciting data that can be generalised to other geographical areas or populations. Qualitative research aims to gather an in-depth understanding of human behaviour and the reasons that govern that behaviour. It is especially effective in obtaining culturally specific information about the values, attitudes, opinions, behaviours, motivations, aspirations and lifestyles of particular populations. Creswell (1994, p.24) describes a qualitative study as “an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting”.

In terms of this research, I believe that the main strength of qualitative research is its potential to yield data that can provide depth and detail, creating a deeper understanding of the phenomena under investigation. This research is not concerned only with the experiences of the participants, but also with the subjective meanings that these experiences have for them (Flick 2006, p.16). This approach offers the potential to gain a true insight into the perspective of those who participate in this study. Thus, rich, open, nuanced descriptions of different aspects of the participants’ lives were sought to
gain this insight or ‘window’ into the life of the cultural group being investigated. By seeking to elicit knowledge that is expressed in ‘normal’ language, descriptions of specific situations, experiences, and emotions are sought, not general opinions. This tendency to study things in their natural settings aids the researcher in making sense of, or interpreting, “phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln 1998, p.3). The exploratory nature of qualitative research allows the participants the opportunity to respond in their own words, evoking responses that are meaningful and culturally salient to the respondent, which is ultimately what I was striving for. Consequently, an exclusively qualitative set of methodological tools was chosen, including participatory observation, field-notes, semi-structured individual and focus group interviews, and a range of cultural artefacts.

2.3.2 Ethnography

Ethnography as a suitable method of inquiry for my study was first considered during a discussion with my supervisors regarding my intended research strategy. I had initially proposed a research strategy that would be based primarily on individual and focus group interviews. It was suggested, however, that I should consider incorporating ethnographic methods into this research design. I hesitated initially, believing ethnographic research to be too ambitious an undertaking at this stage of my academic career. Perhaps more importantly, I did not consider myself a suitable candidate, believing what I see as my ‘social awkwardness’ to be a major impediment to being a successful ethnographer. However, after exploring the idea further with my supervisors (and with a little gentle persuasion), I was convinced that ethnographic methods were
the most appropriate methods for enquiring into the issues that I wanted to research. I understood that to achieve a fuller understanding of the culture I wished to investigate, interviews alone would not suffice and that I must be willing to step outside my ‘comfort zone’. However, despite initially finding fieldwork a very daunting experience, I have now became very ‘turned on’ by ethnography as a research method, and now realise that any other method would have produced a very different type of study. I understand that in order to avoid culturally naive sweeping generalisations, and to obtain detailed accounts of the lived experience of individuals of the culture under investigation, sustained social contact was required for this thesis.

2.3.3 Characteristics and objectives of Ethnographic research

Ethnography is defined as a systematic process, through which models of culture are observed, described, documented and analysed (Agar 1980). Derived from the Greek ‘Ethnos’, meaning people, and ‘graphy’, meaning to write, ‘ethnography’ literally means to write about people and to give meaning to their lives within a given social setting (Marvasti 2004), to provide rich, holistic insights into individual everyday life and practices of societies and cultures. It is the study of the relationships, the behaviours and the perceptions that occur within these groups, and is based on the assumption that human beings are inculcated and socialised into a common cultural framework (Fedderman 1998; Spradley 1980).

While ethnography cannot be described as a prescribed set of methods, it has come to be equated with a family of methods involving direct and sustained social contact with
agents (Willis & Trondman 2000). It is similar to other qualitative research methods in that the researcher becomes part of the cultural scene and, therefore, is deemed an instrument of research. It evolves in design as the study ensues and draws on a range of methods. These include participant and non-participant observation, field-notes, jottings, interviews, questionnaires and historical analysis. The use of these multiple methods has led Denzin and Lincoln (1998, p.4) to describe the ethnographic researcher as a “bricoleur”, or a “jack of all trades” who will use whatever tools are at hand.

The method that is most synonymous with ethnography is participant-observation research, which requires the researcher to spend extended periods of time immersed in the culture that is under investigation. The “ethos of fieldwork holds that in order to fully understand and appreciate action from the perspective of participants, one must get close to and participate in a wide cross-section of their everyday activities over an extended period of time” (Emerson et al. 1995, p.14). Because ethnography is a methodology that “acknowledges the complexity of human experience”, in order to grasp what social agents experience as meaningful and important, this long-term intimate engagement with the culture being researched is required (O’Reilly 2004, p.1). Thus, during my time in the field, I was committed to “getting close” to the activities and everyday experiences of the people in the group being investigated (Emerson et al. 1995, p.3). I interacted with members of the community, observed how they acted, and talked with them about how they understand their groups and their lives, where possible, I participated in their activities. This long-term engagement in the field is for Khan (2011, p.178) “[o]ne of the driving forces behind ‘ethnographic writing’ as
‘people learn more from direct experience than from second-hand experience’. He further argues “that you learn a lot more about the culture you study than you could by reading about it, or listening to somebody else talk about it” (Khan 2011, p.178).

As an ethnographer, my task was to document the culture, the perspectives and practices of the social actors in their natural setting, paying attention to contextual factors, documenting the ‘natives’ views and actions, as well as the environs which they inhabit. A central feature of ethnographic research is that understanding of this cultural phenomena is always sought from the insiders’ point of view (Denzin & Lincoln 1998, pp.1-5; Eriksen 2001). From this emic perspective the aim is to ‘get inside’ the way each group of people sees the world, as the centrality of the “native's point of view” is key to conducting a successful ethnography (Spindler & Spindler 2000, p.250; Hammersley 1994). Further, as the ethnographic researcher goes beyond simply reporting these events and details, I sought, not only to record, but also to analyse the “ideology and worldview” of the people being studied (Apte 2001, p.772). Ethnographic immersion enables an understanding of attitudes, ideas and perceptions which go unquestioned and unarticulated in a society. The “ability to get past stereotypes, assumptions, and veneers to the complex inner workings” is, for Murchison (2010, p.27), where the “power of ethnography lies”. The unearthing and highlighting of these unspoken, taken-for-granted everyday cultural practices is essential if we are to achieve a greater understanding of how different societies operates (Roy and Banerjee 2012). Achieving this deeper understanding is I would argue, essentially the added
value that ethnographic methods offers studies such as this, where a greater understanding of a specific culture is desired (Mundell 2010).

2.3.4 Ethnography: Beyond method

Prior to embarking on my field research, I sought out accounts of other researchers’ experiences as I tried to inform myself of the basic ‘rules’ of ethnography (Agar 1980; Angrosino 2005; Fetterman 2010). I understood that given the complex nature of qualitative inquiry, learning these new skills and competencies would be challenging. Yet, I was still unprepared for the reality of my new role as an ethnographer. I quickly realised that “simply acquiring the knowledge and understanding the processes involved” would not make me into an ethnographer (Goodall 2000, p.10), and that the ability to conduct ethnographic research could not be learned from any step by step guide to techniques and procedures. To quote Goodall (2000, p.10), I quickly understood that in ethnography, “habits … are beyond method”.

I believe that while qualitative research, with its lack of prescribed rules, probably feels like an uncertain process for any novice researcher, the use of ethnographic methods creates even more of these moments of uncertainty than other methods (Lareau 1996). I discovered that using ethnographic methods means learning to operate in an ‘alien’ environment with only the vaguest signposts as to how I should proceed. I could now understand what Van Maanen (1998, p.120) had meant when he said that the ethnographer is “flying by the seat of [their] pants much of the time”. ‘Real life’ ethnographic research is “messy” (Angrosino 2005, p.5), and dependent on factors I
could not control. I felt that as a field researcher I had to “pretty much go along with the flow of events around us” (Hedican 2006, p.21). This uncertainty in ethnography was captured by Margaret Mead’s (1975, cited in Behar & Gordon 1996, p.190) when stating that,

“the fieldworker is wholly and helplessly dependent on what happens, on the births, deaths, marriages, quarrels, entanglements and reconciliations, depressions and elations of the one small community...one must be continually prepared for anything, everything—and perhaps most devastating—for nothing”.

2.3.5 Reflexive ethnography

For the ethnographer, reflexivity is an absolutely central concern, as the researcher is an integral component of the knowledge gained and cannot be divorced from the phenomenon under study\(^1\) (Denzin 1997; Atkinson 1992; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). Failure on behalf of the ethnographer to examine their own emotional responses makes it very difficult to cultivate an empathetic understanding and to discover the meanings local people give to them (Emerson et al. 1995, p.27). Consequently,

\(^1\)Within ethnographic research there are a number of sub-genres, the reflexive approach as was undertaken in this thesis, and also classical and critical models of ethnography. In traditional classic ethnography, the researcher’s ultimate goal to provide an unbiased “indepth, holistic analysis of structure and processes of culture” (McQueen & Knussen 2002, p.22). This approach assumes an objectivity, whereby the ethnographer is able to put aside any preconceived perceptions or unconscious prejudices, in order to relate the facts concerning the new culture in an unbiased way. Essentially the classic ethnographer remains an outsider in the study. Margaret Mead’s work (2001[1928]) is an exemplar of the ‘classic realist ethnographic text’. As this supposed objectivity and impartiality that is synonymous with classic ethnographic texts was considered neither achievable or indeed desirable, this approach was eschewed for this thesis. In contrast to this objective ‘distance sought by the classical ethnographer’, the critical ethnographer’s ultimate aim is to bring about change rather than just describing social life. Critical ethnography takes the form of an “explicit political endeavour incorporating social activism, to empower people and transform their political and social status” (Mantzoukas, 2010, p.431: Carspecken, 1996; Denzin, 2001; Noblit, Flores, & Murillo, 2004). In doing so, the critical ethnography strives to take “us beneath surface appearances, disrupts the status quo, and unsettles both neutrality and taken-for-granted assumptions by bringing to light underlying and obscure operations of power and control” (Madison 2004, p.5). Accordingly, with this central concern with “addressing processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular lived domain” (Madison 2004, p.5), the critical ethnographer typically researches marginalised and oppressed cultural groups. As the population being researched in this thesis were an elite population where there were few concerns with issues of oppression and injustice, this approach was not considered appropriate.
Acknowledgment of “the effect the researcher has on the culture they are studying, and the effect the culture being investigated may have on the researcher, is essential for good ethnographic writing”, a situation Kahn (2011, p.176) contends is “both inevitable and desirable”. This is “[o]ne crucial difference between ethnographic approaches and other qualitative methodologies” in that “researcher bias” is not problematised (Crang & Cook 2007, p.109). Indeed, in ethnography, “the subjectivity of the researcher is seen as intrinsic to the processing of data and a degree of reflexivity in making sense of the sense making of others is expected” (Van Hulst 2008, p.148).

This has led to a concern among ethnographers to “reflect on their own actions, feelings and conflicts experienced during research” (Holloway and Wheeler 2002, p.263). Parahoo (1997, p.292) describes reflexivity as “a continuous process whereby researchers reflect on their pre-conceived values and those of the participants, such as reflecting on how data collected will be influenced by how the participants perceive the researcher”. The reflexive researcher must be aware that she is not a “passive receptacle” into which knowledge or data is poured, as “neither the observer or observed comes to a scene untouched by the world” (Chamaz 2006, p.16). As Agar (1980, p. 41) states, the ethnographer must acknowledge that she enters the field with “more baggage than a tape recorder and a toothbrush having grown up in a particular culture, acquiring many of its sometime implicit assumptions about the nature of reality”.
Yet, while I was clearly cognisant of the value of reflexivity on this theoretical level, in reality I had little idea what this actually meant. I clearly ‘understood’ that such self-introspection is necessary in an ethnographic study, having the potential to give us knowledge about the research endeavour that can be gained in no other way. However as my study progressed, I noticed that I was foisting ‘self-imposed blinkers’ upon this research and in the process I was ‘editing myself out’ in my writing. While this reticence to acknowledge the ‘personal’ is far from ideal in an ethnographic study, paying attention to my ‘chattering’ internal dialogue felt unprofessional, self-indulgent and somewhat inappropriate in an academic study. I felt that I was privileging my own experiences and feared that by focusing on myself, that my voice might overshadow the participants.

As I became aware of how this resistance to reflexivity was impacting on my study, I sought to rectify this, and made a conscious effort to pay attention to my own internal dialogue. I was fortunate in having been a constant scribbler, and had the benefit of several journals where I had recorded my thoughts during the entire research project. By having articulated my thoughts on paper in such an open and unedited manner I gained a better understanding of why I reacted and responded in the ways that I did. More importantly, I understood that I must explore and share my perspectives, expectations, experiences with others, through my writing and reflection, if I was “to provide an open venue for the perspectives of our informants to blossom,” and to successfully unravel my biography from my interpretation of my field experiences (Gilgun 2010, p.3). I knew that an on-going scrutiny of myself was essential if I am to “come clean” and be
“less likely to unwittingly impose [my] perspectives on the accounts and actions of research informants” (Gilgun 2010, p.3).

Thus conscious of the need for this reflexivity, I endeavoured at all times to have one eye continually reflecting back upon my own habitus and dispositions. This made me much more aware of how characteristics such as my class background, educational achievements or previous career history may influence the research process. At all stages of the research process, from the research questions I chose to the issues that I focused on, to the ones I ignored, to the analysis, representation and writing, I now believe that reflexivity allowed me to ‘see’ more clearly as well as reveal what may be inhibiting my ‘seeing’.

By embracing reflexivity I discovered that fieldwork is capable of facilitating a greater understanding of who we are as people and, in a wider sense, “the cultural milieu that has spawned us ethnographers” (Hedican 2006, p.5). I found myself reflecting a lot on my own reactions and feelings to what I observed around me, and questioned why I felt these things. I realised that the privilege that I encountered in this elite setting affected me in a profound way, surfacing feelings I was unprepared for. The casual throwaway comment such as “I am going to do law” or “Do you know he speaks fluent Farsi?” provoked an emotional response from me. I realised that I was angry at how privileged these students’ lives were. I found myself questioning why I responded to this, wondering did I resent or begrudge others their good fortune. These feelings of ‘unfairness’ were heightened each day as I took a route out of the city in which the
school was located, through some very disadvantaged areas. The difference shouted out to me even as I drove past these disadvantaged young people, their physical demeanour being so dramatically different to the young people I had just left less than a mile up the road. I realised that I often felt angry in this privileged setting, not directed at any specific individuals, but at the system that allowed, and more importantly encouraged such inequality. Awareness of these feelings gave me a far greater understanding of why the topic I have chosen is indeed a worthwhile topic.

Journal entries also revealed my own discomfort in the elite setting. Despite coming from a middle class background, I never felt I ‘belonged’ in this setting, I felt like an outsider. While I knew I had the ability to ‘act’ suitably, I found it exhausting. At all times I carefully monitored my behaviour, my appearance and my actions. And I carefully considered what I revealed about my background and my beliefs. Towards the end of my time in the school, I was struck by how few times similarities between myself and those I was in conversation with were remarked upon. Comments like ‘I know exactly what you mean’ or ‘We did that too’ were rare. This lack of identification was most marked when conversations were based around our own educational and family experiences. Interestingly, while conventional wisdom tells us that opposites attract, recent studies (and my own experience in the field) suggest that when people have a choice, they choose relationships with people who are similar to them (Bahns et al 2012; Ingram & Morris 2007). In reality, we look for commonalities so we can build connections. These findings strongly suggest that “interactions with others who share our attitudes and values are more rewarding than interactions with dissimilar others”,
presumably due to these friendships with those similar to ourselves validating our beliefs and “offer[ing] predictable and pleasant interaction” (Bahns et al. 2012, p.120; Byrne et al. 1986; Newcomb 1961; Berger & Calabrese 1975). This tendency of humans to seek out points of identification is known as the “similarity-attraction effect” (Bahns et al. 2012, p.120) and in short simply means we like people we think are like ourselves (Hollway and Jefferson 2000).

This journal entry shows the unease I felt in this elite world, “I swing between moments of great energy and enthusiasm to worrying way too much about possible errors I was making. Putting myself “out there” in this place, I feel so far outside of my comfort zone” [December 2011]. I often compared myself to the duck who looks calm and serene as it floats along a river while paddling furiously underneath. I desperately tried to look totally at ease in this setting, while underneath a continuous internal dialogue raged as to how I should proceed next.

Other journal entries revealed an ongoing concern with trustworthiness. I was very concerned that I was being dishonest with the members of the community and I repeatedly returned to my supervisors in search of reassurance. I feared that I had represented myself dishonestly. While I was quite certain that I had not lied about anything, I still feared that I was being dishonest by omission. I felt that the members of the community who had given me access and always shown concern and kindness for me would feel I was dishonest if I had been more open about my own sociological perspective. Given the conditions of intimacy that arise in prolonged periods of field
work, I feared that my sociological stance might be experienced as betrayal or rejection by participants who expect researchers to affirm or endorse their viewpoint.

I was also concerned with doing no harm and feared that my writing might affect the schools’ reputation and the professional careers of those who had trusted me and allowed me to share their world for a time. Being one of a very small number of these exclusive educational institutions (where a distinctive identity is essential to maintaining their brand), I was very concerned with maintaining the anonymity of the school. As Rathwood College is a relatively small school, I was concerned to protect the identities of those who I was studying. I knew that it would be very easy for any school ‘insiders’ to identify which informants I was referring to specifically. To this end, the name of the school is a pseudonym and all names and in one particular instance the gender of one of the participant have been changed. Additionally, some minor details about the school that would have made the school easily identifiable have also been changed.

2.4 Educational Ethnography

In this study I have drawn on ethnographic methods to obtain a deeper analysis of elite schooling. Educational ethnography is the process of providing holistic and naturalistic descriptions of the processes, activities and events within an educational setting. For scholars interested in gaining a real insight into how different individuals actually ‘experience’ education, I believe that ethnographic methods are the most suitable.
While the value of the ethnographic approach to research in education has increased in recent decades, the focus in Ireland and in Europe generally has typically emerged from the study of poor and marginalised groups in public or voluntary schools. With the ethnographic gaze permanently turned ‘down’, these detailed ethnographic accounts have tended to focus exclusively on the ‘social issues’ in schooling (Willis 1977; Hall & Jefferson 1977; Benyon 1989), highlighting what is failing or deficient and “as needing some sort of improvement” (Gaztambide-Fernandez 2009, p.6).

In contrast, this study is looking firmly ‘upwards’, focusing on abundance and success and the experiences of privilege in educational environments, a widely neglected area in educational ethnography. This lack of attention paid to privilege and the advantages of elite groups is not confined to educational scholarship in Ireland however, but has also been noted in Europe and the USA (Howard & Gaztambide-Fernandez 2010). This has resulted in little being known of the everyday life of elite educational institutions. Bourdieu, whose ‘State Nobility’ (1998) sought to expose how privilege and nobility still existed, is credited with reigniting an interest with elite education. The small body of literature that exists on elite schools has also greatly benefitted from a number of ethnographic studies from the USA in recent years, most notably Khan (2011), Howard & Gaztambide-Fernandez (2010) and Gaztambide-Fernandez (2009).

This dearth of literature on educational ethnography in elite educational settings has resulted in schools being “virtually unmapped terrain and remain[ing] largely outside the public and scholarly gaze” (Howard & Gaztambide-Fernandez 2010, p.2). I would
argue that greater recognition of how the elite education of a small number of students impacts on the inequality experienced by the ‘many’ is needed. The important role these schools play in reproducing inequality was highlighted over half a century ago when Mills (2000, pp.64-65 [1956]) asserted that elite schools are the “most important agency for transmitting the traditions of the upper social classes and regulating the admission of new wealth”. Yet despite this statement from Mills, nearly six decades later, there remains a lack of appreciation and understanding of the role of these schools in reproducing inequality, with elite education remaining largely ‘unproblematised’.

It is clear that this neglect of elite schooling has largely resulted from educational researchers not considering “class privilege and educational advantage in their attempts to understand inequality and foment social justice through education” (Gaztambide-Fernandez 2009, p.2). Yet, as Connell (1982, cited in Gaztambide-Fernandez 2009, p.2) has argued, “understanding elite schools is essential to fully understanding the education system - its relationship to society and culture - and ultimately its improvement.” I would argue that another factor that encourages this lack of interest in elite schooling is the reluctance of educational scholars to put a spotlight on the most privileged groups in society, the avoidance of which has resulted in little being known about the particular educational practices and policies in elite schooling.

I would argue that it is only by studying these social groups up close and personal that we can gain a real insight into the elite world, a task that ethnographic methods excel in, allowing the researcher to “unveil the beliefs and actions of key actors and their sense-making narratives which have developed over time and which explain why and how
these webs of belief inform elite action” (Bevir and Rhodes 2006, p.109). As it is only “in capturing the mundane, the routine, the taken for granted, and the non verbal, ethnography can provide depth and nuance” to our understanding of these groups (Bevir and Rhodes 2006, p.170). I would argue that the knowledge garnered from these rich descriptive ethnographic accounts of elite school life has the potential to truly deepen our understanding of how elite groups access and maintain their power bases (Savage & Williams 2008).

2.5 Studying up: issues with methodology

Issues of privilege are something I have always been concerned with. I believe that a strong meritocratic ideology operates as a mechanism of social reproduction, as its ideology and its dissemination into popular discourse essentially masks the perpetuation of privilege (see Young 1990, pp.192-225). I see the widespread acceptance of meritocratic thinking as effectively hiding privilege ‘in plain view’ — as it completely justifies how the powerful operate in a very unequal world. The ideology of meritocracy is attractive to the dominant classes, as it not alone justifies their privileged position in society as the result of their natural “giftedness” (Bourdieu 1977), but it also helps to gain acceptance from the underprivileged classes. By restricting access to the valued elite cultural capital and by cultivating the belief in its superior competence, the advantages elites enjoy are accepted and justified (Bourdieu 1977). For these reasons, I would argue that it is only by ‘studying up’ that we can gain a greater understanding of how power and privilege actually operates, whilst helping to uncover the internal workings of elite life (Nadar 1972).
Use of the sociological term ‘elite’, which is simply defined as “a group of individuals, who hold, or have held, a privileged position in a society” (Richards 1996, p.199), has long been contentious, with little consensus as who the elite, in any given society, are or even if they actually exist. This has resulted in the term ‘elite’ remaining “largely untheorised and unproblematised” (Woods 1998, p.2101) in much of the resulting literature, with elite groups, in general, operating very much under the radar of social scientists. While the 1950s and 1960s were preoccupied to some extent with the study of elites, exploring how they were formed and how they wielded power and influence (Mills 2000: Lipset & Bendix 1959), recent decades has seen the focus (particularly in Europe) on the socially excluded. Nader (1972, p.303) argues that “anthropologists value studying what they like and liking what they study and, in general, we prefer the underdog”. This failure to ‘study up’ has resulted in the lives of the rich, and privileged worlds, remaining obscured from prying eyes. And while there is much “common knowledge” about the links between elite groups and positions of power and influence, there is “very little rigorous evidence” (Putnam 1976, p.x). For this reason, little is known of the mechanisms employed by elite groups to reproduce themselves to their privileged position (Khan 2011). This “glaring invisibility” of the particular practices employed by elites (Savage & Williams 2008, p.2) is due in part to the methods employed in the study of social stratification. The ability of elites to “establish barriers that set their members apart from the rest of society” is also clearly a significant contributory factor (Hertz & Imber 1995, p.viii).
2.5.1 Accessing elite sites

Accessing elite settings create some particular methodological issues for ethnographic researchers to negotiate, as many elite groups are effectively “insulated from sociological study” (Lee 1993, p.25). Elites are generally under fewer obligations to consent with an ethnographic study, having the “legal and cultural means to deflect researchers” (Fitz et al. 1994, p.56). In effect, elite groups are able to block research “as a result of their ability to wield unobtrusive power” (Lee 1993, p.25). I experienced some initial difficulties in accessing a site for this study. Having identified the schools that I believed could be categorised as elite schools, I wrote to the chairperson of the Board of Management, requesting permission to conduct my study in their school (the reason I chose this route to attempt to access the school is documented in the ethics section of this chapter). Of the four schools that I wrote to, I got a response from two schools. One school responded by letter, expressing their regret that they could not accommodate my request at that time due to previous commitments to other research studies in their school. The Chairperson from the other school responded by text informing me that I should make direct contact with the principal of the school. However, despite repeated attempts to contact the principal, leaving a number of messages with her secretary and on her voicemail, I failed to make contact.

Having been instructed that I did not need to seek permission from the Board of Management of any prospective school (see ethics section), I quickly made progress in accessing a school. I made contact by telephone with a number of schools that I had not previously contacted. The first of these schools that I contacted by phone was a large
elite girls school, where I had a number of long telephone conversations with the vice-
principal. She told me that she was favourably inclined to research requests as she
believed that all schools should “do their bit” in contributing to educational knowledge
(September 2011). Yet, while she remarked that any study focusing on sport and
physical education was of value, she seemed concerned as to the ‘why’ of my study. She
requested that I provide her with an A4 page rationale for my study, outlining why I was
interested in this topic and why I wished to include their school as a setting for my
research. Having previously conducted research in a number of other Irish schools,
albeit not employing ethnographic methods, I found this request very unusual. After
providing the vice-principal with this information, she contacted me again a number of
times. She was interested in her school participating in the study, but cautioned me that
the school principal might not be so sympathetic to requests from researchers who
wished to include his school in their studies.

I arranged a meeting at this school in October 2011, believing I was going to be meeting
the vice-principal (who I believed would put the case for my study forward) and the
principal of the school. I was disappointed when I arrived to the meeting and the vice-
principal informed me that she would not be able to stay as she had to attend a hockey
match. She introduced me to the principal, and, as if to vouch for my credentials, told
the principal the names of a number of past pupils who I was acquainted with. The
principal however, expressed reservations about the value of the topic of my research
and declared that “he would be very hesitant to allow any researcher come in here and
do fieldwork in ‘his’ school”. As a consequence, I was not at all surprised when he
refused my request to conduct an ethnographic study. He did suggest however, that if I
decided to change my research strategy he would probably look positively on a request
from me to interview him, an approach that in his opinion would probably provide me
with more insight into the true nature of the school. I made no further contact with this
school.

In Rathwood College, the second school that I approached, no reservations were
expressed about their school being subjected to the researchers’ gaze. I had made initial
contact with Lucy, the principal’s PA. The principal was not available, but Lucy assured
me that she would put my request to her. A week after making the first call, I phoned the
school back, speaking again to Lucy who assured me she had passed on my contact
details to the principal and she would be in touch. Having not heard from the school, I
phoned again a week later, and was told that the school’s head of physical education had
tried my home number on a number of occasions and had failed to get a reply. As I live
in a small village with a poor mobile signal, I had previously not left my mobile number
as I wanted to be able to put my argument forward without the connection breaking
down in the middle of the conversation. I then arranged a time for the school’s head of
physical education to call me on a day that I knew I would be at home all day. I was
surprised (and delighted) when Robert, head of the school's physical education
department made contact with me to discuss my study. Robert seemed genuinely
interested in the topic, and was very conducive to their school being involved in this
study. We then arranged for me to visit the school the following week.
I was conscious that my approach to this meeting was very different to how I approach meeting most individuals. Accordingly I adjusted my self-presentation as I believed the situation demanded. The following field-notes (November 2011) describe my preparations for this meeting:

“I took great care in selecting what I wore on the day, carefully choosing a ‘modest’ dress and boots. I very consciously attempted to temper my voice, I spoke slower and more carefully and moderated what I thought would be considered my Tipperary accent. I also was careful with my posture, checking it as we spoke”.

I am very conscious that had this school not been an elite school, I probably would have paid little attention to any of these matters.

The meeting with Robert and Jennifer, a physical education teacher, was arranged for just after one o’clock so as not to disrupt any physical education or sports sessions. There seemed to be no issue for these teachers in giving up their lunchtime to speak with me. I later noted how “they seemed very unhurried and relaxed as we spoke, and how open both of these teachers were to me. I sensed no defensiveness. They were both very friendly and warm to me. Robert’s and Jennifer’s only real concerns seemed to be whether the school was large enough to accommodate my study, and “that there would not be enough for me to observe, and that I would not get a real benefit from it” (Field-notes October 2011). A start day was arranged for me, and mobile numbers and emails addresses were exchanged for those individuals who they felt I should be in contact with. They provided me with the school’s annual journal, which they informed me would detail the timetable of the school’s activities and details on all students and personnel in the school. The contrast between this meeting and the meeting at the
previous school could not have been greater.

I am quite certain that my own social and cultural characteristics played a role in my success in accessing the second school (and for that matter in succeeding in getting a meeting in the first school). Coming from a middle class background, and having run and managed my own business for nearly two decades, I had sufficient familiarity with relatively wealthy and powerful people to be able to convincingly engage with these gatekeepers. I have a class neutral accent, I was conservatively dressed, and had no visible piercing or markings. I believe that if I had presented myself as someone more controversial or different I may have been feared or greeted with suspicion and would most certainly not have been welcomed (Lee 1993).

2.6 Selection of participants

Most qualitative research is guided by purposive sampling (Lindloff 1995) with the sample chosen to provide conceptual richness and with the subjects or sites chosen based on their ability to contribute to the evolving theory. In this respect, it was essential to select a research setting from where I believed it was most likely that information and evidence relevant to the purpose of the research could be obtained. Accordingly, the potential field sites targeted (based both on fees and on reputation) for inclusion in this study were selected from a small group of elite second level schools.

I commenced data collection in the site in November 2011 and finished in October 2012. I spent two days per week (during the school term) in the field. As is often the
in field work, I initially adopted a ‘big net’ approach, observing a wide variety of activities and mingling and having conversations with as many participants as possible (Fetterman 2010, p.35). As the research progressed I identified a number of individuals who I wished to focus on and, in some cases, to interview. These participants were selected only after I had observed the school culture and environment for a period of time. As the selection process is purposeful and is not meant to be generalisable, the participants were selected for specific reasons. I sought informants who would be the most informative and provide the richest data with respect to the study. As this study was focusing on physical education and sport, the majority of the central informants identified were involved in sporting practices in the school. Furthermore, my gatekeeper in the field was the acting head of physical education. After a time in the field, I narrowed my focus among the student body to a small group of first year students, shadowing the class one day per week during the second and third school term. I also conducted a number of individual and focus group interviews with the majority of this class. Of the fifteen students in the class, eleven participated in the focus group interviews, the majority of which had just two students per interview. One student declined the opportunity to participate in a focus group interview, and another student did not turn up at the arranged time for his interview.

2.7 Philosophical perspective

In this section, I outline the theoretical framework employed in this thesis. The theoretical framework forms the link between the theoretical aspects and practical components of the investigation undertaken. Developing this philosophical perspective
required that I make several core assumptions about the nature of reality (Burrell and Morgan 1979). The assumptions we make about human knowledge and realities shape all aspects of the research process. Influencing the very questions that we seek to investigate, and how we pose them, assumptions also have implications for every decision made in the research process, informing the methodology, the guiding theory, the questions pursued, and the conclusions drawn (Broido & Manning 2002, p.1). I recognise that clear articulation of these ontological and epistemological assumptions is necessary to reveal my fundamental views of the world, as the researcher must not alone justify why such a theoretical lens is appropriate for the subject of one’s study but also must reveal what learning it enables that other perspectives will not allow (Berg 2009). Clarity on my philosophical perspective is such a fundamental requirement of the research process that it can be argued that without a “more or less distinct perspective” on the world, research has only “the status of a telephone directory where data is listed without analysis” (Clough and Nutbrown 2002, p.10). Revealing these assumptions is also important in offering “transparency for readers to be able to assess the findings of the study” (Crotty 2003, p.17). I understand that when methods that are incompatible with the researcher’s stance are adopted, the final work can be undermined through lack of coherence. Thus, cognisant that my philosophical stance has implications for all aspects of my research project, I have sought to achieve a thorough understanding of my assumptions and to make these assumptions explicit.

Fully concurrent with Patton’s assertion (1990, p.67), that “how you study the world determines what you learn about the world,” I have employed a number of ‘tools and approaches’ that I believe can “identify these socially constructed patterns in the world
and understand them in light of the contexts that give them meaning” (Moses and Knutsen 2007, p.195). I believe that a radically different approach is required for the study of the social world to that of the natural world and, for this reason, I have employed a different toolkit to those used in positivist studies. Positivist concerns with achieving objective and generalisable results are of little significance to this study. Consequently, in eschewing the positivist ideal of a neutral objective distance, I sought to embed myself in the social world I was investigating.

Approaching my research from both an interpretive and a critical stance, I chose to closely examine social actors’ meaning and connecting these interpretations to broader considerations of social power and control. I believe that this research may be interpretive and critical without any conflict. In fact, it can be argued, “it is often hard to avoid being critical when conducting interpretive research” (Kaplan et al. 2003, p.278). While “many interpretive studies are sensitive to power, … critical studies include a concern for the processes of social construction that under lie the phenomena of interest” (Philips and Hardy 2002, cited in Kaplan et al. 2003, p. 278).

Accordingly, this thesis takes an interpretivist approach as I take the position that the real world does not exist independently of our interpretations. Conducting value-free research in an objective manner that seeks to discover one single objective ‘truth’ that can be found and explained, is something that I neither seek nor consider achievable. Gaining a rich and complex understanding of a specific social context or phenomenon must take precedence in this research over eliciting data that can be generalised to other geographical areas or populations. My research project is not only concerned with the experiences of the cultural group under investigation, and with the subjective meanings
that these experiences have for them, but also with my own subjective interpretation of these experiences (Flick 2006, p.16). This characteristic of interpretivist research is especially salient to this research, as I would argue it is as a consequence of the existence of these multiple realities that “different groups [have] inherited and/or created different ways of viewing and understanding the world” (Blaikie 2007, p.39). I would argue that this approach ultimately provides a much deeper understanding of “the unique nature of the social world being explored” from the group in question's highly contextual point of view (Moses and Knutsen 2007, p.193).

From a critical approach, this research focuses on the dynamics of power, knowledge and ideology that surround social practices. With “its emphasis on who gains and holds the power in social and political interactions”, critical theory seeks to understand “how this is used to advantage some groups and disadvantage others” (Henstrand cited in Anfara & Mertz 2006, p.3). Critical thinking is defined as “the act of probing beneath the surface of things that appear to be settled and taken for granted” (Angrosino, 2005, p.3). As Cox (1980, p.129) has suggested, to think critically is to “stand apart from the prevailing order of the world and ask how that order came about”. It is primarily concerned with power in social life, raising questions about how the interests of one group are advanced while those of other groups are oppressed. Far from being incompatible, I would argue that the use of critical interpretive methodologies can go much further in identifying and explaining existing patterns of power and authority in society.

2. 7. 1 Theoretical framework

The over-arching background theoretical perspective that is employed in this thesis is
drawn from conflict theory. Derived from the ideas of Karl Marx, conflict theory views society as a dynamic entity that is undergoing constant change driven primarily by class conflict. According to this perspective, competition over scarce resources is at the heart of all social relationships, with society made up of individuals competing for limited resources. Inequality in society is seen to exist as a result of those with control of a disproportionate share of society’s resources actively defending their advantages. This perspective is in marked contrast to the previously dominant perspective of functionalism, which understands society as a complex system striving for equilibrium. In short, functionalism emphasises stability, while conflict theory emphasises change. Conflict theory challenges the functionalist notion that consensus is characteristic of human relationships, arguing that society is not bound together by its shared values but rather by coercion at the hands of those in power. Conflict theorists tend to assume that, “the institutions of society develop in ways that are intended to keep the rich and the poor in their respective places” and as a result, “generally focus on sensitising concepts such as class, vested interests, stratification, and power” (Powers 2004, p.155). From this perspective the education system is viewed as a mechanism for the reproduction of social inequality, organised in such a way that some groups benefit more than others, whilst being a key component of a social system that is designed to preserve the exclusivity and privilege of dominant groups. For these reasons, conflict theory was considered an appropriate approach because of my belief that the class lines that society is divided along, particularly in vitally important areas like education, are the primary influences upon one’s life chances.

The methods of analysis I employ throughout this dissertation relies mainly on a
theoretical framework which uses conceptual tools derived from the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Chris Shilling. I believe that by using the combination of these theoretical viewpoints a greater explanatory power was offered for the phenomena I was witnessing (Kearney and Hyle 2006). I sought an approach that offered me a greater understanding of the part that schooling plays in the distribution of power in society. I wanted to know whose interests are being served by the way the educational system is organised, and what are the outcomes of the way in which education is structured. I felt that the combination of the conceptual theories employed in this thesis provided real insights into how inequality is reproduced through education. They illuminated aspects of the education system that function to serve the interests of dominant groups in society and maintain the status quo (Gage 1989).

In breaking down the traditional sociological dualisms, Bourdieu shines light on the extent to which people's activities are simultaneously shaping and being shaped by the social world, positing a dialectical relationship between the dominant culture and social class mediated by habitus (Bourdieu 1977). Bourdieu, whose theory of culture offers valuable insights into how dominant groups operate, offers a greater understanding of the role that culture plays in the maintenance of the existing power structure. For this
end, I would argue that Bourdieu’s tools of analysis, cultural capital and habitus, are necessary for discussing social stratification within an academic framework.

The first of these tools is Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, which he developed to help explain how individuals internalise their economic and cultural background. Habitus refers to the “acquired patterns of thoughts, behavior and tasks which are said to constitute the link between social structure and social practices” (Jarvie 2006, p.222) and thus are central to Bourdieu's attempt to bridge the gap between structure and agency. Habitus can be described as society becoming embodied in the person, “in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act” (Wacquant 2005, p.316). Habitus is, in essence, located within the body, manifesting in every aspect of human interaction, from one’s postures, manners and speech, to one’s pre-dispositions towards particular ways of thinking and feeling (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). The particular world view that habitus instills is based on and reconciled to an individual’s social locations, being inculcated from early childhood and reinforced through education and culture, and then passed on from generation to generation. The emphasis upon the embodiment of the habitus is further

———

2 I am aware that there are a number of strong ‘economistic’ Marxist critiques of Bourdieu’s prioritisation of the cultural dimension of class relations. Most notable amongst these are contributions from Hill (1999), Kelsh, Hill & Macrine (2010), Rikowski (2007, 2002), Kelsh (2010), Sayer (2005) and Wrigley (2013) all of whom stress the importance of keeping concepts of class well rooted in the economics of capitalist production. Foremost in this criticism is that by occluding property relations, Bourdieu’s theory deflects attention from the exploitation that is at the core of capitalism (Rikowski 2007). They argue that by turning attention inward into culture and ignoring the property relations that shape culture, Bourdieu’s conception of capital is a barrier to the development of Marxist theory and critique. For Rikowski, emphasis on the cultural “debilitates radical critique of capitalist society, blunts analysis through confused or simplistic thinking and undermines clarity regarding the ways in which capitalist society is socially constituted” (Rikowski 2007). Which Kelsh argues that “in effect if not be design”, ultimately serves the interest of the dominant classes “by blocking the development of class consciousness and the erasure of property relations from the theoretical imagination” (2012, p.18). However I hold to the view that to limit class to the economic sphere in this thesis, would not have provided the explanatory power that Bourdieu’s theory of culture permitted. By focusing on the role that culture plays in the maintenance of the existing power structure, providing valuable insights into how dominant groups operate.
underscored by Bourdieu’s notion of bodily hexis. This concept relates to seemingly insignificant techniques of the body including forms of body posture, deportment, style and gait, revealing how issues as apparently inconsequential as how individuals “carry themselves”, betray “the most fundamental principles of construction and evaluation of the social world” (Bourdieu 1984, p.466).

The second of Bourdieu’s conceptual tools utilised is cultural capital, a commodity he recognised as a valuable resource. In moving beyond the purely economic concept of capital, Bourdieu proposed a range of metaphorical forms of capital (cultural, social and symbolic) and demonstrated how each of these are the product of an investment, all capable of securing a return on that investment. Cultural capital assumes three forms: in an embodied state, in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the objectified state, in the form of cultural goods such as books and pieces of artwork; and in the institutionalised state, most typically associated with educational qualifications.

Bourdieu argued that despite the heterogeneity of cultures, the dominant classes have been able to imbue their own culture with a universal approbation, whilst accordingly designating all other cultures as inferior. This uncritical acceptance of higher cultural forms has resulted in a legitimacy being granted in the education system to these cultural codes associated with the dominant classes. This belief in the superiority of these higher cultural forms results in students from the dominant classes coming into the education system (already rich in cultural capital from their homes) being viewed as more capable and motivated to learn; while students from dominated classes who are unfamiliar with these cultural forms are judged as being unreceptive or hostile to learning (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979).
The third and final conceptual tool employed is physical capital, which Shilling adapted from Bourdieu’s ‘embodied’ capital as a form of capital in its own right. ‘Embodied’ capital, which Bourdieu usually analyses as a sub-division of cultural capital, is typically defined a ‘cultural resource’ invested within the body (Bourdieu 1986). However, for Shilling, understanding of the body as a form of ‘physical’ capital is too important to be seen merely as a component of cultural capital. He argues the “management and development of the body is central in its own right to human agency in general, and to the production of cultural and economic capital and the attainment and maintenance of status” (Shilling 2003, p.23). In illuminating the correspondence between class position and specific bodily activities, the utilisation of the concept of physical capital gives insight into how culturally loaded the body can be. Accordingly, understanding of how the simplest and seemingly taken for granted bodily movements, postures and actions emanate from different manner of socialisation by different social classes and result in bodies of different value, allowed me to theorise how capital can be accrued and accumulated in our bodies.

I felt that the combination of these theoretical frameworks illuminated different aspects of the phenomenon being studied, deepening my understanding of the topic, and provided far greater explanatory power than a single framework could.

2.8 Ethics in elite settings

I agree that research participants must not be seen simply as a means to achieve our research objectives (Taylor and Bogdan 1998). I understand ethical practice as “complex processes, not mere events” (Marshall & Rossman 2006, p.48). In this vein, I
do not regard ethics “as a separate part of our research — a form that is filled in for the ethics committee and forgotten” (Davies & Dodd 2002, p.281), and I fully appreciate that being granted ethical approval by an ethics committee does not automatically deem my research to be ‘ethical’. I was very conscious that because I was writing about real people in real life situations, my words and actions have the potential to have far-reaching consequences for the people who I write about, and that I have an ethical responsibility to safeguard the interests of these individuals and to report my findings truthfully and accurately.

As ethics are an essential part of rigorous research (Davies & Dodd 2002, p.47), it was necessary and appropriate that informed consent was obtained from participants before commencing data collection. An information letter and informed consent forms were drawn up with the former including a brief description of the nature of the study that participants were being asked to participate in, the purpose and aims of the research, and the procedures for the data collection process. The voluntary nature of participation was stressed in the informed consent documents, ensuring participants were aware of their rights as participants. These documents were submitted to the Faculty of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences (FAHSS) research ethics sub-committee in the University of Limerick and ethical approval was subsequently granted.

There was, however, one clause in approval being granted that was to delay the progression of this study for several months. The university ethics board stipulated that

3 FAHSS approval number REC347
I must first get clearance from the Board of Management of any school that I approached. This final condition, proved to be a significant barrier to gaining clearance to a school. Despite writing to four schools’ Boards of Management in March 2011, I had failed to gain access to a school by the start of the following year’s school term in September 2011. I believed that being unable to arrange meetings with any members of these Boards of Management and put my case to them was the main difficulty with gaining access. Furthermore, because the schools that I sought access to, were exclusively private fee-paying schools, there was no higher authority (such as the Vocational Educational Committees with vocational schools) that I could appeal to.

After several months of trying I was still unable to get any Board of Management to discuss my letter of application. While I had initially hoped to have begun the data collection stage of my research before the end of the spring school term, this delay in gaining access meant that I was already several months behind schedule. After discussions with my supervisors, it was agreed that the Board of Management clause was proving to be unworkable, and that the decision of the FAHSS ethics board should be appealed. This issue was brought to the attention of the chairperson of the ethics committee at the end of September 2011 and I was informed just over one week later that the ethics committee had agreed that the permission of the school principal alone would suffice.

---

4 The chairperson of one of these boards contacted me by text, to advise me to make direct contact with the school’s principal. Despite making numerous attempts to contact this principal I failed (further details on my attempts to make contact with this principal are documented in the access section of this chapter). I received a letter from the board of management of a second school, notifying me of their decision to turn down my request (similarly there is further information on this decision in the access section of this chapter).
In the meantime, as progress with school boards’ of management had stalled completely, I initiated contact with two schools directly by telephone. Both of these schools were willing to discuss the possibility of their school being involved in this study. As previously detailed in the discussion on accessing elite sites, (section 2.5.1), I failed to gain access in the first of these schools I visited, while in the second school I visited, my request to involve their school in my research was received very favourably. Attaining consent, without reservation, from this second school meant that within days of being informed of the decision of the ethics board to remove the Board of Management clause, I had gained access to a school. Prior to commencing my fieldwork I sent the approved information letter and informed consent forms to the school principal, who was then given time to reconsider the school’s involvement. I reiterated my intention to protect the school’s identity, with the school and all participants to be given a pseudonym in the writing up process. Additionally I reassured them that nobody other than myself and my supervisory team would have access to interview transcripts.

Carrying out research, and particularly ethnographic research in elite settings, leads to some particular ethical issues. First and foremost is the reversal of the usual power dynamics in the research setting, with elite’s privileged and shielded position meaning that the “traditional power dynamics of ethnographic research are changed” (Busby 2011, pp.9-10). The existing literature on ethnographic methods tends to stress the need for the researcher to attempt to redress the imbalance in the researcher/participant relationship, in which the researcher is assumed to be the ‘expert’. Pierce (1995, p.94)
argues that the focus tends to be “on giving power back to subjects, as the ethic prevails that academics are the experts and subjects are not”. In the elite setting, this dynamic changes dramatically.

Pursuing research in elite contexts is rife with subtle and complex issues that play out in terms of power dynamics between the researcher and researched. Foremost in this is that in the elite setting, power does not reside with the researcher. As Mc Dowell (1992 cited in Cochrane 1998, p.2123) states “in elite research, we are the supplicant, requesting time and expertise from the powerful”. At no stage during my fieldwork did I feel that anyone was particularly impressed or intimidated by my ‘researcher’ status. There was also no mystique about the PhD research process, with many of my adult informants knowledgeable about the processes and the time involved. I never got the impression that anyone in the field was baffled by me having taken on such a venture, but rather, I felt it was seen as something quite commonplace. This attitude to post-graduate study was demonstrated by Robert (the physical education teacher) when I was requesting the first form classes involvement in focus group interviews. After I explained to the class what would be involved, and what was required of them, Robert encouraged their participation saying that he was sure that “several of you here, will in the future, as you do your own Masters or PhDs, require the involvement of others to carry out your own research” (Field-notes April 2012).

Access is a concern in all types of field research and in the elite setting there can be particular difficulties gaining entry (Johnson 1975). Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011, p.75)
contend that despite “elite and semi-elite populations hold[ing] key positions within society…their activities and power remain invisible to the average citizen”, with elites often protecting “their privacy through a myriad of self-imposed barriers, ranging from unlisted phones…to the hiring of staff…to prevent unwanted contact with those outside their culture”. For researchers following a critical perspective, this difficulty is increased to the point that some commentators have argued that “a certain amount of strategic deception is needed when these researchers are … interested in “studying up” (Korn 1997 cited in Hesse-Biber, 2011, p.75). As there are few reasons for these elite groups to give their valuable time to an individual who could potentially use information garnered against them. While marginalised or disadvantaged groups must endure being over-represented in social research in order that the highlighting of their troubles might result in some social change (or at a minimum that the researcher may use their ‘expertise’ to contribute in some small way to the community), there are far fewer, if any, benefits for resource-rich elite groups in taking part in research. Furthermore, due to the nature of ethnographic research in particular, elite groups “may not perceive any benefit in taking part in in-depth, long term research given the demands of such research” on the group’s time (Alcadipani & Hodgson 2009, p.127).

Another ethical issue in elite sites is that “ethnographers may feel a responsibility to their informants to withhold things in return for the privileged access they were granted, or because they want to maintain good relations so that they, and other academics, can return in the future” (Busby 2011, p.16). This unwillingness to upset elite gatekeepers is something I can relate to. During my time in the field, I became very aware of how
sensitive elite schools are to any constructive criticism. Being able to operate ‘under the radar’ of critical observers is something that I now believe is very important to these schools’ success, with affluent parents carefully selecting (and paying handsomely for) schools that will shelter their children from the harsh realities of life. I was certain that if I portrayed this elite school in a negative light in my writing that the impact on this school would probably be far greater than on a non-fee paying school. Due to this, I felt a greater responsibility to paint as full and accurate a picture of the field-site as possible and to produce valid, quality research.

2.9 Data Collection process

With an ethnographic approach pervading the research my principal aim was to gain a greater understanding of the culture being explored. I was aware that imposing consistency and uniformity on the community being researched would only serve to stereotype and generalise its culture reductively. Therefore, in attempting to portray the culture under investigation in all its complexity, I understood it was of the utmost importance that I utilised methods of collecting data that would represent the multiple voices and actions constituting the research setting. For these reasons I employed a range of qualitative tools aimed at developing insights into the meanings of experiences for participants that would help illuminate the local experiences of the culture of the elite educational institution that I was researching as they engaged in their everyday worlds. Fig. 2.1 demonstrates the range of techniques that I employed for collecting data and these include; participant observation; conducting focus groups and individual interviews with various participants, and reviewing a range of documents and cultural
Due to the nature of the central research question, looking at issues to do with the social construction of the body, I anticipated little conscious awareness into how these corporeal processes manifest amongst much of the school community being researched. Accordingly, with potentially much of the sociological knowledge that I sought to tap into in the research setting being largely implicit or tacit, I understood that a significant task in this data collection process was attempting to make these implicit understandings explicit (Splinder 1987). This capacity to uncover meanings that there may be little conscious awareness of, or known only ambiguously to those in the culture.

2.9.1. Participant observation

Fig. 2.1
being researched, was one of the primary factors that influenced my decision to employ an ethnographic methodology. Participant observation, the central data collection tool employed in ethnography, excels in capturing elements of a culture that “use rules and norms that the participants may experience without explicitly talking about, that operate on automatic or subconscious levels, or are even officially off limits for discussion or taboo” (Guest et al. 2013, p.75). The regularity with which the expression “you had to be there” is used reveals how reliance on a verbal description can sometimes fail to fully capture the essence of some scene or event. This difficulty with verbally communicating the essence of a particular story cannot be dismissed as resulting from a failure of one’s rhetorical skills, but is clearly a consequence of “often important elements of human experience…only [being] visible to those who are actually there” (Guest et al. 2013, pp. 77-78). As Crossley has argued “the devil is in the detail and the detail may not always be reflexively available to the lay agent in an interview situation …it must be observed in practice” (2007, p.91). I would argue that participant observation puts the researcher in direct contact with the phenomena of interest in a way unrivalled by other data collection techniques, with the deeply contextual insights and flexibility of participant observation make it a powerful source of qualitative insight. For these reasons stated, and given that the central objective of this thesis is to seek a greater understanding of the social construction of the elite educated body, I am confident that employment of participant observation as the primary data collection strategy afforded me the greatest opportunity to observe this embodiment process.
2.9.2 Participant observation: the process

I had originally intended to commence my fieldwork in April 2011. However, due to delays in gaining access to suitable schools (the reasons for this delay is documented previously in the ethics section), I did not begin my fieldwork until the beginning of November 2011. I initially spent one day per week in the school during term time. After four weeks, this was increased to two days per week over the course of a full academic year.

As previously documented in section 2.5, I initially adopted a ‘big net’ approach when conducting my field work. Through this holistic outlook I attempted to gain a comprehensive picture of the whole school community by framing their activities within the larger context in which they occur. This involved interacting with a wide variety of informants in the whole school community, where I mixed and mingled with all willing members of the school community. Robert, the head of physical education and sport in the school, facilitated many of these connections, regularly introducing me to his teaching and coaching colleagues and always endeavoured to include me in lunchtime or sports field sideline conversations he was engaged in. This big net approach ensured I achieved a ‘wide-angle’ perspective of the culture under investigation, providing greater clarity about where I should focus on for further analysis.

Having focused on gaining this ‘big picture’ holistic understanding of the school culture during my first two months in the school, the focus of the study narrowed to specific portions of population upon my return to the school after the Christmas holidays. These
individuals were selected due to their potential to provide the richest data. The majority of these central informants identified were involved in physical education and sporting practices in the school, amongst whom were teachers employed full-time in the school and a number of sports coaches who were employed on a part-time basis by the school. A group of fifteen, first year students were also selected, due to being the group that I had spent the most time with since my arrival in the school. The majority of the group had enrolled in the school the previous September, and accordingly offered me the greatest potential to observe any changes that a Rathwood College education may evoke. This first year class group was comprised of nine boys and six girls. I shadowed this class during the second term, which entailed following the students to their physical education class, their afternoon sports session and to any competitive ‘home’ games they were competing in, and during the last term in their first year, I also shadowed the class during their academic classes and library sessions.

2.9.3 The mechanics of fieldwork

In the field, data was recorded through note taking, recording sounds and images; this was achieved through the use of a combination of tools, included a small pocket sized note book and the use of a number of features on my smart phone, including the camera, the voice recorder, the Evernote app and also the Scribble app that allowed me to quickly sketch words or pictures that served as prompts when I was writing up my field notes. These data collection methods were chosen primarily due to my desire to be discreet when gathering data.
From my first days in the field, I had made a deliberate effort not to be seen to be ‘cataloguing’ data on participants, as I was initially only observing life outside the classroom, I felt it would be inappropriate for me to be taking notes on what I was observing (I felt that my note taking would have attracted less attention if I was observing an academic class). As I was very concerned about this issue of trust with the participants I did not want to be seen as someone, “whose primary interest lies in discovering their secrets and turning their most intimate and cherished experience into objects of scientific inquiry” (Emerson 1995, p.36). In the company of large groups for several hours typically at sports events, I often felt a deep ambivalence: on the one hand I wanted “to preserve the immediacy of the moment by jotting down works as they are spoken and details of scenes as they are enacted” while on the other I felt that taking out a notebook might “plant seeds of distrust” (Emerson 1995, p.36). I was conscious that some people can be very uncomfortable with notes being taken about them. Therefore to ensure that my note-taking did not cause unease in the school, I rarely used my notebook when I was in company in the school, instead I took note of any crucial quotes or comments on my smartphone, either in the form of a ‘scribbled’ note or as recorded audio messages. Despite being aware of an almost total absence of mobile phones use among the school community, I felt more comfortable being seen using my phone occasionally, than being seen writing notes. I was also able to discreetly use the voice recorder to document some activity or conversation that I did not want to risk forgetting. I also felt more comfortable making brief notes on my phone, as I believed that being seen doing this (an act that most probably looked like sending a quick text message), was preferable to writing notes on what I observed.
While there is an abundance of literature published on ethnography, I was surprised at how little advice I managed to locate on the actual ‘mechanics’ of fieldwork. This mystique about the actual mechanics of doing fieldwork meant that I was really unsure for my first few weeks of fieldwork if I was managing to capture the ‘correct’ data (Thieburger 2011). In a similar vein, Emerson et al (1995, p.ii) has stated that while the novice ethnographer will get “reams of advice” on obtaining access and the necessity for long periods spent in field, there is little practical advice on being a fieldworker.

I understood that field-notes should not be “a matter of passively copying down ‘facts’ about ‘what happened’, [but rather] ‘descriptive accounts [that] select and emphasise different features and actions while ignoring and marginalising others” (Emerson 1995, p.9) My supervisors had (very wisely) requested that I forward on my typed notes to them each week. However, I was unsure if I was actually producing a ‘stream of consciousness’ or if I was self-consciously editing my field-notes for others to view. I could now understand why other ethnographers may be uneasy or embarrassed about field-notes, often seen as a kind of backstage scribbling, a little bit suspect, and not something to talk about too openly or too specifically. Field-notes seem too personal, too messy and “unfinished to be shown to any audience” (Emerson 1995, p.ix). It is probably for these very reasons that novice ethnographers do not have ready access to original unedited field-notes, only gaining access to completed ethnographies with the selected, edited field-notes they contain. A consequence of this is that fieldworkers get little training on how to write “more sensitive, useful and stimulating field-notes” (Emerson 1995, p.viii).
My goal was to get it all that my observations down on paper and to resist editing. In trying to get it all down on the page while it was still fresh in my mind, I struggled for consistency in my writing, grappling with not shifting from one style to another, one tone to another, one topic to another. Yet I knew that if the ethnographer focuses too much on wording, she “will produce an internal editor” distracting her attention from “the evoked scene and stopping her outpouring of memory” (Emerson 1995, p.50). Furthermore, as my study was focusing on physical education and sporting practices, describing the physicality of individuals in the field was required. I found this more challenging than providing accounts of conversations or activities, being unaccustomed to remarking upon an individual’s physicality when recounting details about my experiences. Additionally, I was well aware from the literature on ethnography of the importance of writing up one’s field-notes as soon as possible after leaving the field each day. Field-notes are a valuable resource for the field worker as documenting in field notes enables better recall of events in the future. However, as I resided more than 100 miles away from the research site, I often found it difficult to motivate myself to sit down and write up my notes at the end of a long day.

2.9.4. Interviews in the field

One of the most frequently used tools in ethnographic research, in addition to participant observation, is interviewing. Interviews occurred within the context of the ongoing observations and the collection of cultural artefacts. These interviews were undertaken to seek meanings that individuals or groups within the school community have for their own experience or of observed phenomena. The recording of these
interviews allowed me to delve further into specific topics, and capture long verbatim
quotes. Having been embedded in the social context for almost an entire academic year
before embarking on the interview process, I felt confident that these interviews were
grounded in the local context, with questions posed that were relevant and couched in
terms that make sense to the “native population”. Indeed, these regular interactions with
my main informants allowed me establish a healthy rapport prior to commencing
interviews.

Having requested and been granted permission by the school principal to conduct
individual and group interviews with the first year class I was shadowing, I approached
the class and requested their participation. I succeeded in interviewing thirteen of the
fifteen students. The interviews took place in a variety of locations around the school; in
the students’ common room, in the foyer of the sports hall, on a garden bench in the
school grounds and in the school dining hall. I selected the location for all the
interviews, except for the first meeting which was conducted in the boys’ common
room, chosen by the two boys I was interviewing. I had agreed to that location without
putting sufficient thought into the suitability of the location. The room which was
selected was a small room with no windows and a solid wooden door, and therefore
prohibited any monitoring of the interview by any concerned school staff. Despite
feeling uneasy about the choice of location, I allowed myself to be reassured by the two
13 year old students, who had no concerns with the location. Once the interview was
completed I quickly realised that it was inappropriate for me, as an adult female, to be
alone in such a private location with two teenage boys. I was determined not to allow a
situation like that to develop again, and was more assertive with the students in choosing a location in the subsequent interviews.

I was always mindful that interviews should be designed and carried out in such a manner to promote the unfolding of emic cultural knowledge in its most ‘natural’ form. Since my participants possessed this emic, native cultural knowledge that I sought, I was careful not to predetermine responses by the kinds of questions asked. For this reason, the interview guide was semi-structured, consisting of a series of open-ended questions, and were set up to be more like a conversation than an interview. Following Kvale’s (1996) guidelines on successful interviewing, I designed my interview guide with clear, easy to understand, jargon-free questions. Prior to commencing interviews I carried out a pilot test of the interview guide and afterwards amended some of the questions to improve the ‘flow’ of the interview. I felt this format would allow new or unexpected issues that arose during the interview to be discussed. These new emerging issues were included in subsequent interview schedules, which fits well with the adaptability provided by a qualitative methodology (Kvale 1996). I varied the order of the questions depending on how the interview was evolving, sometimes omitting questions altogether. I took no notes during the interview, and used the voice recorder on my smartphone to record all the interviews to encourage a conversational approach to the interview. I tried to put the students at ease by adopting an informal conversational approach and I tried to maintain eye contact, nod frequently, and make each interviewee feel comfortable. I felt that I established a good rapport with the majority engaging with the topic and with me enthusiastically.
There were two interviews where I was not happy with the outcome. Both interviews were individual interviews. The first interview was with Dylan, a boy full of nervous energy. We conducted the interview on a garden bench beside the tennis courts during lunchtime. When we first selected the location, there was nobody else around. However, after commencing the interview a senior student came to sunbathe on a nearby bench. I was conscious of the fact that this student could probably hear our conversation and I felt it impacted on the quality of the interview. The second interview was with Tia, the ‘new’ Chinese girl, and the difficulty in this case was due to language problems. Tia was only in the country four months and her command of the English language was still poor. She had difficulty understanding the questions I posed to her, and I also struggled to understand her replies when she did make an attempt to answer the question. Consequently, the quality of the interview was poor.

In line with the emphasis on theory development through iterative work on the data, I attempted to leave sufficient time between interviews. Before proceeding with the interview, I took a few minutes to reacquaint the interviewees about the purpose and nature of my study, informing them of the topics I hoped to cover, and reiterated my assurance of confidentiality. The interviews ranged in time from 20 minutes to 90 minutes. Gaskell (2000) explains that with appropriate probing and targeted questioning, the researcher can obtain clarification and amplification of interesting points. Accordingly, when the respondent said something of interest on the key themes, additional questions were asked to guarantee elucidation of their answers. At the end of the interview all respondents were given the opportunity to ask any questions they had.
in regard to the topic being discussed or on any aspect of the research process. They were then thanked for their time and involvement.

2.9.5 Cultural artefacts

Other data collection tools employed include a range of cultural artefacts. These cultural products are items that reveal information about the society that made or used it, being “tangible manifestations of the beliefs and behaviours that form a culture [and describing] peoples experience, knowledge, actions and values” (Murchison 2010, p. 164). Building a collection of cultural artefacts allows the ethnographer possible insights into the culture being investigated that may be reflected in the cultural products being engaged with. Interestingly, for a community steeped in history and tradition, a significant number of the cultural artefacts I engaged with, and that were highly productive in terms of rich data they generated, were in digital form. It is clear that this turn to the digital cultural artefacts is an inevitable result of the emergence of the world wide web and the services it brings having resulted in “a rapidly increasing degree of our cultural heritage … either being migrated or already born into digitality resulting in a new breed of cultural artefact that is ephemeral, networked and dependent on computational operations” (Kallinikos, Aaltonen et al. 2010 cited in Marton 2011, p.2).

Traditionally, cultural artefacts were considered as not capable of wielding the same information and weight that participant observation or the interview does, with their use mainly justified on the grounds of how these resources could add breadth to other findings (Murchison 2010). Their inclusion, valued primarily for what they offered in
“corroborating or comparative data in relationship to the ethnographic record”, where essentially they provided a contextual framework and enabled triangulation between the different sources of data (Murchison 2010 p.164). I would argue, however that not alone do these cultural artefacts support and supplement other methods, it is clear that especially with the advent of the digital cultural artefact, these tools have the capacity to reshape the research experience, having the potential to bring new routes to knowledge which are “opened up through online/offline engagements” (Postill and Pink 2012, p.4). Their inclusion in this research was not due to a wish to replace long-term engagement in a society or culture, but, as a result of the value I place on “involving digital technologies in co-producing knowledge” (Postill and Pink 2012, p.4). While accessing digital resources such as official school Twitter accounts, school websites and blogs produced by school personnel can supplement the ethnographers more traditional tools of participant observation and interviewing, they also have the potential to independently contribute to our understanding of a culture. Such is the variety and quality of these digital resources that the field researcher can successfully navigate in both the physical and on-line spaces by expanding the ethnographic gaze virtually, with these digital artefacts clearly having the capacity to yield rich data on elements of the culture under investigation.

The more traditional cultural products engaged with included Rathwood College’s school journal, a range of school photographs, sporting memorabilia and two historical accounts of Rathwood College in book form. Rathwood College’s annually produced journal contains information on all aspects of school life and is distributed to the staff,
students and all members of the school community. A range of school photographs on
display in the school were also included, the vast majority of which were group shots
comprising of class groups and sports-related gatherings. Two written histories of the
school provided accounts of the school’s history, from its foundation to the closing
decades of the last century (Author A. 1995: Author B. 1982). The digital cultural
artefacts included the school official website, the school’s official twitter account and a
number of blogs produced by school personnel. The school’s well maintained and
regularly updated website contained a wealth of information on the school and its
community, including information on the school’s academic and extracurricular
programme, the school’s parent and student councils, information on bursaries available
and on the school’s active past-pupil network. Rathwood College’s enthusiastic
adoption of social media is evident in their active Twitter and Facebook accounts, where
there is much engagement between the present Rathwood community, their families and
also with their past pupils. The final cultural artefact in digital form was three well
researched and well written specialist academic blogs created by members of the
teaching staff. It was apparent from the significant numbers that follow these blogs and
comment on the postings that not only are they well regarded in the Irish teaching
profession but also have many overseas followers.

2.10 Analysis and writing up

Due to the “iterative, cyclical nature” of the qualitative research process (Crabtree &
Miller 1999, p.xvi), the data analysis begins almost simultaneously. Accordingly, at the
end of each day, or first thing the next day, I completed my field notes, and analysis of
the data took place concurrently. Similarly, at the end of each interview, I wrote a brief appraisal, assessing my performance as an interviewer, my ability to develop rapport with the interviewees and noting any issues that arose that might have impacted on the duration or quality of interview. I then listened intently to each recording to identify key themes and the main points of the discussion, which were then incorporated into the interview schedule for subsequent interviews. For Quinn-Patton (1990, p.353), this “period after an interview is a critical time of reflection and elaboration. It is a time of quality control to guarantee that the data combined will be useful, reliable and valid”. I believe this process resulted (in most cases) in the interview data becoming richer as the interviews proceeded. Having completed all the interviews, I duplicated each recording so that, in the eventuality of encountering any problems with the original, the data would not be lost.

The overall data collection process had produced over 300 pages of field notes accumulated over the course of the year, ten hours of audio taped interviews, which when transcribed verbatim, resulted in over 92 pages of transcripts, and another ‘pile’ that resulted from my engagement with the cultural artefacts in the schools. This level of detail in qualitative research can be “both a blessing and a curse” (Trochim 2006). While it enables you to describe the phenomena of interest in great detail in the language of the research participants, large amounts of data and transcripts is not straightforward to analyse and can rapidly generate a large cumbersome database if not managed properly (Bryman 2004, p.399).
Grounded theory was chosen as the most appropriate method of qualitative data analysis. Grounded theory uses a systematic set of procedures to develop inductively derived theory grounded in data (Strauss and Corbin 1990, p.24). In contrast to content analysis where themes are usually derived from theoretical constructs derived in advance of the analysis (Cohen et al 2000), the more inductive grounded theory sets aside pre-conceived ideas, letting the data give rise to the theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967). This emphasis on allowing themes to emerge in the data is a process of analysis that, when successfully accomplished, results in conclusions that are not “an extension of the analyst and his or her personal biases” (Bryman 2004, p.182). Proponents of this method of data analysis argue that by deconstructing the data, a deeper understanding of the phenomenon in question emerges (Cohen et al. 2000; Strauss and Corbin 1990).

Grounded theory provides a hierarchical procedure for developing codes. Open coding involves exploring the data and identifying units of analysis to code for meaning, feelings, action, or events. Axial coding seeks to make links between categories and codes compared to existing theory, while selective coding involves identifying a core code (Creswell 1998; Cohen et al. 2000). Using the constant comparison approach, I read and re-read all the transcripts line by line, looking for emergent themes, codes, and categories. To be true to the grounded theory method of analysis, I tried at all times not to read the data through a lens influenced by my literature review, and paid close attention to issues that emerged in the data that had not previously emerged in the literature review. For the novice researcher, this early part of the process can be confusing, generating what appears to be “a mass of apparently unrelated
material” (Ezzy 2002, p.94). However, as the coding process progressed and as themes emerged, the analysis became more organised and coherent.

Having reached saturation point, where no further themes or categories were emerging, I ended up with a set of themes or categories that I believed characterised the phenomenon being explored (Creswell 2007, p.290). Themes were then selected on the basis of their centrality in relation to the other categories, the frequency with which the theme occurs in the data and it’s “inclusiveness and the ease with which it related” to other themes (Creswell 2007, p.290). Once I had these categories I identified my core categories. Figure 2.2 is a presentation of the initial themes as they emerged. It shows the eight themes that first emerged from the data; total institution, sense of collective identity, collective attitude of mind, meritocratic beliefs, abundance of capital, physical capital, distinction, and the ability to create distinctive bodies.
After further analysis of the data, these eight emergent themes depicted above in Figure 2.2 were collapsed into two themes that I believed would make a meaningful contribution to answering the two research question. These two central themes that emerged were the total institution theme and the physical distinctiveness theme.


2.11 Verification Procedures, Transferability and Trustworthiness

Silverman (1993) argues that issues of validity and reliability apply to qualitative studies in the same way as they do to quantitative studies. Eight verification procedures often employed to enhance the trustworthiness and transferability of qualitative research, were depicted by Creswell (1998). It is recommended that qualitative researchers engage in at least two of these procedures. Seven of the eight procedures were employed for this study and each are now discussed in turn.

2.11.1 Prolonged engagement and persistent observation

Synonymous with ethnographic studies, prolonged engagement and persistent observation were central features of this research process. Prolonged engagement involved investing sufficient time in the field to develop a deep understanding of the phenomena under investigation that could not be adequately explored with short-term study designs. Persistent observation allows the inquirer to explore details of the phenomena under study to a sufficiently deep enough level that he or she can decide what is important and what is irrelevant, focusing on the most relevant aspects. Thus, in acknowledgment of the complexity of human experience, I understood that in order to grasp what the cultural group under investigation experience as meaningful and important, long-term intimate engagement was required (O’Reilly 2004). Accordingly, through a year (academic) long engagement in the field and through the use of repeated observations, meetings and interviews, participants felt sufficient confidence and trust in me, the researcher, to allow a detailed study of the cultural context.

5 These techniques were identified as prolonged engagement and persistent observation; triangulation; peer review and debriefing; negative case analysis; clarification of researcher bias; member checks, rich thick description; and external audit (Creswell 1998, pp.201-203).
2.11.2 Triangulation

Triangulation is the process whereby a combination of different methods, sources, areas of expertise, and theories provides corroborating evidence and depth in the methodological proceedings (Creswell 1998, p.202). In this research, I have utilised multiple sources (the initial big net approach incorporated the whole school community, subsequent to this I included an entire class, a number of teachers and coaches and the school principal) multiple types of sources (Pupils, teachers, coaches, school management and cultural artefacts) and multiple theoretical perspectives (Conflict theory, Bourdieu’s Habitus and Cultural Capital and Shilling adaption of Bourdieu’s Physical Capital) in order to enhance the trustworthiness and transferability of my findings.

2.11.3 Peer review and debriefing

This process provides an external check of the quality of the research. Lincoln and Guba (1985 cited in Creswell 1998, p.202) suggest debriefings by peers as a technique for enhancing credibility of interpretation, arguing that a peer reviewer acts as the person who keeps the research sincere. They do this by periodically meeting with the researcher to critique and question the emerging interpretation before the researcher fully commits to it. This technique was employed in two ways in this thesis. Most formally, a debriefing session was held annually throughout the research process. I submitted my work to three annual panel review meetings in the Department of Sociology at the University of Limerick. These review boards, which comprised of my two supervisors and another academic from the Department, involved the panel reading
two pieces of my work and a report documenting my progress over the previous 12 months. The meetings proved to be very helpful with the discussions and recommendations emanating from these meetings focusing my research. A second (less formal) way in which debriefing by peers was a feature of this research process was the regular progress meetings I attended with my supervisory team, who served as my primary peer debriefers throughout the course of this research. These debriefing sessions gave me the opportunity to discuss any specific incidents that arose and data that emerged, and to reflect on aspects of my work that helped to uncover taken for granted biases, perspectives and assumptions.

2.11.4 Clarification of researcher bias

Creswell (2007, p.179) comments on the necessity of being reflexive as our values and ideologies replicate through our work. As such, a central characteristic of this project was self-reflexivity. Reflexivity sees researchers being urged to talk about themselves, “their presuppositions, choices, experiences, and actions during the research process” (Mruck & Breuer 2003, p.3). Berg (2009, p.198) describes this process of reflexivity as having “an ongoing conversation with yourself” resulting in an acknowledgement of the impact of your writing on the researcher, on the participants and on the reader (Creswell 2007, p.179). As I discussed earlier in this chapter, I experienced some difficulties initially engaging in reflexivity. After feedback from my supervisors that my ‘holding back’ was impacting on my writing, I allowed the personal into this research.
Topic selection in a qualitative study is usually driven by a personal interest in the topic (Ely 1991, p.29). My interest in educational inequality has stemmed from my own experiences with the education system. Having not had the opportunity to pursue a third level education upon completing second level school, I returned to education in my late thirties as an undergraduate. The decision to pursue a third level qualification was something that I had deliberated on for some time, as I was unsure about my ability to achieve academically after a very poor performance at second level school.

The study of sociology has dramatically transformed my beliefs in relation to education. I had long held the view that education is the ‘great equaliser’ in society. I believed that education was probably the most effective agent for social transformation, capable of counteracting inequality in society. As my studies progressed however, and my interest in education grew, the previous views I held about education being a vehicle for social mobility were shattered. I found many of the concepts and theories I was introduced to forced me to reassess many of my commonly held assumptions and beliefs about the opportunities and the constraints that characterise all our lives. Contrary to my earlier beliefs that hard work and determination alone allows everyone the opportunity to succeed in Irish society, I increasingly began to view the education system as one of the most effective mechanisms for maintaining the status quo in Irish society.

Theories on the effect of social class on education revealed to me the extent to which educational attainment is affected by one’s social position. I became much more aware of the failure of our educational system to provide its lower-income students with the
same access to resources and opportunities as it does to its more affluent students. As a result, I have become very critical of initiatives in schooling such as ‘streaming’ students and more recently the plan to allocate additional points for mathematics in the Leaving Certificate exam in Ireland, all initiatives that I believe will advantage the already advantaged middle and upper middle classes. As detailed in chapter one, it was a newspaper article that had first ignited my interest in elite education. The article which profiled some of Ireland’s most influential individuals from the world of politics, business and the legal profession, highlighting for me the number of such individuals who had been educated in a very small pool of the country’s most exclusive secondary schools. As central institutions in the process of elite socialisation imbuing fundamentally different attitudes and values to the rest of the population, I considered this problematic when one considers the amount of influence these individuals have in Irish society. I believe that despite generally being neglected in sociological research, the study of elite schooling can provide valuable insights into how educational exclusion operates. Consequently, I was drawn to this topic as I sought to gain a greater understanding of what role elite schools play in reproducing inequality in Irish society.

I acknowledge that I am not an impartial bystander and that I came to the research with many assumptions and biases. I attempted to make my experiences, opinions, and feelings visible throughout the research process. Being aware of my biases allowed me to take precautions to maintain objectivity during the collection of the data, in that it allowed me to compose questions that limited how my biases might influence the information respondents shared with me. Additionally, in an attempt to avoid
generalising across a population, I attempted with each participant, to search for the unique perspective and meaning that I believed each had to offer.

While I acknowledge that my prior assumptions may have (subconsciously) influenced my interpretations, by undertaking such a rigorous and systematic process I have tried to ensure (as much as possible) that the theory generated was contextually sensitive, persuasive and relevant.

2.11.5 Member checks

Member checking is viewed as a technique for establishing the validity of an account. Member checking refers to channeling one’s research interpretations back to research participants with the purpose of soliciting the participants’ views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Merriam 1988; Miles & Huberman 1994). This technique was employed in an informal manner throughout the course of the fieldwork. These informal member checks were carried out verbally as opportunities arose during the normal course of observation and conversation. Conducting these informal member checks throughout the research process provided the opportunity for me to seek clarifications on any issues that I was unsure of. I regularly posed questions to participants such as “Am I on the right track in my understanding of…?” or “Did I understand this in the same way you meant it?” This ability to conduct this constant check on interpretation provided me with a useful “way of finding out whether the data analysis is congruent with the participants’
experiences” (Curtin & Fossey 2007, p.92), and accordingly added accuracy and richness to my research.

2. 11. 6 External audits

The procedure of external audit were also used as a verification check. Creswell (1998, p.203) states that an external consultant who has no connection with the study should, “examine both the process and the product of the account, assessing their accuracy… In assessing the product, the auditor examines whether or not the findings, interpretations and conclusions are supported by the data”. This technique was employed at a number of conferences and lectures when I shared my findings. The external audit conducted at the conferences entailed two poster presentations. The research was also shared in a guest lecture I presented to a group of Masters students and with a group of fourth year undergraduate students who were undertaking qualitative research methods modules.

2.11.7 Rich Thick Description

Rich thick description provides the foundation for qualitative analysis and reporting (Patten 2002, p. 437). Creswell (1998, p. 203) describes the use of rich thick description as the means by which the reader can ‘step into’ the setting being described, allowing the particulars of the research process to be identified and its results to be compared to other cases. When sufficient detail of the experiences of those we have researched are presented this allows the information gathered to be relocated to other settings, and thus to conclude whether the findings can be reassigned as a result of mutual features (see also Bryman 2004; Guba and Lincoln 1994). To achieve this, I have included elements
of the raw data in this thesis in order to provide rich thick description of my participants’ experiences. By also allowing my participants’ voices to be heard through the use of verbatim quotations, I am hopeful that the reader will be able to ‘step into’ the setting.

2.12 Theoretical Generalisation

The question of generalisation is often controversial in qualitative research (Power 2008). However, studies which do not support representational generalisation can still seek to achieve generalisability through inference to theory rather than to specific populations (Hillebrand et al. 2001, p.653). Theoretical generalisation is the rationale for generalising used by many qualitative researchers, in which the contribution to wider social theory is the basis for generalisation (Bryman 1988 cited in Silverman 2005, p.130). The specific strategies that I employed to enhance my theoretical generalisability included theoretical sampling and ‘the comparative approach’ (Hammersley 1992 cited in Silverman 2005, p.128). Theoretical relevance was the basis by which the site participants were selected for inclusion in this research (Schwandt 2007, pp.126-127). This allowed me to select where and whom I believed could illustrate dimensions of key concepts and thus allow me to assess the development of my theoretical explanations (Silverman 2005, pp.129-131). I would argue that selecting the participants in this manner makes my contribution to theory more robust and trustworthy and extends the generalisability of this research (Hillebrand et al. 2001, p. 654). Using the comparative approach in which I compared my data and emergent concepts to other studies, has allowed me to make stronger
claims about my analysis and “directly tackles the question of generalisability by demonstrating the similarities and differences across a number of settings” (Perekyla 2004 cited in Silverman 2005, p. 129). Accordingly, I believe that I have taken sufficient steps to argue that this thesis offers theoretical generalisation.

Conclusions

This chapter presented the methodology adopted for this project. Having discussed the rationale for the study, the research question, and the aims and objectives of the research, the chapter documented the methodology adopted, discussing the research design, the conceptual framework and also the practical elements of the research. The methodological frame of my study was then discussed, providing the rationale for the qualitative and ethnographic framework employed. The philosophical and theoretical perspectives that have informed my methodology was then discussed. The chapter then details how entry to the site was achieved, the data collection methods and the method of data analysis implemented were subsequently discussed. The chapter closes with a section discussing the verification procedures I undertook in order to improve the trustworthiness of my research. The findings generated from the process just discussed are presented in subsequent chapters.
Chapter Three

A profile of the school and my central research participants

This chapter begins by profiling Rathwood College, the elite boarding school the fieldwork for this research was conducted in. The chapter then presents the profiles of the central participants in the school, including the school staff and management and the fifteen, first year students who I shadowed in the school.

3.1 Rathwood College: the elite boarding school

Rathwood College is one of Ireland’s most elite schools. An exclusive, private fee-paying, mixed sex, boarding and day boarding secondary school, Rathwood College attracts students from all over Ireland and also international students. With fees in the highest range, the student body is comprised exclusively of students from upper middle to upper class families. The student body is comprised of approximately 400 pupils between the ages of twelve and eighteen, of which the gender breakdown is close to parity. The findings of this research draws exclusively on the ethnographic work undertaken in this school, where after an initial broad sweep approach I narrowed my focus to several members of staff and a group of fifteen first year of secondary school boys and girls who were aged 12-13 years. With nearly a third of the class composed of international students, with eleven Irish, two Chinese, and two Nigerian students, this class would be representative of the proportions (if not necessarily the nationalities) of the international population in Rathwood College.
3.2 Central participants in the study

3.2.1 Staff participants

Robert is the head of the physical education department in Rathwood College and acted as my gate-keeper during my time in the school. Canadian born and raised, Robert moved to Ireland ten years ago and has worked the greater part of this time in Rathwood College. Robert enjoyed some success playing hockey at national level in Canada and continues to take a keen interest in the sport in Rathwood. He resides in the school with his wife and two small children.

Mrs Garson is the principal of Rathwood College. While she is of Irish descent, she was born and raised in England. Prior to her appointment in Rathwood College, Mrs Garson had taught and held the post of vice-principal in a number of English boarding schools. As is customary for Rathwood’s principals, Mrs Garson resides in the school with her husband and her family.

3.2.2 Student participants

Jocelyn is from County Carlow, and due to her father’s role with an overseas business development agency, her family have lived abroad in a number of different locations during her childhood. At primary level, Jocelyn had also previously attended an exclusive private boarding school which she boarded in from the age of nine to twelve. Her father is a past pupil of Rathwood College. Jocelyn is a very ambitious and dedicated student, highly achieving both academically and in her extracurricular
pursuits. Utilising her ‘natural’ leadership qualities, Jocelyn captains her hockey team, and takes an informal leadership role in her class.

Tristan, who is from County Wicklow, is well acquainted with boarding school life, having previously boarded from the age of seven at the same private boarding primary school that Jocelyn also attended. Both of Tristan’s parents attended private fee-paying schools; his mother attending an exclusive boarding school in Dublin and his father attending the exclusive Harrow School in the United Kingdom. Tristan takes great pride in his cricket and rugby skills that were honed in the equally sports rich environment of his previous boarding school.

Josh is from County Galway where he attended a local primary school. Playing at local and county level Josh had previously enjoyed much success in the GAA sports of hurling and Gaelic football. He admitted to initially experiencing homesickness when he first began boarding but quickly adjusted to his new world and his new commitments. Josh is the first member of his family to attend a boarding school, with both of his parents having attended local post-primary schools in their native County Galway.

Ope is a first year student in Rathwood College but in his second year boarding in the school, having repeated his first year. Ope is of Nigerian descent, and was born in the United Kingdom where his family resided for a number of years prior to moving to Ireland. Ope attended a local primary school in County Galway where his family now
live. Despite admitting to feeling out of his depth in the sporting environment of Rathwood when he first enrolled, Ope now enjoys much success in a variety of team and individual sports in the school.

Mina is also a first year student in the school. Mina is Chinese and came to Ireland for just one year for the purpose of improving her English. She claims that Rathwood College was chosen by her parents over other suitable schools in the United Kingdom and Ireland primarily because of the sports-rich culture in the school, something that she feels she has missed out on in her schooling to date. She has decided that she will attend an international school as a day pupil when she returns to China as she believes that there will be a stronger team sports culture in an international school in comparison to a traditional Chinese school.

Dominic, who is from a neighbouring town to where Rathwood College is located, attends the school as a day-boarder. Having previously attended an exclusive private fee-paying school at primary level, Dominic appeared to me to be the student who struggles to fit in most. For much of the time I observed his class Dominic was very much on the ‘sidelines’, often appearing awkward and ill at ease. Physically, he also stood out, appearing to pay little attention to the school’s strict uniform guidelines, and apparently struggled to keep up with his classmates at both his physical education classes and at afternoon sports.
Samuel is from a small town in the West of Ireland. He is the fourth of his siblings to board at Rathwood College, as did their father previously. Although a slight small boy, Samuel is definitely the pupil who could get the award for ‘most unlikely to be beaten’ at any pursuit he sets his mind to. Through what appeared to be mainly dogged determination, Samuel, (from all accounts, like his siblings before him) excels in all areas of school life.

Saffron also boards in Rathwood College. Nigerian born, Saffron’s family have lived in Ireland since she was a young child. She attended a local primary school in county Meath where her family now resides. Saffron is a very determined hardworking girl, who at thirteen has a career in the legal profession already mapped out for herself. Although Saffron appears naturally athletic, she puts a lot of pressure on herself and is rarely happy with how she performs in either her physical education class or on the sports field.

Alex, who is from County Wicklow, is the second of his siblings to board at Rathwood College. He had previously attended a local non-fee paying primary school in his home town. A very confident and probably what would be described as a ‘charming’ young man, Alex is a skilled communicator. Alex assumes an informal leadership role in his class.

Henry, whose family resides on the other side of the city from where Rathwood is located, is a day-boarder in the school. He had previously attended an exclusive private
fee-paying primary school. A very agreeable conscientious boy, Henry would probably struggle to survive in a larger, all male environment. In fact, even in the smaller family environment of Rathwood College, his gentle and sensitive nature could easily be taken advantage of. Despite his sensitive disposition, Henry strives at all times to do his class and his team proud.

*Tia* joined the class in January 2012. Despite this being only four months after the majority of her class mates had begun, strong bonds had formed between the rest of the class, a situation that resulted in Tia struggling to bond with the other boys and girls in Rathwood College. Furthermore, Tia, who is Chinese, arrived to Rathwood with a poor command of the English language, a further barrier to her bonding with her class. However, I believe it was Tia’s poor proficiency at, and indeed her total lack of enthusiasm for, any physical activities or sports that created the greatest difficulties for her forming bonds with her classmates.

*Lorcan*, whose family lived across the city from Rathwood College, had initially started as a day-boarder. After feeling he was missing out on some of the experience his classmates were enjoying in the school, Lorcan began boarding in his second term. Lorcan, who could be classified as the class ‘joker’ appears to use most of his energy in finding ways to do the least amount that he can get away with in the school without breaking the rules and getting detention.
India is a day-boarder in Rathwood College and had previously attended the local non-fee paying local Church of Ireland primary school. She is a quiet, studious girl, who also took a great interest in the team sports that she participated in.

Georgia, whose family live in Kilkenny, is a boarder in the school. Her family had previously lived in Dublin, where she attended a private fee-paying primary in an exclusive suburb of the city. Georgia, who is a very accomplished equestrian, does not usually compete in school sporting competitions, preferring to travel with a small number of other Rathwood students to a local equestrian centre where, as a team, they compete in polocrosse and show jumping.

Dylan, who lives on the far side of the city that Rathwood College is located, also boards in the school. He had previously attended the same exclusive fee-paying primary school that Thomas attended. Dylan has very high expectations of Rathwood College, and often seemed frustrated when the school does not live up to his expectations. He also has very high expectations of himself especially at physical activities and sports, and seemed to place a lot of pressure on himself to succeed in these activities.

3.2.3 Parental participation

Two parents who played an active role in the school also participated in the study. Rosemary, whose two sons were day-boarders in the school, was an active member of the parents’ council and was regularly in the school fulfilling her duties. Callum, father
of first year student Edward, was on a short term contract (covering maternity leave) teaching mathematics in the school.
Chapter Four

Educational Advantage

Introduction

This chapter addresses the cultural practices within elite schooling research question. It has a dual purpose, seeking to empirically and theoretically explore educational privilege and the role of elite schools in this process, followed by an empirical analysis of elite education from an Irish perspective. The chapter begins with a discussion on how class privilege and the study of elites has been neglected by social scientists in recent decades, as a result of which the sociological gaze has rarely been directed upwards towards the most privileged educational settings, a consequence of which has been the dearth of knowledge on the day to day practices in these elite educational environments. A theoretical analysis of education then follows with the previously dominant functionalist perspective, the prevailing assumption of which is that “innate talent and ability, combined with effort will yield positive educational outcomes,” (MacVeigh 2012, p.27) explored first. There then follows an analysis of the conflict theory perspective on education, where it is argued that amassed financial and cultural resources play a much greater role in achieving educational success than any individual traits or abilities. Utilising the concepts of the hidden curriculum and cultural capital, the mechanisms through which elite advantage within the education system is achieved are then discussed. The chapter concludes with an analysis of elite schooling in Ireland, which reveals the distinctive characteristics of these schools and the role of a strong meritocratic ideology in the reproduction of privilege among Irish dominant
groups.

4.1 Elite schooling

While there may be consensus in a given society as to which schools are the ‘top’ schools, there is no objective criteria as to what constitutes an elite school. The difficulty in achieving this objective criteria results from the benchmark being used to adjudicate these schools differing significantly among the different educational stakeholders (parents, teachers, academics, media etc) and also in different countries. For Courtois (2012), elite status is achieved by those schools that converge in terms of high fee structures, results and the ‘pedigree’ of those who attend, while Gaztambide-Fernandez (2009, p.26) identifies five criteria that he asserts must be met in order to achieve elite schools status, and these include being typologically, scholastically, historically, geographically and demographically elite. However I would argue that while there is “remarkable continuity and consistency - among raters and over time - in the rankings” it is not really possible to specify with exact precision particular characteristics of schools that define them as elite institutions, a difficulty I would argue that is due to the extent to which elite status rests on the “less tangible, less sharply demarcated subjective criteria of reputation and prestige” (Kingston and Lewis 1990, p. xvii). Accordingly, the term ‘elite school’ in this thesis refers to a small set of society’s most exclusive and prestigious private fee-paying schools. Additionally, while in common with schools in the United Kingdom and several other Commonwealth countries, the use of the term ‘elite school’ can be applied to both primary and second
level schools, the focus of this thesis is specifically on second level schools, which students generally attend from the age of twelve to eighteen years.

4.2 Neglect of educational privilege in social sciences

In this section I discuss the neglect of educational advantage in the social sciences, a failure that is clearly exacerbated by the neglect of all dominant groups by social scientists in recent decades. This failure to study educational advantage in the social sciences has resulted in the lives of the rich and privileged remaining obscured from prying eyes (Nader 1969). I would argue that for this reason, little is known of the mechanisms employed by elite groups to reproduce themselves to their privileged position, and what meaning and practices they maintain to define and sustain their identity and status.

This lack of attention to elite groups is even more marked within educational scholarship, where the focus has remained almost exclusively on the experiences of those disadvantaged in education. This persistent spotlight has explored the factors that contribute to disadvantage and underachievement in schooling from a myriad of different viewpoints including family situations, parental education, economic poverty, poor housing, ethnic or cultural difference, rural isolation, poor attendance, pupil-teacher ratios, under-resourcing of certain schools to the suitability of the school/education system itself. Yet, with few researchers venturing into the rarefied world of elite education, “a world in which abundance, opportunity and success are defining characteristics”, this has resulted in a lack of understanding as to how advantage in
education exacerbates educational exclusion (Gaztambide-Fernandez 2009, p.1). For this reason Gaztambide-Fernandez (2009, p.1) argues for greater consideration to be given to how advantage in education impacts across the entire educational system:

“Studying up’ is crucial for understanding the dynamics of an educational system in which elite schools are an important piece of the puzzle. Studying the experience of students in the most privileged educational settings sheds light on the social and cultural dynamics that shape inequality across the educational system.”

Moreover, while elite education remains outside the public and scholarly gaze, a fuller understanding of “the education system — and its relationship to society and culture — and ultimately” how to improve it, cannot emerge (Howard & Gaztambide-Fernandez 2010, p.2). Furthermore, it is clear that studying the rarefied world of elites is important because “they create the ladders others must climb to move up in the world”, and I would argue that it is nowhere more important than in the elite school, “which have been official ladders of mobility and opportunity”, and within which the “highest rungs of these ladders have been obscure[d]” (Stevens 2009, p.4).

4. 3 A meritorious society

Elite education and educational advantage remaining outside the gaze of educational researchers cannot simply be explained as a result of a gap in the literature. I would argue that the near universal acceptance of the ideology of meritocracy has been a significant factor in leading to social scientists’ gaze being averted from elite scholarship. The rhetoric of individual merit has been an adaptive response to changes in the manner in which elites reproduce their privilege in recent times, where in contrast to previous eras, where leisured elites were assured of and seen as entitled to secure
futures through their birthright alone, contemporary elites must be seen to have ‘earned’
their fortune. Whilst there is clearly still an appreciation of the role of inheritances in
the reproduction of contemporary elites privilege, there is now an assumption that these
bequests must also be earned. To the same effect, Pincon and Pincon (1998, p.10) argue
that there is now the belief that without the ability to manage the heritage “that befalls
you…you forfeit social structure”. I would argue that it is this apparent rejection of the
archaic inheritance practices of elites and the almost universal adoption of these
meritocratic principles, which has succeeded to a large degree in easing concern about
elite advantage and a pedigree-based hierarchical order. Indeed, the strength of the
meritocratic discourse is such that nowadays elite status and rank is typically explained
as the result of their own doing, not as the result of any inherited or cultural advantages.
This belief that everyone, even the rich, “must acquire their positions through hard
work,” has resulted in a confidence that anyone can achieve what they set their mind to,
essentialy implying that “upward mobility is a realistic possibility” for all (Khan 2011,
p.14). I would argue that the prevalence of such beliefs in our society that elite
advantage is becoming even greater in recent times.

4.4 Education: a Functionalist meritocracy

The championing of the education system as a meritocratic institution has been largely
promoted in recent decades by Functionalists, the dominant sociological perspective in
education. It is viewed by many as the primary means of expanding life chances for all,
and accordingly the means by which greater social equality can be achieved (Tovey and
Share 2003, p.188). As this “engine” of meritocracy, education’s role is to identify and
select the most talented and motivated individuals and subsequently provide them with
the appropriate educational training in “direct proportion to this individual
merit” (McNamee & Miller 2004, p.95). As such, each individual is provided with equal
opportunities to achieve their greatest potential for knowledge in a number of different
subjects. From this perspective the education system is an arena where every child,
regardless of social background, has the same chance to succeed, and where success is
largely determined by an individual’s own efforts and abilities. The determinants of
success in this system are generally held to be a combination of factors including innate
talent, hard work, and having the right attitude and moral virtue (McNamee & Miller
2004), with the individual alone determining success and failure (Drudy & Lynch 1993;
Considine & Dukelow 2009). In essence, it is “a society where ability and effort count
for more than privilege and inherited status” (Hurn 1993, p.45). According to this
ideology, limitless opportunities exist for all individuals to go as far as their own merit
takes them (see Considine & Dukelow 2009, pp.287–299). Thus from this standpoint,
education is an ‘opportunity’ that is open to all, where all students are given the same
chances to gain the valuable skills and competencies necessary for their adult life.
Proponents of this system argue that a meritocratic society is a more equitable and
gainful society, where distinctions based on criteria such as class, race and gender will
diminish in time (McNamee & Miller 2004). Further noble goals of education are said
to include personal well being (White 2002) and instilling liberal values (Halstead and
Taylor 1996).
4.5 The Conflict Theory perspectives on education

From a conflict perspective, however, the reality is very different. From this viewpoint, rather than operating to promote equality, the education system functions to reproduce and protect the interests of the dominant classes. Although they recognise it as only one part of a much larger and more complicated process, with social reproduction happening in many locations, from the home, to the workplace, to social events, the education system is deemed by conflict theorists to be the primary site of social reproduction, serving dominant social groups to reproduce its wealth, privilege and power legitimately (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990).

4.5.1 Hidden in plain view

With education typically portrayed as an “unproblematic good,” continued inequality in educational attainment tends to be explained by differential access and participation rates (Lynch 1999). As a result it has been assumed that increased participation in secondary and third level schooling in recent years equates to increased equality of opportunity (Whelan and Hannon 1999). This has resulted in educational content generally not being problematised, with little attention paid to “what was being taught and how” (Gewirtz & Cribb 2009, p.42). Yet as Connell (1993, p.18) has noted, education is a social process in which the “how much” cannot be separated from the “what”, with the ‘what’ of education referring to the role of curriculum. Notwithstanding a small number of prominent commentators highlighting the lack of neutrality in the school curriculum, critical examination of the curriculum continues to be an aspect of the education system that fails to get sufficient attention in debates on

Contrary to the commonly held assumption that a standardised curriculum is in place across all schooling, this thesis contends that the content and quality of schooling differs significantly according to the social make-up of the student body. Whereas the formal curriculum is explicit and documented and for the most part standardised across all schools, the many differences in schooling, in terms of student experiences and outcomes, strongly suggests that there is a “hidden curriculum” in operation (Gewirtz and Cribb 2009). In contrast to the formal or intentional curriculum, which is the set of learnings that the school system consciously and explicitly teaches, the hidden curriculum is by and large not a product of conscious intention (Cornbleth 2012).

Generally the ‘hidden curriculum’ focuses on the informal aspects of schooling, the socialisation role and what is implicitly taught through how the school is organised, and how it transmits tacit messages about attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviour (Gewirtz & Cribb 2009). Through the transmission of these aptitudes and attitudes necessary for getting along in school and the larger society, the hidden curriculum initiates the student into a society’s dominant culture by fostering conformity to the cultural values which are compatible with it. It is this capability of schooling to tailor the different educational experiences for students from different social classes that is critical to the culturally reproductive processes of schooling. With the numerous messages conveyed in the school varying according to the social class make-up of the school, this emphasises
different cognitive and behavioural skills in each social setting and thus contributes to
the development of students in radically different ways. Accordingly, students are taught
how to accept their society’s inherent cultural values and crucially its expectations.
Thus, it can be argued that the hidden curriculum serves to maintain the status quo and
the prevailing dominant culture (Cornbleth 2012). Essentially, “it perpetuates particular
cultural traditions at the expense of others, and in doing so reinforces images of what is
or is not culturally valued in a given society” (Lynch 1999, p.17).

I would contend that such is the acceptance of the practices of dominant groups, that
much of the ‘hidden’ curriculum is effectively ‘hidden’ in plain view. There are few
attempts made to conceal the vast differences in schooling; in the vastly different
teaching styles, the considerable differences in resources and in their physical
environment and crucially the differences in students’ aspirations and achievements.
This ability of powerful groups to dominate without recourse to “overt mechanisms of
domination” is illustrative of how “dominant or hegemonic ideologies act to “saturate
our very consciousness, so that the educational, economic and social world we see and
interact with, and the common-sense interpretations we put on it becomes the world
‘tout court,' the only world” (Apple cited in Gewirtz & Cribb 2009, p.113).

Bowles and Gintis (1976) influential ‘correspondence’ theory highlighted the apparent
connections between the everyday activities in our schools and the reproduction of
unequal economic relationships with which we work and live. They contend that
schools operate in the ‘long shadow of work,’ where their primary function is to serve
the needs of capitalism. Through their ‘correspondence theory,’ they sought to demonstrate the relationship between the norms of schooling and the maintenance of the capitalist system. The aim of this covert role of education is to socialise young people into accepting the role assigned to them by the capitalist class (see Drudy & Lynch 1993, pp.167–188), with “schools … expected to sort students into different programs, providing different learning experiences in preparation for very different and unequal places in the nation’s economy” (Oakes & Rogers 2006, p.159). In such a system, schools provide different classes and social groups with the knowledge and skills they needed to occupy their respective places in the labour force (Bowles & Gintis 1976).

Crucially, as the labour market is a pyramid where only a small number of ‘leaders’ are required at the top and a large number of workers required at the bottom, the education system is organised to produce workers to fit this model (Bowles and Gintis 1976). Thus, for all but the most elite students, schooling revolves around teacher authority and student passivity, as the majority of students are prepared for subservient positions. In direct contrast to this, the young people attending elite schools are prepared for their future professional and managerial occupational roles through teaching practices and forms of teacher-student relationships that train students to be autonomous and self-directed learners (Bowles and Gintis 1976). Class work in the elite school concentrates on developing the student’s analytical intellectual powers, where children are “continually asked to reason through a problem, to produce intellectual products that are both logically sound and of top academic quality” (Anyon 1980, p.185). Accordingly, elite education focuses on “articulateness, authoritativeness, and ability to work
effectively in groups”, all forms of valued cultural capital, and the skills necessary in leadership roles (Young 1990, p.207). For these reasons, I would argue that the differentiated form of education that is delivered in elite schools results in expanded future options, both professionally and socially, for the sons and daughters of the dominant classes.

4.5.2 Cultural stratification

As one of the few sociologists to retain an interest in elite groups to the end of the Twentieth Century, Bourdieu is credited with offering us valuable insights into how elite groups manage their inheritances, providing a “powerful means” of understanding how dominant social groups “establish social distinction and reproduce social advantage” (Light and Kirk 2001, p.81). In expanding the concept of class inequality beyond one of material inequality, the role that non-economic resources play in reproducing inequality is recognised. As a result, capital is recognised in its different forms, including cultural, social and symbolic forms. In acknowledging capital in these different guises and highlighting cultural obstacles, I would argue that Bourdieu provides a cogent explanation for the rigid patterns of stratification that persists when “[e]conomic obstacles are not sufficient to explain” (Bourdieu & Passeron 1979, p.8). Whilst economic inequality continues to be the most obvious marker of distinction between the classes, the role of the less obvious markers of distinction must also be acknowledged in the reproduction of inequality. Cultural capital is recognised as the aesthetic preferences, linguistic styles, and attitudes that are highly valued in society (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). Social capital is the connections, relationships, and
networks of influence that one employs throughout the course of one’s life that enables them to succeed. Essentially cultural capital is “what you know” while social capital is “who you know” (Calhoun 2000, p. 696). The dynamic between the different forms of capital allows one form to be converted into another, aiding the intergenerational reproduction of privilege (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977). I argue that it is the ‘misrecognition’ of these forms of capital as innate personal attributes or knowledge that is of most concern. Failing to recognise the value of these assets as valuable, transferable forms of capital, effectively hides the cause of inequality. Indeed, it can be argued that without an understanding of these metaphorical forms of capital it is “impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world” (Bourdieu 1986, p.46).

Through cultural reproduction, members of the dominant classes acquire the knowledge necessary to maintain their privileged position, propagating the social, cultural, and economic capital of their dominant classes (Bourdieu 1986). The culture of the dominant classes serves as a vital distinguishing feature, marking the elite as a distinct and distinctly dominant social group, and serving as a key resource utilised by elites to maintain their dominant position in society. Whilst generally considered the result of innate individualistic choices, it is the contention of this thesis that the manifestation of the dominant culture is largely determined by social forces, the function of which is to make social ‘distinctions’. Thus, by virtue of their dominant position in society, the middle and upper middle classes are able to define what a society values as good taste, reproducing the dominance of their own culture as ‘legitimised distinction’ (Franks
1991). This ‘elite’ culture is, for Bourdieu, a device skilfully employed by the dominant classes to exclude those in subordinate classes and thus preserve and reproduce the existing class structure. Moreover, as an appreciation of elite or high culture is not something that can be acquired at will, requiring training to develop a true appreciation of and desire to consume these cultural products, (a training that is usually confined to the homes of the dominant classes) makes the acquisition of cultural capital prohibitive to all but those people who grow to maturity in advantaged socioeconomic households.

4.5.3 The legitimation of elite culture

Elite culture is the set of cultural products held in the highest esteem by a society, and is typically defined as those elite cultural forms that are largely exclusive to the dominant classes (Bourdieu 1984; DiMaggio & Useem 1978). It is contrasted with popular or low brow forms of culture, which are typically associated with middle and working class cultural consumption. Elite culture is perhaps most typically associated with cultural styles such as opera, symphony orchestras, ballet, the decorative arts, fine art, museums and galleries, and the theatre. However, in reality, elite culture encompasses any cultural pursuits or goods that are consumed by a privileged minority, including everything from food, clothing preferences, sporting activities and travel destinations. The association in common discourse between the word ‘cultured’ and elite cultural tastes is a clear reflection of the privileged position that the dominant classes hold in society. For example, with music; opera or classical music is considered more refined and cultivated than music typically consumed by the working classes, such as traditional or folk music.
It is the contention of this thesis that this ranking of the aesthetic tastes and cultural participation of the elite as highbrow and superior to all other forms of cultural consumption is a critical factor in the legitimation of elites’ social position. As acceptance is not alone elicited from those who are most privileged by it, but also and most crucially from those who are disfavoured by it (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977). As a result the consensual or hegemonic acceptance of the legitimacy of these elite cultural practices serves to not alone position the dominant classes as superior, but also positions others as inferior (Bourdieu 1984). Crucially, not alone does this total legitimation of bourgeois culture make it very difficult for subordinate groups to accrue any ‘profit’ from the conversion of their own cultural capital, but also serves to make it very difficult for the working classes to identify and challenge the basis of the inequality they experience (Skeggs 1997). With working class culture typically used as a marker of poor taste and individual failure, this enables the dominant classes to claim an apparently natural entitlement to the privileges they enjoy (Skeggs 1997).

Whilst this cultural stratification scheme has become less rigid in recent times with the distinction between high, middle and low brow forms of culture diminishing (Peterson 1992: Peterson & Simkus 1992: Peterson & Kern 1996), it is clear that the consumption of high brow cultural forms is still largely confined to dominant groups. The traditional cultural hierarchy has changed with good taste no longer defined purely as an appreciation and consumption of high cultural forms, it is increasingly defined as an appreciation of high, middle and low brow forms of culture (Peterson & Kern 1996). Peterson (1992), who had originally posited the notion that the distinction between elite
and popular forms of culture were diminishing, has argued that the distinction between cultural omnivores (those who consume, high, middle and low brow culture) and univores (those who consume only one from of culture) was now replacing the traditional cultural opposition. Contrary to those studies, cultural consumption largely “continues to be structured along class lines” (Tampubolon 2010, p.1), with consumption of high cultural forms remaining largely exclusive to elite groups. Additionally, while a greater tolerance and appreciation of a wider range of cultural products amongst elites has been noted, this tolerance stops short at low culture (Bryson 1996). Indeed it is possible that this intolerance to low brow cultural products may be more important in social classification than positive identification with high status cultural products (Douglas 1996). Accordingly, while it is clear that there is some evidence of changing patterns of cultural consumption in recent decades, with elites consuming a wider range of cultural products, the consumption of high brow cultural forms is still largely confined to dominant groups. In short, cultural consumption and appreciation is still strongly influenced by an individual’s social class.

These cultural preferences, while generally accepted as innate, individualistic choices, are credited with playing a central role in contributing to the established social order, establishing and legitimating social hierarchies (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977). The value of these shared beliefs and attitudes has been recognised as a unifying factor among the elite, and a major determinant of an individual’s life-chances. The role of culture is credited with providing a number of significant functions in society, playing a key role in holding society together and giving individuals a sense of belonging. This cohesive
role that culture plays is stressed by a number of sociologists who argue that by providing collective representations of themselves, culture inspires “sentiments of unity and mutual support” (Griswold 2004, p.xvi). It is through a society’s shared cultural practices and values that individuals and groups define themselves, forging their identity and distinguishing themselves from other social groups. Culture is defined as a complex system of behaviours, objects, norms, values and beliefs that “defines the way of life for a given group or society” (Anderson & Taylor 2005, p.54). Culture is not confined to a few specific areas of an individual’s life, but can impact on all areas of life, including the “stories, beliefs, media, ideas, works of art, religious practices, fashions, rituals, specialised knowledge, and common sense” of a society (Griswold 2004, p.xvi). Accordingly cultural attributes are ranked as good or bad, beautiful or ugly, having worth or worthless dependent on the cultural values of a given society.

4.5.4 The role of culture in educational privilege

From a cultural stratification perspective, educational success or failure is explained by the amount and type of cultural capital inherited from the home and school environment rather than by measures of individual talent or achievement. Thus, those who have higher levels of valued cultural capital gain the most access to, and benefit from, the education system. By being exposed to elite culture in the home and in the elite education system, the children of the dominant classes receive the necessary training to acquire a ‘natural’ predilection for this culture, thereby acquiring the knowledge and appreciation of high culture which is a prerequisite for access to the dominant classes. Access to the cultural resources in the elite home play a key role in helping children
adjust to school and to achieve academically, transforming cultural resources to cultural capital. As each class has its own particular culture, students from homes with a culture most closely aligned to the culture of the school will therefore have a distinct advantage (Aronowitz and Giroux 1986). As the culture of the school is unashamedly the culture of the dominant class, this places students from a middle or upper middle class background at a distinct advantage in school (Aronowitz & Giroux 1986), where “teachers and other gatekeepers judge and assess students by the criteria set by the dominant culture” (Marks 2009, p. 90). While they appear to be impartial and neutral, acting “in the name of fairness and objectivity”, it is clear schools also function to transmit the benefits of a valued culture (Bourdieu 1977, p.167).

Such an education system places those who attend elite private schools at a distinct advantage. As the culture of the school is so closely aligned to the dominant classes, elite groups are far more knowledgeable of, and at ease in, the education system (Bourdieu 1977). This familiarity with the school means that dominant groups know how schools work and accordingly they know what strategies are needed to be successful. While already imbued with reserves of cultural capital on the day they enrol, the greater emphasis on high culture in these schools results in greatly enhanced life chances for such students. Elite schools effectively convey the distinctive patterns of speech, mannerisms and social graces of the upper classes. I would argue that these skills, together with the promotion of a competitive spirit combine to make elite schools “genuine executive training grounds” (Bourdieu 1998, p.88). In such circumstances, working class children are at a disadvantage from their first day in school as the
education system creates hurdles for those without the requisite cultural knowledge that are very difficult to overcome (Marks 2009).

4.6 Elite Schooling in Ireland

This section examines elite schooling in Ireland, focusing explicitly on the small pool of Ireland’s most exclusive fee-paying schools. While recognising that these schools vary in many ways, I argue that there are certain characteristics that elite schools share, characteristics which Mc Dermott (2010) argues “make them unappealing to those who believe that equality of opportunity ought to be the foundation stone of our education system”.

Top places in Ireland’s school league tables are consistently dominated by some of the country’s most exclusive fee-paying schools (Faller 2013; Sunday Times 2009; 2010; 2011; 2012). These tables rank schools on the basis of progression rates to third level education. The “smaller class sizes, strong religious ethos, extracurricular ‘innovation’ and the holistic approach to education” offered by these exclusive schools is said to be responsible for their remarkable success (Butler 2009). Such an explanation is congruent with the functionalist perspective, the dominant perspective in the Irish education system, which contends that the success of students and their future career prospects are generally dependent on personal attributes such as intelligence and a strong work ethic. Yet a conflict theory perspective views such meritocratic ideology, which is particularly strong in the Irish education system, as facilitating the continuation of class-based advantage, effectively “camouflaging the continued existence of
With fees ranging up to €15,000 a year (and in the most exclusive schools, boarding fees that can account for as much as an additional €10,000 a year), it is clear that elite private education largely remains the preserve of the middle and upper middle classes in Irish society (Kennedy 2009; Courtois 2012; Walshe & Hickey 2008). Such fees raise an annual income of over €116.9 million (Department of Education and Skills 2011), a bottom line figure which does not include the many other contributions that are sought by these schools to maintain their high standards (Department of Education and Skills 2011; Walshe & Hickey 2008). Despite benefiting from this very healthy income stream, the 55 fee-paying schools in Ireland also receive a very generous €100 million of taxpayers’ money each year (Murray 2013; Smith 2014; Maloney 2014). Moreover, while there are clearly dramatic variations in the fortunes of schools in the fee-paying sector in general, the attendance figures in Ireland’s elite schools would suggest that they have not suffered unduly during the recent economic crisis in Ireland. For example in the elite Glenstal Abbey School the first year intake had dropped to nineteen in 2010, but had quickly returned to full capacity of forty by 2012, despite fees for boarders being almost €17,000 a year (Boland 2012).

While most schools have been affected by a range of dramatic cuts in state funding (see Flynn 2008 for an overview; Economist 2013), generous state subvention of fee-paying
schools has survived relatively unscathed\textsuperscript{6} despite the harshest cuts being implemented in the eight austerity budgets\textsuperscript{7} the country has experienced since the economic crash of 2008. In spite of a strong recommendation from Colm McCarthy’s Bord Snip group (who acknowledged the great inequity in the continued funding of these schools) that there should be a 25\% reduction in funding to fee-paying schools\textsuperscript{8}, there has been much reticence by successive governments to meddle with the state funding of these fee-paying schools. It is even more significant that in Budget 2009, the Irish State decided to leave the amount of state funding to elite fee paying schools unaltered, while simultaneously reducing the payment rates of student grants, reducing and removing certain ETB\textsuperscript{9} allowances. I would argue that the reticence on the government’s part to remove funding to fee-paying schools reveals the extent to which politicians are acutely aware that any policies that threaten middle class advantages threaten electoral advantage (O’Brien 2008), all the while legitimating this inequality through a discourse of meritocracy.

The roll of past pupils for many of these schools reads like a ‘who’s who’ of leaders in Irish politics, business and the professions, documenting the power and influence that

\textsuperscript{6} Despite imposing eight harsh austerity budgets, the only ‘pain’ that successive Irish Government’s have imposed since 2008, on the school fee-paying sector has been to increase class sizes. In the budget of 2013, the government increased the ratio by two points for fee-paying schools from 21:1 to 23:1, while maintaining the 19:1 for the free educational sector. (Merrionstreet.ie, 2012).

\textsuperscript{7} Since 2008, seven budgets have taken €28 billion out of the Irish economy in spending cuts and tax rises, a future that amounts to 17\% of GDP at this time (Economist 2013).

\textsuperscript{8} It is noteworthy that this group’s recommendation acknowledges that the proposed cut will not result in any significant change for the bigger private schools, effectively leaving the existing status quo unaltered (See Mc Carthy et al, Special group on public service numbers and expenditure programmes 2009, pp. 62-63).

\textsuperscript{9} ETB are Educational Training Boards which offers unemployed people an opportunity of returning to adult education. See http://www.etb.ie for further details.
the graduates of Ireland’s top schools wield (Sunday Tribune 2003). The exclusive Belvedere College, for instance has educated writers of the caliber of James Joyce and business leaders like Tony O’Reilly. Clongowes Wood College in Naas has educated business leaders Michael O’Leary and Michael Smurfit and former Taoiseach John Bruton. Dublin’s Alexandra College lists its most noteworthy past pupils as politician Ivana Bacik and Supreme Court Judge Mrs. Susan Denham. The prevalence of the privately educated is also apparent in leading business circles with up to 40% of Irish chief executives and business leaders having attended elite schools such as Blackrock College, Belvedere College and Clongowes Wood College, despite the fact that Ireland's fee-paying schools account for 14.4 percent of secondary schools overall (Keenan 2012; CRO 2009). Similarly, seven of the present eleven Irish Supreme Court judges (The Supreme Court of Ireland 2014), and a disproportionate number of Irish politicians (Sunday Tribune 2003) have spent their formative years in private fee-paying schools, of which a significant number of these have attended the country’s most exclusive schools. In the United Kingdom a similar process has occurred and recent research has highlighted the extent to which high status occupations are dominated by the privately educated. More than half of the leading figures in politics, law, medicine, business and journalism have been educated in private fee-paying schools (Milburn 2009). Despite a mere 7% of the population attending private schools, this elite group provides 75% of judges, 70% of finance directors, almost 70% of barristers in the top chambers, and one in three MPs (Milburn 2009). Similarly, research from the US and from France would suggest that recruitment to elite positions is restricted to a minority of elite schools (Domhoff 1967; Tomlinson 2005; Bourdieu 1998).
The predominance in Ireland of the privately educated in key leadership positions highlights the extent to which elite schools act as conduits of privilege, where they not alone determine a student’s academic learning, but also perhaps more importantly shape students’ lifestyles and life chances. These findings would strongly suggest that these schools are central institutions in the process of elite socialisation within the Irish education system, providing particular forms of entry into (and preparation for) high occupational status and positions of economic and political power. Such evidence strongly suggests that for Irish elite groups, investment in elite education is highly rational, paying rich dividends for those who attend these schools.

While it is true that the Irish education system has a core curriculum common to all school types, the availability of specific subjects is often determined by the size, gender, and class composition of the school (Lynch 1989, p.154). This is most evident in the greater emphasis on non-technical subjects in elite schools. Subjects that many vocational schools prioritise such as woodwork and metal work are not offered as subjects in elite schools, while the ‘classics’, such as Latin and Greek, are no longer seen as having a practical value for most students, are still considered of value for elite schools. Furthermore communication and analytical skills and the cultivation of social and personal responsibility are all skills and attitudes strongly associated with leadership positions. The development of these skills and attitudes is a feature of Ireland’s elite schools, reflecting the role of elite schools in preparing the next generation of elites for their future roles as key-players at the pinnacle of Irish society (Kennedy 2010).
For all students, access to educational resources such as books and computers, smaller
class sizes, sporting facilities and private tuition on a one to one basis, are positively
related to students’ educational outcomes (Lynch 1989; Lynch and Lodge 2002; Smyth
2008; Smyth & Hannon 2007). However, the high fees and substantial contribution
from the State, together with additional generous contributions from their student’s
families and the religious orders running the schools, have allowed elite schools to tailor
all aspects of schooling to impact significantly on their students’ educational outcomes.
I would argue that the resources that elite schools enjoy allows for the development of
the ‘whole personality’ and encourages confidence and ‘leadership skills’ (Allen and
Hayes 2008, p.17). These differences are indicative of the two-pathway education
system that exists in Irish society, “whereby some are trained to become managers who
can conceptualise and lead, while others are destined to become ‘operatives’ who are
permanently bossed around” (Allen 2008 and Hayes, 17).

Consequently, I would argue that the remarkable ‘success’ that the country’s most
exclusive fee-paying schools enjoy topping annual league tables, is not as Butler (2009)
has argued, a demonstration of the ‘all-round excellence’ of these schools, it is more
accurately described as a demonstration of the impact of continuing class inequality in
the Irish education system, where schooling is tailored to a student’s social background,
which results in social privilege being transformed into personal merit and social
disadvantage into personal deficiency (Kennedy 2009; Lynch 1989; Lynch 1999).
Rather than leading to a fairer more equitable society the strong meritocratic discourse
that exists in the Irish education system actually encourages the reproduction of
inequality. Also and perhaps more importantly, I would argue that its use provides a way of justifying the inequality in education (Kennedy & Power 2010). Accordingly, I view the facilitation of class-based advantage through elite schooling as effectively “camouflaging the continued existence of privilege” (Power 2008, p.75; Lynch & Lodge, 2002; Drudy & Lynch, 1993).

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I developed a theoretical and empirical understanding of the operationalisation of advantage through elite schooling. The chapter highlighted the role of elite schools and that of a strong meritocratic ideology in the reproduction of privilege among Irish dominant groups. Utilising the concepts of the hidden curriculum and cultural capital in this process, this chapter demonstrated how the existing education system clearly places those who attend elite private schools at a distinct advantage, casting light on the pivotal role the education system plays in conditioning and institutionalising people to accept their future situation and in orienting their expectations to that future (Greaves et al. 2007). In highlighting the predominance of the privately educated in key leadership positions in Irish society, this chapter revealed the extent to which these schools act as conduits of privilege, enabling dominant groups to procure educational advantage for their offspring, providing them with the necessary skills and attitudes that enable them to convert cultural capital into social resources, and to use these resources to gain wealth, reputation, and power. This next chapter will discuss the social construction of the elite body and the central role of the physical curriculum in elite schooling in reproduction of elite privilege.
Introduction

This chapter addresses the central question of this thesis, exploring issues to do with the social construction of the body and the role that the physical curriculum in elite schooling plays in this process. This chapter argues that physical ability and demeanour are not neutral concepts, that not alone do bodies bear the mark of one’s social background, but are actively involved in the production and reproduction of social difference (Bourdieu 1986). The chapter opens with a discussion on the social construction of the body in sociology, enquiring into the degree to which our embodied selves are produced and reproduced through the physicality of the body. In their observation of physical practices, Mauss (1979) and Young (1980) reject the notion that the operation of bodily techniques are “invariant across history and culture” revealing the extent to which our bodily automaticisms are the “product of social constitution” and are a cultural performance (Hoy 1999, p.3). Utilising Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, the chapter then explores how despite not being amendable to conscious reflection, our bodily dispositions respond and evolve to our changing environment, revealing “how one comports oneself, physically, socially [and] emotionally” becomes “natural” and “normal” and synchronised to a large extent with those that share the same social location (McLeod and Yates 2012, p. 90). Subsequently, in his conceptualisation of the body as a form of capital, Shilling’s concept of physical capital is utilised to call
attention to how these socially constructed bodily dispositions produce bodies of different values, whilst revealing the considerable ‘profits’ that are to be gained from the acquisition of the socially valued body (Shilling 2003).

The chapter then proceeds to explore the role of the physical curriculum in elite schooling in the construction of the socially valued body. In revealing the centrality of the physical curriculum in these schools, valuable insights are provided into the distinctive corporeal practices among elite groups. In highlighting the distinctive nature of this elite school physical curriculum, the chapter reveals a pronounced emphasis on the transmission of corporeal knowledge, a priority that has been evident since the foundation of the elite school system. The chapter concludes by calling attention to the critical role that the physical curriculum and in particular physical education and school sport in elite schools play in creating distinctions between the elite educated student and their non-elite educated peer, a function of elite schooling that I would argue enables dominant groups to define their bodies and lifestyles as superior, and accordingly is an intrinsic component in the maintenance and reproduction of their elite culture.

5.1 The body in sociology

Despite the significant role the body has played in sociological theory, particularly in gender and race studies, the human body as an entity worthy of sociological interest in its own right has been neglected by scholars (Shilling 2003). The common-sense view of the body that has held has seen differences in behaviours and abilities being attributed solely to biological and physical differences, where the mind and body are
perceived as distinct entities. This mind-body dualism posits that the mind and body are of two distinct natures, where the mind is “subject to voluntary control, usually characterised as will, and the body is subject to laws which govern and regulate processes which do not require conscious effort or attention” (Blackman 2008, p.4). This postulation gives prominence to the mind in defining the person, with the body seen “at best, as the mind's vehicle and, at worst, as driven by desires and appetites that need the mind's restraining influence, guidance and command” (Longhurst et al. 2008, p.200). In recent times this dualism has been challenged. Charged with pushing the mind and body too far apart, the view of the body as a purely physical or mechanical phenomenon now holds less weight. This has resulted in literature on the body viewing the body as a social, as well as biological and physical entity, thereby challenging “the mechanic mind body distinction of Cartesian dualism by demonstrating that perception is formed by the interrelationship between the lived body and its environment” (Woodward 2009, p.106). Subsequently, this chapter seeks to make clear the extent to which bodies are not only flesh and blood and are not immune to cultural influence, but are “inextricably linked to the selves who inhabit them and the social worlds in which we exist” (Woodward 2009, p.106).

5.2 The social construction of the body

Commentators that reject the common-sense view of the body as a purely biological construct have sought to demonstrate how much of the construction of the body is dictated by social processes (Kirk 2002; Light & Kirk 2001; Shilling 2003). From this perspective, the body is “a social entity on which social beliefs, social values and social
practices are inscribed” (Gard & Wright 2005, p.175), or as “a screen upon which social and cultural concerns are projected” (Freund 1988, p.839). In looking beyond the body’s role as “a mere input mechanism for informations that the brain then makes sense of” (Khan 2011, p.116), and following Khan (2011) I argue that the body can itself, “be the site of inquiry” (p.116). Similarly, Foucault (1995, p.26) argued that the body is “directly involved in a political field, power relations have an immediate hold upon it: they invest it, market it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs”. Accordingly, our social knowledge cannot simply be thought of as “some cognitive framework we are taught”, but, more appropriately must be considered as a form of a “corporeal inscription” (Khan 2011, p.147). In essence, our experiences are written on our bodies. By understanding that our bodily tastes, dispositions and habits are not preordained, not simply something we are born with, we can recognise that our bodies are continually produced through our experiences in the world (Khan 2011; Adair 2003; Adair 2001).

The conventional view of the body, in which our corporeal self is regarded exclusively as a part of nature, makes awareness of the human body a cultural object as a difficult concept “to grasp” (Kirk 2002, p.81). It is clear, however, that sensitivity to the historically and culturally specific nature of the valued body helps elucidate the notion of the body in culture. The socially constructed nature of beauty is perhaps the most explicit example of how the body is influenced by society, with what is considered physically beautiful in western countries differing greatly to what physical attributes are admired and valued in some non-western countries. Presently, in most Western societies
the preoccupation with achieving the “ultra-slender and boyish” body form is such that
the presence of excess body fat is not just a challenge to hegemonic standards of
physical beauty, but obesity is at the forefront in national health policies in recent years
(Davis 1990, p.13). Yet this is clearly not a universal ideal. In many countries large
bodies are not alone considered the most beautiful, but also represent the ideal health-
wise, symbolising fertility, prosperity and strength (Popenoe 2004; Sheinin 1990). This
would suggest that Western countries’ current preoccupation with obesity and weight
can be interpreted as much a response to social, cultural and economic forces as it is to
health concerns (Gard & Wright 2005). Further evidence of the socially constructed
nature of the human body is the increasingly commonplace tendency to engage in
permanent methods of adorning and enhancing the human body, with women and also
increasingly men now treating the body as a phenomenon to be shaped, decorated and
trained through piercing, dieting, tanning, tattooing and surgical enhancement. While
these examples provide some of the most explicit evidence of the socially constructed
nature of the body, they all refer to the outward appearance of the body, explicit
evidence of the socially constructed nature of the physicality of the body are more
difficult to obtain.

5.3 The concept of embodiment

The concept of embodiment is the process “whereby collective behaviours and beliefs,
aquired through acculturation, are rendered individual and ‘lived’ at the level of the
body” (Noland 2009, p.9). Nikkels (2010, p.ix) who has made an impassioned plea for a
greater understanding of the role of the socially constructed embodied body, argues that
our culture is “insane” and the reason for this madness is our insistence that our social knowledge and values are discarnate, suggesting that the only cure for this madness is a greater awareness of the embeddedness of knowledge in the physical body. He argues that the location of our knowledge cannot be considered to be solely located in our isolated mind, but rather it is also given expression in our bodily forms, with all our bodily dispositions reflecting our store of knowledge of all sorts (Nikkels 2010). Furthermore, much of the literature that has emerged on the sociology of the body has given precedence to the role of language, to the neglect of the physicality of the body. This has led one critic to suggest that due to this so-called “linguistic turn” (van Ede 2004) in the humanities, sociological studies of the socially constructed nature of the body has seen the body effectively “dissolve into language” with “the body that eats, that works, that dies, that is afraid — that body just isn’t there” (Bynum 1999, cited in Roodenburg 2004, p.216). While I acknowledge that language undoubtedly plays a key role in the social construction of the body, I would argue that it is imperative that we also understand and appreciate the socially constructed nature of the body’s physicality.

Curiosity in regard to the movements of the body being “invariant across history and culture, or whether they are the product of social constitution” has roused little interest amongst scholars troubled by social inequality (Hoy 1999, p.3). For those few who have considered the issue at all, the first alternative is usually taken for granted. This thesis, however, seeks to consider the second hypothesis. Namely, that there exists a range of social and cultural influences that shape an individual’s posture, their manner of moving and their relation to space (Young 1980). Thus “in asserting the social and historical
malleability of the body” (Hoy 1999, p.5), I argue that subjective experiences are stored in the body, with the body and mind more accurately thought of as interdependent rather than as separate entities. Acknowledging that “people's mundane competence” in making sense of human gestures and comportment are “an embodied and deeply cultural capacity” (Longhurst et al. 2008, p.200), I would argue that the operation of bodily techniques are, indeed, a cultural performance, of which the physicality of the body plays an important role in the embodiment of culture, and accordingly in the construction of elite privilege (Kirk 2002).

5.4 The cultural performance of bodily techniques

Mauss devised the concept of ‘body techniques’ to describe “the ways in which from society to society, men know how to use their bodies” (Mauss 1979, p.97), and in so doing, “pulled the physical, mental and social aspects of human beings together as an irreducible whole” (Crossley 2007, p.85). In his observation of the performance of physical practices, Mauss (1979) observed how there were marked differences in these body techniques which varies according to gender, age and ethnic origin. He identified variations in a wide number of bodily techniques associated with a range of unconnected activities including marching, walking, sitting, throwing and sleeping. Mauss also noted, for example, how children could squat with ease, an ability that he noted few adult Westerners possess, and during his time posted in France during WW1, he observed significant differences in the technique employed to dig, an activity that would appear to offer little potential for variation. Mauss (1979) observed how the English troops struggled to use French spades, resulting in 8,000 new spades being required when the English relieved a French division, and vice versa. I would argue that
appreciation of the difficulties experienced by both the French and English soldiers in particular, adjusting to the different digging technique, casts light on the extent to which “a manual knack can only be learnt slowly,” (Mauss 1973, p.71) revealing the extent to which our bodily actions are historically and culturally variable, and embodying specific aspects of a given culture.

Similarly, Young (1980), who was concerned with what she saw as a deeply unequal and patriarchal society, observed differing bodily techniques in the embodied action of men and women. By heeding differences in the way men and women use their bodies, Young (1980, p.148) recognised how gendered differences play out in our bodies “to the detriment of women”. In particular, she observed more limited and circumscribed differences in women’s comportment and movement than in the corresponding behaviours of men:

“Girls do not bring their whole bodies into the motion as much as the boys. They do not reach back, twist, move backward, step and lean forward. Rather the girls tend to remain relatively immobile except for their arms, and even the arm is not extended as far as it could be.”

(Young 1980, p.142).

A range of bodily techniques, she argued that under-used the real capacity of the female body (Young 1980). This led Young to conclude that the origins of these characteristic features of feminine comportment and movement are not innate attributes but are due to the female body being conditioned by a patriarchal society to limit their bodily capacity.

Like Mauss (1979) and Young (1980), Bourdieu recognised that different groups acculturate a characteristic physicality in their members. However, they differed in their explanations for why certain cultures, age groups, genders or class groups value
movement in a particular fashion and not another. Mauss tended to look to the biographical and historical origins of these techniques, while Young focused on the influence of gender. For Bourdieu (1984; 1977), it was social class that was of primary importance. He recognised that different opportunities were afforded to individuals (determined by their social class) to produce bodily forms of different symbolical value, and accordingly sought to explore how profits were accrued, or inversely, costs were incurred by those sharing a particular form of embodiment.

5.5 The body as a form of capital

Bourdieu’s conceptualisation of the body as a form of embodied capital, facilitates us in recognising the body as a symbol of status, as a possessor of power, and crucially as being integral to the accumulation of a range of valuable resources in society. In revealing how the most ‘personal’ bodily characteristics of individuals are socially created forms of differentiation, Bourdieu provides the means by which, not alone is the socially constructed nature of the body understood, it also reveals the social value attached to these different bodily forms. It is the recognition of this social value that is attached to particular forms of bodily dispositions which I would argue makes Bourdieu’s contribution so important. While previous commentators (Mauss 1979; Young 1980) recognised the body as a site for the playing out of social, cultural and gender differences, it was the appreciation of advantage in corporeal terms that makes this contribution so significant. Furthermore, while there is undoubtedly an appreciation of the different value placed on different bodily forms, corporeal advantage is not considered to be of any major or lasting significance, a lack of appreciation that for
Lareau (2002, p.747) is due to the mechanisms by which these advantages are transmitted being “imperfectly understood”.

In extending Bourdieu’s analysis of embodied capital beyond that of a sub-division of cultural capital, Shilling provided the means by which the importance of the body in its own right can be recognised and appreciated. Shilling (2003) recognised that different bodily forms are a commodity that have value, that can be converted into other forms of capital. ‘Physical’ capital is generated in the social formation of bodies, where bodily forms and movements acted as symbols and signified particular social values (Shilling 2003). The conversion of this form of capital is described as the result of one’s bodily involvement in “work, sport and leisure into different forms of capital” (Shilling 2003, p.111). Physical capital can be converted into economic capital, in the form of professional sports and sponsorship, into cultural capital in the form of scholarships to schools and colleges and into social capital in the form of social networks and international connections through sports organisations (Shilling 2003). While these are clearly the most explicit forms of acquiring physical capital, I would argue that the body has considerable exchange value beyond that associated with the ability to do physical work or excel in a sporting environment.

Accordingly, this thesis seeks to cast light on the extent to which the acquisition of bodily capital is dependent on not alone one’s physical abilities, but also on the manner in which the body is presented and managed (Shilling 2003; Bourdieu 1977; 1984), revealing how in “everyday actions” bodies “communicate important social and cultural
meaning” that both enables and restrains “social action and access to resources” (Light 2008, p.30). This ‘capital’ or value that is embodied in the messages that these ‘everyday actions’ communicate can provide social advantage or disadvantage (Light 2008). Bourdieu argued that it is through injunctions as trivial as “stand up straight” or “don’t hold your knife in your left hand that the existing social order with all its social and gender hierarchies comes to be naturalised in our bearings and deportment” (Bourdieu 1977, pp. 93-94). In recognising the cultural basis of embodied action, Shilling’s physical capital provides the means by which we could comprehend how one’s demeanour, way of speaking, posture, or bearing (all mundane ‘personal’ attributes), have the power to set apart the individual in possession of the most valued forms of these embodied attributes.

While capital in the form of beauty or elite level fitness can be readily appreciated, few are alert to the profits to be gained from these less obvious markers of distinction, such as an individual’s bearing and gait. In their presentation as innate qualities of the bearer, just part of ‘who we are’, our bodily automaticisms are an ideal instrument for the incorporation of social advantages. It is this lack of appreciation or the lack of understanding of the importance of these ‘markers’ of distinction that makes their accumulation so valuable. I would argue that it is precisely this ‘naturalness’ that makes our bodily “automaticisms an ideal instrument for the incorporation of social imperatives” (Roodenburg 2004, p.219). Moreover, it is not necessarily about what a person is doing with their body but rather how that action comes to be understood by others, as it is a society’s culture that gives meaning to our bodily automatisms.
Furthermore, due to the nature of the acquisition and transmission of physical capital, it has traditionally been, and remains so today, the form most confined to privileged groups. This ring-fencing of physical capital among dominant groups has resulted from a lack of understanding of the value of this commodity being an “unknown, unappreciated quantity to most” (Khan 2011, p.116) As demonstrated by Mauss (1979), accumulation of forms of corporeal knowledge relies on experience to successfully learn the ‘knack’. Being an embodied form of capital, the acquisition of a bodily automaticism is a more lengthy and time-consuming process than the acquisition of other forms of capital, with the accumulation of these forms of corporeal knowledge typically requiring a lengthy intensive immersion in the appropriate culture. The lengthy ‘apprenticeship’ that is required results in the most valued forms of physical capital being reserved for those who enjoy extended access to the sites of these valued cultures. A further consequence of the considerable time and labour of inculcation that is required, means that the manner in which this most valued corporeal ‘commodity’ is acquired remains an obscure process to most, which I would argue, leads to a misrecognition of embodied capital as an innate characteristic of the person. This obscurity of the process clearly benefits those groups who gain most from its acquisition, as the lack of appreciation of the value of corporeal knowledge means that its acquisition and transmission is more easily disguised than those of the other forms of capital. Moreover, as embodied capital “cannot be accumulated beyond the appropriating capacities of an individual agent”, declining and dying “with its bearer”, and as it cannot be inherited or “transmitted instantaneously by gift or bequest, purchase
or exchange,” the ‘natural’ quality of this form of capital is further reinforced (Bourdieu 1986, p.149).

While in the main the most valued forms of all ‘capital’ remain out of reach to the subordinate classes, I would argue that the manner in which the most valued forms of embodied capital are acquired means that it is the form of capital that is most out of reach to the most disadvantaged in society. While undoubtedly the acquisition of economic capital (and all its benefits) still remains confined largely to the dominant classes, there are some admittedly rare but nonetheless achievable routes to economic capital for disadvantaged groups. Similarly the accumulation of valued social forms of capital and (objectified and institutionalised) cultural capital, is also achievable for a minority of the subordinate classes. While access to these forms of capital may be unrealisable for most, they remain more attainable to the disadvantaged groups than embodied capital. This elusiveness I would argue, is a result of both the lack of understanding and appreciation of the ‘value’ of embodied capital, and also due to the lengthy acculturation process required in its embodiment.

5.6 The role of habitus in development of bodily dispositions

For Bourdieu (1977), the formation of one’s habitus is the key factor that determines an individual’s social position, with it not alone determining an individual’s bodily form, but crucially it is central in shaping the life-chances of people. Habitus, for Bourdieu, is a set of dispositions which incline agents to act in certain ways. These dispositions “generate practices, perceptions and attitudes” which in time, come to feel ‘natural’
“without being consciously coordinated or governed by any conscious rule” (Thompson 1991, p.12). Habitus is “socialised subjectivity” and expresses how individuals “become themselves” and the ways in which these individuals engage in practices (Webb et al. 2002 cited in Mc Leod and Yates 2012, p. 90). This “strategy-generating principal” that is habitus predisposes rather than determines action (Bourdieu 1977, p. 72). Our behaviour is not dictated by this system but rather it provides a practical sense that inclines us towards one behaviour rather than another. As our social relationships create habitus, this process is inextricably bound up with our social class positioning, with the particular world view that the habitus instills being based on and reconciled to an individual’s social location. It is the social norms of one’s social group, the social, cultural and physical environment that is inhabited, that directs this action.

As habitus is in essence society located within the body, it affects every aspect of human embodiment, “in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act” (Wacquant 2005, p.316; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Accordingly, the habitus can be identified manifesting itself in every aspect of human interaction, from one’s postures, manners, speech, to one’s predispositions towards particular ways of thinking and feeling, with one’s dispositions providing other people with an understanding of who they are. This process by which power relations inscribe themselves onto individuals is rarely consciously recognised or appreciated (Wacquant 2005). Further, being pre-conscious and so not readily amenable to conscious reflection and modification — we perform them without conscious reflection because they are “obvious” and commonsensical, and as such, we are left with no
recollection of having learned them (Jarvie 2006, p. 222). This lack of consciousness to our immediate environment means that conscious thought is not required about how to function in our own social group, with “how one comports oneself, physically, socially [and] emotionally” becoming “natural” and “normal” and synchronised to a large extent with those that share the same social location (McLeod and Yates 2012, p. 90).

This lack of awareness of becoming inscribed by one’s habitus is documented by Bourdieu (1977) in his observance of changing behaviours and actions in the Bearn peasantry. He noted that as this rustic population experienced dramatic changes to their lifestyles in the modernisation of post-war France, quite pronounced changes became evident in the community’s bearing and bodily movements. He observed however, that he alone was aware of the Bearn peasantry’s bodily response to this changing environment, as he witnessed their transformed social world manifesting in different ways of acting and apparently feeling (Bourdieu 1977). This reveals the manner in which social actors carry in their bodies their habitus, and display their response to the changing environment through their bodily movements and emotions. There is little actual consciousness of our environment and how we operate in it, like the “fish in water” that does not feel the weight of the water, we take the world around us for granted (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 127).

Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, pp. 98–100; Bourdieu 1993) used the metaphor of “the game” to convey his sense of how the habitus operates. He describes how in the process of playing, participants “become invested in and absorbed by the game itself” to
such an extent the experienced player internalises a sense of a game, allowing him or
her to play with an ease that does not require conscious deliberation. In the same vein,
habitus gives us a feel for ‘the game’ in the world in which we reside, as the rules of
society become embodied and operating in this environment becomes essentially
‘second nature’.

Bodies are clearly implicated in the reproduction of social relations, with an individual’s
habitus central to the acquisition of physical capital, determining both the quality and
quantity of the resource that is available to them (Shilling 2003). The differing
opportunities afforded to individuals (determined by their social class) produces bodily
forms of different symbolical value. Thus, it can be argued that influenced by one’s
class location, individuals not alone develop distinct orientations to their bodies but
these distinct orientations result in the creation of bodies of varying forms and values
(Shilling 2003).

5.7 How our bodily automaticisms produce bodies of different value

Variations in physicality are evident from one group to another within a society and
from one society to another. Our movements, gestures and bearing consciously or
unconsciously convey information to others about a diverse range of things (Emmison
and Smith 2000). Physicality is impacted upon by many factors including gender, race,
and social class. The influence of gender on the construction of our physicality is
perhaps the influence we are most conscious of. Even as children we quickly learn to
associate different physical movements with masculinity and femininity. Through
interaction with one another what is physically involved in establishing a gender identity as a boy or a girl is established and reinforced. That is, through their own actions and behaviours, children created a well understood set of rules or codes concerning the ways girls and boys ‘should’ and ‘should not’ move. This works to reproduce and establish rules concerning how our gender should be physically played out through our bodies, with our knowledge of gender becoming “deeply inscribed” in our “postures, gaits and styles of movement” (Garrett 2004, p. 143). As a result of this process “most individuals reach adulthood in possession of an exquisite knowledge of rules and a well-practiced and developed repertoire of gestures, postures and movements related to who they are as women or men” (Garrett 2004, p.143).

In contrast to this awareness of the influence of gender on our physicality, the extent to which other cultural factors and in particular social class influence the expression of physicality is much less appreciated or indeed even considered plausible. Yet, a relationship between those who share a particular form of embodiment and a social class location clearly exists. Shilling’s conceptualisation of the body as a form of capital helps illuminate this interrelationship, revealing how the management of the body is “central to the acquisition of status and distinction” (Shilling 2003, p.111). Central to this is the ability of dominant groups to define their bodies and lifestyles as superior. As the dominant classes come to construct themselves as distinct from other social classes, their particular forms of physicality are afforded greater symbolic value (Shilling 2012). The influence of social class status, remains evident in the bearing, gestures and their relation to space in the bodies of the dominant classes. According to Bourdieu, an
upright posture and a sense of being at ease are characteristic of the dominant classes. He defined the “bourgeois development” of the body as manifested in “a deportment characterised by a certain breadth of gesture, posture and gait, which manifests [itself] by the amount of physical space that is occupied . . . and above all by a restrained, measured, self-assured tempo” (Bourdieu 1984, p.218). Similarly LaFrance and Mayo (1978, cited in Emmison et al. 2000, p.220) recognised distinct differences in how higher status individuals used their bodies. They found that those of a higher status are freer to touch than lower status people and that when a subordinate initiates a conversation they tend to be further away from the other party than when a superior initiates a conversation. They also recognised the different posture and relation to space adopted by higher status individuals, who they noted tended to adopt asymmetrical positions or sprawl when they sit, and generally used up more space around themselves. Finally they recognised that higher status people gazed at the other when they are talking but tended to look away when they are being talked to.

While there is undoubtedly much variation between cultures in the meaning ascribed to all postures and gestures, it is clear that in all cultures many of the actions employed by the dominant classes are used to express power and dominance. Power and rank are commonly expressed through certain postures relative to others as “much of the choreography of authority is expressed through the body” (Connerton 1989, pp. 339-340). Similarly Skeggs (1997, pp.143-144) argues that “the bodily dispositions we learn as a result of positioning bear[ing] the markers of class as effectively, if not more so, than clothes”. Connerton (1989) argues that “from the way in which people group
themselves and from the disposition of their bodies relative to the bodies of others we can deduce the degree of authority which each is thought to enjoy or to which they lay claim”. These non verbal expressions of power and dominance are also evident in the animal kingdom, where in common with the human world, power and dominance is expressed by “expanding, you make yourself big, you stretch out, you take up space, basically opening up” (Cuddy 2011). It is argued that both humans and animals do this “when they have power and when they are feeling power in the moment” (Cuddy 2011) Subordinates by contrast will tend to occupy less space and sit upright in a symmetrical position, making the body smaller, hunching over, by crossing their legs, or arms or the ankles (Cuddy 2011; Cuddy 2013; Emmison and Smith 2000).

While the acquisition of postures and gestures is generally achieved without conscious processing, there is an explicit recognition in dominant groups of the value of the correct bodily automaticisms. Despite texts like Kinsey Goman’s (2011) ‘The silent language of leaders‘ and Bowden’s (2010) ‘Winning body language: control the conversation, command attention and convey the right message without saying a word’ being conducted in another academic tradition, they provide strong support for Bourdieu’s assertions about “the importance of embodied habitus as a mode of domination” (Emmison et al. 2012, p.207). These texts emphasise how important one’s body language is in effective leadership, impacting on a leaders ability to “negotiate, manage change, build trust, project charisma, and promote collaboration” (Kinsey Goman 2011, p.3). They repeatedly stress “that personal space, physical gestures, posture, facial expressions, and eye contact communicate louder than words and, thus,
can be used strategically to help leaders manage, [and] motivate” (Kinsey-Gowan 2011, p.3). Even Toastmasters (2011, p.3), an organisation that teaches public speaking and leadership skills, emphasises the importance of managing your physical behaviour when you hope to “win your audience over”. Their literature stresses that while “your voice transmits a verbal message, a vast amount of information is being visually conveyed by your appearance, your manner, and your physical behaviour” (Toastmasters 2011, p.3). Much of this literature stresses that a vital component of effective communication is the synchronisation of one’s automaticisms, which in essence means that “one’s manner and actions must affirm” one’s words, a feat that when successfully achieved results in one’s posture and gestures being “so graceful and unobtrusive” that they are not noticed or remarked upon (Toastmasters 2011, p. 5).

Conversely, when an individual’s behaviour contains mannerisms not related or apparently contradicting one’s spoken message, “those actions will call attention to themselves and away from your speech which has the effect of your words, your message, “losing its impact” (Toastmasters 2011, p. 5). This essentially means that if one’s use of personal space, physical gestures, posture, facial expressions, and eye contact appear “out of alignment” with one’s words, it has the potential to sabotage one’s message, resulting in doubt being cast about one’s authenticity (Kinsey-Goman 2011, p.2). In fact, amongst those cognisant of the importance of ‘winning’ body language, this ability to align our words and body language is referred to as a “secret weapon” that they argue is used by “many great leaders ….to their advantage” where when successfully accomplished “almost effortlessly, you’ll project the magic qualities
of sincerity, earnestness and enthusiasm.” (Kinsey-Gowan 2011, p.11). Due to this strong association between one’s non-verbal behaviour and one’s perceived authenticity, the body serves as “a crucial means by which individuals can publicly express such virtues as self control, self discipline and will-power” (Petersen and Lupon 1996 cited in Tinnings 2010, p. 110). In essence, this means that people rich in physical capital are judged by others to be better people.

The ‘ability’ to look someone in the eye, to shake hands with confidence, to stand shoulders back; all of these are considered the ‘mark’ of good character. This is evident in the common metaphor when we speak of someone being upstanding or ‘upright’ we may use the expression literally to mean that they are standing straight. Or we may use it metaphorically to describe someone “whom we judge to be honest and just, to be loyal, to stand by their convictions and in general not to stoop to low or unworthy actions” (Connerton 1989, p.74). This distinctive upright posture is essentially the posture that is typically associated with upper class physicality. I would argue that incorporating the correct bodily automaticisms, especially the inculcation of this upright elegant bearing (as if it was something ‘inbred’ or ‘natural’ instead of the product of a long intensive socialisation) is crucial in the construction of the elite body (Roodenburg 2004, p. 219).

5.8 The role of sport and physical activity in the embodiment of social class status

While engagement in sport and physical activity is credited with being a very powerful influence in the dispositions that the body learns, ample attention has not been given to
how this process facilitates the acquisition of physical capital. Having cast light on the role that sport can play for dominant groups in reproducing their privilege, Bourdieu’s (1978; 1984) exploration of the embodiment of class in a sporting environment has cast light on the process by which societies reproduce valued bodily forms, where an individual’s socio-cultural environment and their embodied experiences can be seen to shape the development of one’s classed identity.

The “widely held assumption that sport unites” (with sports traditionally viewed as associated with merit and the sports field seen as free from arbitrary social division) the reality is that “sport is a manifestation of the social world, existing as a representation of historical, social and cultural forces” (Kitching 2011, p.51). The notion that sport is class-blind with success largely dependent on the individual’s talent is wrong. Opportunities to participate in sport differ significantly, influenced to a large extent by the social class of the participants (Sterk and Knoppers 2009; Mehus 2005; Scheerder et al. 2005; Stemple 2005), with social and economic issues playing a key role in shaping who has access to physical activities. As a result of these ‘classed’ differences in sports participation, the quantities and forms of physical capital acquired by individuals is largely dependent on one’s social class position, with the dominant classes not alone providing more opportunities for their offspring to acquire an abundance of physical capital but also placing a far greater emphasis on the cultivation of this embodied capital from a very early age (Evans and Davies 2004).

Among the upwardly mobile middle classes there is a preference for “fitness training for its own sake,” while among the professional classes fitness training for its health
benefits is combined with culturally rich activities such as hill walking\(^\text{10}\) (Shilling 2003, p.140; Bourdieu 1978). Elites also prioritise the health giving aspect of physical activities, differing from the upwardly mobile middle classes in the emphasis they place on the social aspects of participation in high status activities such as polo, yachting or golf (Shilling 2003; Bourdieu 1978). Emphasis is also placed by elites on activities that develop an elegant upper class physicality, including activities such as ballet, horse riding and tennis. For the dominant classes, participation in sport is not simply about having fun or a way to blow off steam, but is considered the most effective vehicle for conferring this elegant upper class physicality on the human body (Taylor-Gatto 2002). In elite circles, possession of a commanding upper class physicality is much valued. In fact, the diaries of George Washington (cited in Taylor-Gatto 2002) have since revealed, that such was the importance Washington placed on acquiring this particular physicality that he deliberately pursued and mastered ballroom dancing and horse-riding due to his belief that these physical activities would confer a commanding physical presence on the person who had become adept at them. Interestingly, despite Washington being remembered as a great statesman, his intellectual abilities was considered quite average,

\(^{10}\) The relationship the working classes have with their bodies has been described as an instrumental relationship, where the body is seen as a ‘mean to an end’. This instrumental orientation is said to result from the demands of life allowing little time ‘free from necessity’, for the working classes. This has resulted in the working classes developing a machine like attitude to their bodies, in relation to health, illness and exercise and lifestyle where the emphasis is on putting the body right, (getting it holiday fit or fit for work) (Jarvie 2006). This results in a working class preference for accessible and affordable sports / leisure activities, that don’t require a large amount of time dedicated to them. This is evident in the preference among working class men for activities such as weightlifting and boxing, activities that are accessible, but also equips individuals for manual work. The working classes also tend to be attracted to those sporting activities which demand a high investment of energy, effort or even where there is a greater risk associated with participation (e.g. Boxing or motor cycling) (Williams 1990). It is notable that there is little or no ‘clout’ attached to the these activities favoured by the working classes, (such as soccer, darts and boxing), and thereby offer little opportunity for the production of valued forms of physical capital from those that participate in these activities.
in contrast to his physical presence which historians have remarked was very impressive (Taylor-Gatto 2002).

While the lack of necessity among dominant class males to physically labour is clearly a factor, there is also a lack of emphasis among males from the dominant classes in producing a physically strong body (Shilling 2003). This leaner body type that is sought by the dominant classes is also a response to social forces, with the body type sought by elites clearly being better “suited to a world in which economic practice is constituted more strongly by the presentation of the self” (Wilkes 1990, p. 118). The dominant classes have the time and resources to exercise more control over their bodies, which they exercise by choosing an appropriate lifestyle (Wilkes 1990). It is this ability that dominant groups possess to define their bodies and lifestyles as superior that I would argue is one of most significant factors in the reproduction of inequality. In their search for distinction, the dominant classes set their bodies apart from other social groups and despite observing differing orientations to the body among the dominant classes, there is a considerable contrast with working class orientations (Shilling 2003).

Curiously it is physical capital that is often viewed as the resource that evens the playing field for the working classes. Professional sporting careers or careers in the beauty industry are seen as one of the most achievable routes to a better life for the working classes, and offer one of the most lucrative avenues that are open to the working classes to amass profits from their own physical capital (Shilling 2003). The stories of sporting legends that rose from humble beginnings to achieve greatness, both
in terms of fame and wealth, have always reverberated in sporting halls of fame. Likewise, in the world of modelling and other careers where success is determined almost solely by one’s physical beauty, ‘rags to riches’ success stories abound. However, what these stories fail to highlight is how these routes to ‘success’ are open to only a tiny percentage of individuals. For all the working class individuals that seek to capitalise on their physical capital only a tiny minority will ever achieve success. Furthermore, for those working class individuals that are part of that tiny minority, they clearly encounter far more risks in the conversion of their physical capital (Shilling 2003). Careers that are based solely on one’s external appearance or on one’s physical skills are always vulnerable, due both to the ageing process and particularly to injury in sporting careers (Light & Kirk 2001). In contrast to this, while sport does not carry the same means of upward mobility for the children of the dominant classes due to the nature of their physical capital, the dominant classes experience fewer risks in the conversion of their physical capital and are not subject to the gradual attrition of their physical capital such that the working classes experience.

5.9 Corporeal knowledge in schooling

The school is an important site for both acquiring and converting physical capital, yet this capacity of schooling has largely been neglected. With the exception of Kirk (2010; 2002) Light and Kirk (2001; 2000) Light (2008; 2001), and most notably Shilling (2003) there has been a reluctance on the part of scholars to consider the role that schooling and education plays in the construction of bodies. For those commentators
that have recognised the role that education plays in transmitting corporeal knowledge, the embodied nature of schooling is undeniable:

“One only has to look at how schools instruct students on their dress, the importance of sitting quietly in class, getting to the loo on time, to realise that the ‘moving’ managed and disciplined body and not just the speaking, listening body is central to the daily business of schooling”

(Shilling 2003, p. 19).

For Shilling (2004, p. xvi) it is difficult to overestimate the significance of these bodily engagements as he argues that it is through participation in these elements of schooling that children cultivate “acceptable bodies”.

The transmission of this corporeal knowledge is transmitted by means of the physical curriculum, which incorporates a wide variety of educational procedures including both the formal and the informal processes, the overt and the hidden. While the provision of physical education and sports programmes are the most obvious examples of the overt physical curriculum in operation. As part of the timetabled curriculum for all ages from primary school through to secondary school, a school’s physical education and sporting programme provides the most realisable “opportunit[ies] to observe such processes at work in starkly explicit forms” (Evans, et al. 2004, p.52; Shilling 2003).

In contrast to this, the subtle operation of the hidden or informal physical curriculum makes it’s detection much more difficult. However, despite this obscure nature, it is clear that the hidden curriculum fulfils an important function in the system of education, with mastery of particular elements of the hidden physical curriculum obligatory if students are to make their way satisfactorily through the school (Kirk 1992). The important factor that distinguishes the hidden from the overt physical curriculum is that
these attitudes and values relayed through the hidden curriculum are communicated “unintentionally, unconsciously and unavoidably” (Kirk 1992, p.37). These apparently inconsequential physical activities which make up the hidden elements of the physical curriculum are generally associated with developing competencies in routine tasks such as queuing in an orderly fashion, learning to wait quietly, exercising restraint, completing work, keeping busy, and cooperating (Kirk 1992; Sandford and Rich 2006; Bain 2006). With the daily life of the school filled with these routines, the opportunities to engage with these hidden elements of the physical curriculum are countless.

In contrast to the overt physical curriculum where the “substance of the lesson changes from week to week, the routines and the interactions [of the hidden curriculum] often retain remarkable consistency” (Bain 2006, p.19), the repetition of which is said to result in the lifelong absorption of this information:

“It is argued ...that the implicit and unspoken values of the school system, regarding issues such as appropriate behaviour, dress and interactions with staff etc became ingrained through years of required conformity, so that young people to an extent embody the hidden curriculum at a deep level”

(Sandford and Rich 2006, p. 278)

As a result, these taken-for-granted patterns of behaviour, which are not explicitly taught by school personnel but which are learned through the repetition of these daily practices in schooling, are intimately related to how those exposed to these subtle messages acquire their sociocultural beliefs and practices, and through which “young people can assimilate the cultural norms, beliefs, and values of the institution” (Sandford and Rich 2006, p.278). Through this “socialisation and enculturation process” the hidden physical curriculum frames students thinking and
perceptions, with the daily reinforcement of these ‘powerful messages…which have a
lasting impact throughout their adult lives’ (Fernandez-Balboa 1993, p.230).

The composition of the hidden physical curriculum is not neutral or universal but is
tailored according to the social class makeup of the school body. This results in an
adapted physical curriculum that reflects “differing curricular, pedagogical and pupil
evaluation practices [whilst] emphasising different cognitive and behavioural skills in
each social setting” (Handel, 2006, p.391). This tailored physical curriculum results in
the construction of socially differentiated bodies, differences which start to emerge early
in childhood and which as they develop, bear “the imprint of an individual’s social
class” (Shilling 2003, p.112). For this reason, I would argue that the kind of school one
attends plays an important part in determining much of an individual’s future, with the
cultural preferences within different schools having the potential to produce bodies of
differing values (Light and Kirk 2001, p.96).

5.9.1 Physical education and sport in schooling
As the arena where the majority of physical activity occurs, the physical education and
sports programme in the school provides the greatest opportunities to observe the
operation of the physical curriculum, in both its overt and hidden forms. Yet while the
literature on physical education and school sports has been concerned with issues to do
with justification of the subject within an overcrowded curriculum (MacPhail and
Halbert 2005; MacPhail et al 2005; Fahey et al, 2005), the question of access to physical
education and school sport (Fahey et al 2005; Evans and Davies 2004; Laker 2003; Kirk
& Tinning 1990), curriculum content (Halbert & MacPhail 2010; Siedentop & Tannehill 2000; Lund & Tannehill 2010) and the physical, mental and social outcomes out of the subject (WHO 2003; Department of Health and Children 2000, 2005; Foster 2000; Whitehead 2000; Bailey 2005), the question of its social reproductive abilities has received much less attention.

The common-sense understanding of physical education and school sport being one and the same can be attributed in no small measure to the hegemonic position of physical education being understood as competitive team sports (Capel 2000). This is a common misconception in which physical education means simply playing games (Laker 2002), and while they are clearly interdependent “with sport making a contribution to physical education and physical education making a contribution to sport”, it is important to define what physical education is, and the unique contribution it makes (Capel 2000, p. 141). “Sport” is defined as “all forms of physical activity which through casual or organised participation aims at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, or the formation of ‘social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels’” (Council of Europe, 2001). In contrast, physical education is defined as being concerned with “learning the skills and understanding required for participation in physical activities, knowledge of one’s own body and its range and capacity for movement” (Bailey 2005, p.72). Different sporting activities can and do contribute to the learning process in physical education, and the learning process in physical education clearly enables participation in sport. However, where they differ significantly is that in physical education “the focus is on the child and his or her
development of physical competence, rather than on the activity” (DES/WO 1991, p.7). The stated objectives of the junior cycle physical education curriculum for Irish second level students are social and personal development, physical and motor development, knowledge and understanding, creative and aesthetic development, development of health related fitness and the development of safety (Department of Education and Science 2003). However, to assume that all physical education and sports programmes achieve all of these objectives fails to acknowledge the extent to which these activities carry different meanings and unequal benefits and risks for all participants, depending on their social class.

5.9.2 The physical curriculum in elite schooling

Even a cursory glance at the website or prospectus of most elite schools reveals the important place the physical curriculum occupies within these schools (Clongowes 2014; St Gerard's School 2014; Belvedere College 2014; Gonzaga College 2014). This emphasis on the physical curriculum is most explicitly communicated by means of their impressive physical education and sporting programmes and achievements, the emphasis on high status activities and the omission of ‘popular’ (such as soccer and GAA) sports.

It is clear that elite schools invest heavily in the physical curriculum. While the status of physical education and school sport in many Irish schools causes concern (Halbert & MacPhail 2010), in the elite school the importance of these activities is not challenged. The average time allocated to physical education in Irish post-primary schools is
seventy-seven minutes, with twenty-seven percent of pupils reported as not participating in any extracurricular sport each week (Woods et al 2010). In some of the country’s most prestigious boarding schools, physical activities are timetabled six days per week (Clongowes Wood College 2014; Glenstal Abbey School 2014). Moreover, while there are clearly many non-fee paying schools that excel in their own sporting fields, I would argue that the emphasis in these non-fee paying ‘sporting’ schools would appear to be more on developing elite athletes as opposed to developing elite individuals.

In contrast to the constraints schools experience in the provision of the formal curriculum, the lack of constraint in the provision of the physical curriculum has allowed for greater variability between schools (Lynch 1989). This lack of universality is influenced by many factors including region, religion, and gender. When one compares by the type of school, the extent to which social class has a considerable bearing on the choice becomes apparent (Lynch 1989; Lareau 2002), with the difference in relation to elite schools being the most significant. Despite elite schools providing an extensive array of activities in all fields, there is a notable absence of certain activities and an inclusion of other activities which appear to be provided only in private schools. The lack of emphasis on Gaelic games and the inclusion of high status activities such as cricket, rugby, and golf would be the most notable difference between elite school extracurricular provision and most secondary and vocational schools in Ireland (Lynch 1989).
I would argue that the prioritisation of and participation in high status activities such as rugby, cricket, and golf can provide already privileged individuals with further advantages. By exposing students to high status activities, elite schooling is seen to provide the necessary skills and attitudes that enable the conversion of this physical capital into valuable social resources. Different sports and activities tend to bestow particular and differing amounts of cultural capital and thus possess differential value in terms of cultural resources. Consequently, access to sports such as rugby and cricket, which have traditionally been class distinguishing activities, can facilitate the effortless reproduction of the upper middle classes into “good social and economic positions” (Tomlinson 2005, p.173). Elite schools clearly have compelling reasons for prioritising high status physical activities, many of which stress manners and deportment and hence facilitate the acquisition of physical, cultural and social capital.

The possession of soft skills, which are instilled through the hidden physical curriculum, are increasingly acknowledged as a key factor in the success of elite graduates in the market place (Lleras 2008). The role of the overt and hidden physical curriculum within elite schools is evident in the emphasis on developing physical capital through intensive physical education and sporting programmes, and while not explicitly taught, the hidden curriculum is evident in the emphasis on the development of self-confidence, teamwork and communication skills. The strong emphasis on the physical curriculum clearly gives graduates a significant advantage over other students and in the labour market (Lleras 2008). Indeed, the dominant classes are often socialised with the explicit aim of occupying management or leadership positions, with the
development of the skills required for these roles seen as being as “important as arming [students] with the necessary credentials, contacts and networks” (Tomlinson 2005, p. 171). It is clear that while “developing a taste for elite sporting and leisure is important as while these activities may not always represent a direct route to a career for the dominant classes, they can lead to social situations which indirectly facilitate entry into a profession or allow business contacts to be forged” (Shilling 2003, p.120). Thus, familiarity with high status activities matter insofar as they enable students to display markers of high status. For this reason, the ability to play polo or cricket is not important in itself; its importance being that it serves as a cultural marker which signals that this individual is a well-rounded person with diverse interests and capabilities, and is clearly familiar with valued cultural and physical capital. Additionally, in playing a role in forging and maintaining the influential ‘old boy’ networks, high status activities foster both the acquisition of skills and competencies, and a level of comfort and familiarity in elite culture (Bourdieu 1998).

Whilst rugby, which was formerly a class specific sport in Ireland, has now been extended to all types of schools, elite schools continue to dominate the sport at schools level, particularly in the Leinster area. Bourdieu (1990) has noted that in developing the skills necessary in rugby that players also developed the skills necessary for the bigger ‘game of life’. Similarly I would argue that elite schools continue to prioritise rugby in their physical activity and sporting programmes due to the qualities that are nurtured in the playing of the game (Light and Kirk 2001, p.81). One of the principal aims of boys’ elite schools has traditionally been the “reproducing of a hegemonic masculinity” in
their student body (Light and Kirk 2001, p.174). Rugby is credited with being a central element in this masculinising process performed in these schools, successfully “[t]urning boys into particular types of men” (Light and Kirk 2001, p.174). The “durable personal bonding” that encourages lifelong loyal connections, the “ruthless competition” set beside “restraint and self-control” and “even in defeat” the ability to “hold their heads up and shake hands with their opponents at the end of the match” are all valued attributes in elite culture (Light and Kirk 2001, p.94). Rugby conveys “particular meaning to the players and to prospective employers, business connections and clients”. Consequently, when a student who had held the captaincy of his school’s ‘A’ rugby team during his years at an elite school was recruited by a high status firm, the expectation would be that the young man in question would be:

“A committed team player, a leader, and a winner. It would have implied that the young man will ‘fit in’ with the culture of the firm, who knows how to achieve, and who will attract a degree of status to the firm. It would also have indicated that his habitus would be in tune with the collective habitus of the firm and with the class habitus of its clients and business networks”

(Light & Kirk 2001, p.94)

Thus, with “engagements with sports and physical activity ... part of the active construction of biographies” (Lee 2010, p.14), influencing life expectations and life chances, it is clear that decisions that are made about what activities and sports that schools participate in and to commit to are made within a wider structural and social context.

Elite educated students have far greater opportunities to become physically skilled, they enjoy more opportunities and more encouragement to participate in physical activities and sport (Lynch 1989). Attendance at an elite school therefore makes it more likely that the young people who attend will acquire more valuable forms of physical capital. It
must be acknowledged however that while the desire to impart these valued cultural skills may also be shared by non-fee paying schools, they do differ significantly in the number and type of resources they have at their disposal. Few schools can compete with the economic resources that elite schools enjoy where, with the benefit of state funding and generous fees, state-of-the-art facilities are provided in a wide range of activities. These extra financial resources also enable schools to pay their teachers more, in return for a greater commitment to after school activities (Lynch 1989). Furthermore, it is highly unlikely that students who attend elite schools will have the extra pressure of having to hold down a part-time job during their years in school, leaving them free to pursue a range of extracurricular sporting activities.

5.10 Creating bodies of distinction in elite schools

It is clear that the kind of school an individual attends is a key factor in the transmission of valued “embodied culture” and thus accordingly in the transmission of future capital and opportunity (McGregor 1997). Elite schools, which are key institutions for the transmission of social advantages in elite families, excel at the transmission of corporeal knowledge. The sport and physical education programmes in these schools play a key role in the inculcation of this class-specific form of embodiment into their student body (Bourdieu 1978; Light & Kirk 2001). Credited with nurturing all forms of capital that is valued by those dominant in society, every effort is made to instil in their students the knowledge and ability to regulate the conversion from one form into another.
Becoming an elite scholar is “very much a corporeal process” and to truly understand the reproduction of privilege I argue that greater attention must be paid to elites corporeal disciplining (Khan 2011, p.117). In the forming of these elite scholars, schools “not only inculcate the right attitudes, values, motivations, predispositions and representations but also the right physical capital in terms of skills, techniques and understanding” (Bailey and Kirk 2008, p.175). This has led to privileged young people “developing particular skills and particular views of their bodies which serve to reinforce their class positions” (Green 2010, p.32). Crucially the “trick of such disciplining … is that this social inscription appears as the natural, distinctive, particular quality of each individual student instead of a social product that helps further [the] durability of inequality” (Khan 2011, p.117). With the distinctions between the outward appearance of the classes not as clearly delineated as it was for previous generations, the marking of the bodies of these students as elite has become a crucial task for elite schools. Therefore, this ability of the dominant classes to mark their bodies as elite, has become of even greater importance to the maintenance of their dominant position. Much of the ability of dominant groups to define their bodies and lifestyles as superior can be attributed to the emphasis elite schools have always placed on developing physical capital in their students (Light & Kirk 2001). Accordingly, the “bodily orientations” produced by these schools are recognised as crucial marks of distinction which are prerequisites for entry into elite society (Shilling 2012, p.164).

This emphasis on the ‘physical’ is a feature of elite schools in all countries that have inherited the colonial legacy of the British public school, where the virtues of sport were
espoused to such an extent that some commentators have argued that the culture of athleticism steadily came to dominate the whole system of elite education (Mangan 1981; Courtice 1999), with such an emphasis being put on sport and physical activity that “not to do sport was counter both to the culture and the ethos of the school” (Wright et al 2009, p.111). These physical education and sports programmes were not promoted as some innocent pastime but were recognised as a powerful vehicle for the transmission of preferred values and for the generation of a particular form of culture and as being a central mechanism for elite schools to ensure their students privileged place in society. Participation in the physical education programme in these schools was considered key to producing the particular type of citizen sought among elite groups, which were deliberately cultivated to produce a specified embodied relation to the world (Wright et al. 2009). This culture of athleticism has been credited with playing a key role in the “remarkably homogeneous and cohesive elite” that existed in Britain at the end of the Nineteenth Century, who shared “to a high degree a common education and a common outlook and set of values”, turning out “well-mannered, rational manly boys, all taking the same view of things, all doing the same things” (Holt 1989, p.95). Team sports were of the essence in creating a powerful force for group loyalty, with team games core to the kind of “inclusive culture that sociologists nowadays identify with ‘total institutions’ like army barracks or prisons from which there is no escape and where an individual eats and sleeps, works and plays in collective isolation” (Holt 1989, p.97). While many of the mechanisms employed in these schools to teach young male elites how to rule have changed considerably in the last century, (with the regimes of cold showers, and liberal use of the rod now assigned to history), interestingly, the
sporting practices in these schools have remained remarkably unchanged (Gaztambide-Fernandez 2009).

Elite schools mould their students’ bodies to convey prestige and power, and to distinguish themselves from those they consider socially inferior. While sport in general is considered to offer virtually unique opportunities for character development, it is clear that elite schools seek to foster a different range of character traits. The physical education and team sports practices in elite schools are credited with being a cultivator of this ‘elite’ character, promoting “physical and moral courage; loyalty and cooperation; the capacity to act fairly and to take defeat well; and the ability to command and obey” (Mangan 1981, p.9), all qualities which are prerequisites for future generations of leaders. Participation in these sports is said to promote “such desirable character traits as loyalty, discipline, commitment, a concern for excellence and a never say die attitude” (Simon 1991, p.18). For Kingsley (quoted in Holt 1989, p.93), the importance of modern sports to these young elites could not be overstated, arguing that it was through sport that,

“Boys acquire virtues which no books can give them; not merely daring and endurance, but better still, temper, self-restraint, fairness, honour, unenvious approbation of another’s success, and all that ‘give and take of life which stand a man in good stead when he goes forth into the world, and without which, indeed, his success is always maimed and partial’.”

This elite sporting code emphasises the importance of playing to the best of one’s ability without giving the impression of strain, as practicing or trying too much was said to undermine “natural grace and talent” (Holt 1989, p.102). Sport must not only be played in good spirit, it must be played with style. The sports that were employed for the
inculcation of these values are primarily team sports, the most popular of which were cricket, hockey, rugby and tennis. Such sports have traditionally been credited with imparting the values of team spirit and co-operation, and encouraging discipline and reliance on one another. Baron Pierre Coubertin, the founder of the modern Olympic movement was profoundly influenced by what he saw as “the embracing of athletics and sport as integral elements” within the British public school system. He argued:

“Apart from the benefits to the physical development of growing bodies, organised sport at Rugby and other leading public schools created moral strength and social unity. [These schools he argued] celebrated the importance of sport as a bonding agent as well as a builder and inducer of character, co-operation and initiative in their pupils.”

(cited in Doble 2012, p.60)

For those embodying this elite amateur sporting code (or Corinthian spirit as it became known as), on the sports field, the principal value of athletic competition lies not in winning itself but rather in the quest for excellence, self-improvement, and self-knowledge through exposure to challenge. By emphasising the quest for excellence, the aim of the sports contest changed from that of simply triumphing over opponents to the quest for self-development and achievement.

For the Corinthian sportsperson, the aim is not to defeat opponents but to reach certain standards of performance or to gain self-knowledge and development through trying to satisfy those standards. Indeed, “the testing of one’s mettle in competitive athletics” was seen as an invaluable “form of self-discovery” (Simon 1991, p.22). The ideal of competition with others is replaced with the so-called “competition with oneself”. It was not if you won or lost but how you played the game. While placing less emphasis on the winning of games, and more on taking part encouraged wider participation, it also
conversely taught these boys who were destined for success the value of being gracious losers;

“By teaching boys how to lose as well as how to win with dignity, the wider competitive principle was strengthened. For to succeed in any competition — sporting, academic or economic — the odds were very much that you would lose before you would win. It was vital that boys should not be discouraged by initial setbacks and that they should persevere until success finally came. There was no disgrace in losing so long as you ‘did your best.’”

(Holt 1989, p.97).

The idea of being a good loser therefore, is not just a matter of etiquette and upper class style it is an “effective device for encouraging a healthy as opposed to Hobbesian competitiveness” (Holt 1989, p.98). Although competitors must always try as hard as they can to achieve victory, “the principal value of athletic competition lies not in winning itself but in the process of overcoming the challenge presented by a worthy opponent” (Holt 1989, p.98). As good competition necessitates a cooperative effort by competitors to generate the best possible challenge to each other, each competitor has the obligation to the other to try his or her best. Although one must lose, each side gains by trying to meet the challenge that each has voluntarily agreed to face. Consequently, competition in sports must never be viewed as a zero-sum game, but more appropriately as a mutually acceptable quest for excellence through challenge.

5.11 Elite and deserving

To successfully embody their privileged positions, it is critical that the sons and daughters of the dominant classes internalise the understanding that they are who they are because of their innate, individual distinctions and not because of the advantages their social class position has bestowed on them. By the same token, a central element of being able to capitalise on the many social advantages that elite education confers is
to truly believe that these advantages are earned and deserved. The instilling of the belief in one’s ‘giftedness’ is, I contend, a role that the physical element of elite schooling is very effective at delivering (Bourdieu 1984). I would argue that key to accomplishing this internalisation of ‘giftedness’ is to cultivate the belief among the elite student body that any successes they may enjoy, are a result of their own merit and not due to any privileges their attendance at the elite school may bestow. Elite schools achieve this by making much of what happens at these schools looks to a casual observer to be much the same as that which occurs at any other school, Khan (2011, p. 97) argues this seeming similarity is key:

“The students learn to make distinctions disappear between themselves and other non-private school students, indeed, between them and the rest of the non-elite world. This helps construct a narrative that the difference between St. Paul’s and other schools is not the obvious distinctions of privilege and wealth. They look just the same as the rest of us. It’s not that they have access to privileged information that we are excluded from. It's not that they have bought their way into some exclusive club. Instead, when privilege is successfully embodied, the gap between them and us just seems natural, an almost inevitable result of ‘who we are”

By cultivating the belief in their superior competence, the advantages these elites enjoy are accepted and justified. With their privileged position in society justified, as a result of their natural ‘giftedness’ (Bourdieu 1977), this serves to camouflage the advantages they enjoy that simultaneously reproduce and maintain their privileged positions.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored issues around the social construction of the body and the role of the physical curriculum in elite schooling in this process. In conceptualising the body as a form of capital, Shilling (2003) has provided the means by which the socially constructed nature of the body and its social value can be understood, revealing the
extent to which bodies not alone bear the mark of one’s social background, but are actively involved in the production and reproduction of social difference. Elite private schools clearly provide a different education for their selected pupils and emphasise the ‘distinctiveness’ of their students. This ability of dominant groups to define their bodies and lifestyles as superior (and crucially to feel entitled to do so) is clearly an intrinsic component in the maintenance and reproduction of their elite culture, in effect the embodiment of their elite status. This is one of the unspoken roles of elite schools, to teach their students how to embody their privilege (Khan 2011). The creation of these elite identities is not limited to what occurs in the classroom, or with what we might consider classical elite practices, but is incorporated into all aspects of elite school life. Consequently, it must be acknowledged that physical education and school sport must be viewed as “social processes, which can and do have a powerful and lasting impact on the identities of children, their attitudes towards physical activity, themselves and others” (Evans and Davies 1993, p.3). The following chapter, which presents the first of the two findings chapters, introduces Rathwood College, and analyses and discusses the distinctive cultural practices within this elite boarding school environment.
Drawing on the ethnographic data collected in Rathwood College, this chapter presents, analyses and discusses my subjective interpretation of the research findings relating to the research question that explores what role, if any, the culture of the elite boarding school plays in the generation of social stratification and self-reproduction of elite groups. The chapter begins by highlighting the ‘total institution’ nature of the school, with the ‘total capturing’ of the students’ minds and bodies (during the formative years of adolescence) in the boarding school environment. The chapter then discusses the cultural homogeneity that was evident in Rathwood College, revealing the strict adherence to higher cultural forms amongst the entire school community, a uniformity that was most apparent in the physical presentation of their student body. The chapter concludes by exploring how the distinctive socialisation processes in elite schools enkindles solidarity within the school community and as a consequence of which, facilitates the development of an identification as members of an exclusive social network.

6.1 Cultural assimilation

The findings of this research provide insight into the cultural homogeneity within elite groups. As documented in chapter four, there is a strict adherence to higher cultural forms among elite groups. This was evident in Rathwood College in the physical environment, in the physical appearance of students, in their practices, and in the
activities that were engaged in. Despite being a community largely populated by adolescents, few concessions to popular teenage forms of culture were evident in Rathwood College (the only exception was a preference for popular computer games amongst the boys). The absence of any apparent celebrity culture or fashion was particularly noteworthy, with students focusing almost exclusively on life within Rathwood College’s school walls rather than following the latest trials and tribulations that the previous weekend’s reality television ‘stars’ were enduring;

“As they waited for their teacher to arrive, most of them sat and chatted, one of the girl’s tied up one of the boy’s mad mops of hair. There is no mention of anybody’s clothes or shoes or last night’s tv programmes, they chat about funny things that happen in class or what matches are on this afternoon.”

(Field-notes January 2012)

This adherence to higher cultural forms is more significant when one considers the changing composition of the student body in Rathwood College. This diversity has intensified in the past two decades with a student body increasingly stratified by race and ethnicity (with African, Asian and many different European nationalities), a finding that was also reflected in the literature on elite boarding schools in the United States (Khan 2011; Gaztambide-Fernandez 2009). Given this increasing diversity the upholding of this cultural homogeneity in Rathwood College is even more striking. Despite this changing composition inevitably resulting in a growing linguistic diversity, with conversations in French, German, Chinese or Korean being regularly overheard in the school, there was no evidence of any cultural artefacts representing the increasingly diverse student body, or no apparent dilution of the overarching culture in the school. This I would argue demonstrates that for students from other cultures, a process of assimilation into the elite must take place to ensure their admission into the Rathwood
Community. It can be argued that for students familiar with the dominant culture in Ireland, schools like Rathwood College simply underscore what they have already begun to internalise and learn before they are admitted. However for other students, they “are inducted through… assimilation” into the elite (Gaztambide-Fernandez 2009, p.11). I would argue that rather than diversifying the elite, students at Rathwood College construct a narrow identification as elite students, where it is the student who must change “not the elite” (Gaztambide-Fernandez 2009, p.11). Accordingly, this thesis rejects arguments (Peterson 1992; Peterson & Simkus 1992; Peterson & Kern 1996; Bryon 1996) that cultural stratification has become less rigid in recent times, with these findings providing compelling evidence that among elite groups traditional cultural opposition remains.

6.2 Class-bound segregation

Key to achieving the cultural uniformity and cultural cohesion among dominant groups, is the enduring and loyal patronage of what Mills (2000 p.p 64-65 [1956]) has referred to as “the most important agency for transmitting the traditions of the upper social classes”, the elite boarding school. There are specific characteristics of Rathwood College that clearly facilitate the embodiment of elite status. The ‘total capturing’ of the students’ minds and bodies in the boarding school environment during those formative years is critical to this process.

11 While a cultural and ethnic diversity was apparent during the students first days in the school, within a few months of enrolling in Rathwood College, these differences had become much less evident.
The findings clearly show that key to achieving this cultural homogeneity is the segregation of students on grounds of wealth and social class. This segregation is achieved by the school’s ability to command fees in the highest range for an Irish private fee-paying school. The continued practice of an explicit bias in enrolment practices in selecting pupils (including giving first preference to the siblings of past pupils, to children of a member of staff, to the children of past pupils and to selection based on interviews - see for example the admission policies for Blackrock College; Gonzaga College; Glenstal Abbey School; Clongowes Wood College; Alexandra College). This practice also ensures that economic capital alone will not grant access to Rathwood College’s elite network, as this process ensures that access to elite status groups is denied to almost all but those already familiar with the dominant culture and is in essence an element of social closure, a range of practices which ensure that the students of Rathwood College are educated in “class-bound isolation” (Kingston & Lewis 1990, p.19).

While it may seem intuitive to suggest that boarding schools in general would be more ‘total’ than other types of educational institutions, the level of encompassment in this particular school appears to be to a much greater degree than other boarding schools. In a modern society an individual “tends to sleep, play, and work in different places, with different co-participants, under different authorities, and without an over-all rational plan” (Goffman 1968, p.17). However in a ‘total’ institution, these different facets of life are welded together in one place and under the same authority. In Rathwood College there is clearly a “breakdown of the barriers” that ordinarily separate these various
spheres of life (Coser 1974, p.8), with membership of the school community encompassing much more of their members’ lives than the norm in an Irish second level school. This regulation of students’ lives is a successful formula for preparing their young charges for elite life. A key feature of the total institution is this disconnection from the outside world. With physical, social and moral barriers to the outside world clearly in evidence in the school, it is patently clear Rathwood College values its isolation. In fact, such is the totality of the experience that is a Rathwood education, I would argue that it can incontrovertibly be stated to not alone encompass the academic, but also the social, physical and moral elements of its students’ lives.

My findings also reveal the extent to which the cultural landscape in Rathwood College is designed to facilitate spatial segregation. The creation of private, secluded spaces for their communities has clearly been the desired format for the founders of elite boarding schools since their inception, with the literature on elite schooling, almost without exception describing expansive, sequestered landscapes (Khan 2011; Gaztambide-Fernández 2009; Howard and Gaztambide-Fernández 2010; Howard 2008; Stevens 2009; Bourdieu 1998; Cookson and Persell 1985). Central to this has been the access to high levels of economic and cultural capital that these schools clearly enjoy, permitting the creation of the self-contained environment necessary to regulate their students’ lives. Rathwood College closely adheres to this formula. Despite being situated on the outskirts of a large city, Rathwood College still feels at some remove from its neighbouring environment. Nestled on over 200 acres of unspoilt grounds, the architecturally impressive Rathwood College provides the classic ‘total’ environment
for the school community. The purpose of physical barriers at Rathwood College differ to the purpose of barriers in most total institutions. Where fences or walls are usually erected to keep students in, the purpose of potential physical barriers at Rathwood College appears to be to keep ‘outsiders’ out:

“The entrance to the school is quite understated and apart from a discreet sign, the school could easily be mistaken for the entrance to a large private country home. The gates to the school are wide open and unmanned. However as one approaches the school buildings, two large signs make it quite clear that these grounds are out of bounds to all but members of the school community. As you drive into the school there are four high ramps, a number of very prominent signs that warn off trespassers, walkers etc. There are CCTV cameras and two signs advertise to strangers the presence of a security firm that protects the school 24 hours a day. You can be in no doubt entering these grounds that you have no place being here unless you are a member of the school community, or you have a family member who is.”

(Field-notes, January 2012)

As I approached the school buildings for the first time, the design of the school was not what I had been expecting. The school did not consist of one large imposing building but seemed to be composed of a series of buildings, with few, if any, that looked like traditional school buildings. I observed on my first view how Rathwood College does not feel like an unfriendly daunting place:

“There is a kind of ‘homeliness’ to the place. With many of the buildings looking like traditional houses, of different shapes and sizes. I feel that there is a ‘village’ feel to the place. Not in the traditional Irish village sense, but as in a little exclusive enclave.”

(Field-notes, October 2011).

As I have become better acquainted now with the self-contained, cloistered world that is Rathwood College, I better appreciate how accurate my initial appraisal of the school as ‘village-like’ was.

The intimate connections within this sequestered ‘village’ community appear to be central to the operation of this ‘total’ community. There is clearly a strong belief in the positive benefits of living a tightly integrated life in the school, with a strong emphasis
on not just building lifelong relationships between the students but also with the staff of the school. Being one of a small number of Irish schools that offers seven-day boarding and a six-day school week, the level of engagement with its students is significant with students only permitted one weekend per month to return home. In contrast to this, the pattern in most Irish boarding schools has been to change to a five-day boarding model. For Mrs Garson, Rathwood College’s principal, the seven-day boarding formula is an essential characteristic of a successful school, providing significant opportunities to accomplish a lot more with the students. She argued “at the weekend, you can achieve a lot with children, that is why seven day boarding is so good for children” (Field-notes April 2012). She is succeeding in achieving a level of encompassment with the majority of students boarding in the school and the remainder of the students who day-board participating fully in all the schools’ activities, except for sleeping on the school grounds.

Additionally, with the homogenisation of its ‘inmates’ considered essential if the total institution is to maintain its power (Goffman 1968), this intervention in the students’ development at the formative stage of the early adolescent years is crucial to ensure that these schools are able to mould their pupils to their ‘likeness’:

“If we would attempt to form the character as well to cultivate the minds of the young, we must be able to control all their occupations...to have them under the same roof with ourselves, and we become responsible for their manners, habits, and morals”

(McLachlan., 243 cited in Armstrong 1984, p.5)

This ‘all-encompassing’ character of elite boarding schools has long been considered key to their success, with a bounded community necessary for these schools to achieve their mission, the ultimate goal of which is the formation of a distinct community. For
Lambert (1977, cited in Persell and Cookson 1986, p.132) the key to this elite school ethos is that “its end and means are one”:

“Its values are embodied in a total social system; divesting its pupils of many of the roles and attributes they possess in the larger society, the school provides them with its own structure, role patterns, relationships, styles and norms. it is in living out its subtle, complete and all-inclusive way of life that the values are so effectively and permanently imbibed”

(Lambert 1977, cited in Persell and Cookson 1986, p.132)

Rathwood College closely adheres to this same mindset, seeing the complete control of the boys and girls entrusted to their care as the key to students reaching their full potential, a factor which for Rathwood’s principal is central to their success (Fieldnotes March 2012). The move in many elite schools to co-educational formula and to the admission of days students has been seen as lessening the ‘total’ experience in these schools (Cookson & Persell, 1985, p.133). Despite having embraced a co-educational formula many years ago and also accepting day boarders in the school in recent years, the ‘totality’ of a Rathwood education has not lessened.

**6.3 Physical distinctiveness**

This adherence to the higher cultural forms consumed in Rathwood College was more explicit in the students’ physical appearance and presentation, with my findings noting an almost complete lack of tolerance of any deviation from elite culture. While the school was explicit about, and constantly reinforced, what is expected from their students in terms of their physical appearance, the extent to which Rathwood’s students adhered to these conventions was noteworthy. The physical distinctiveness is immediately apparent. Within months of being in the school, the students had embraced a particular Rathwood look. The students almost without exception, adhere to very strict
cultural expectations regarding their bodily presentation, with their physical appearance sending out very clear signals about their privileged social class location. This is particularly noteworthy in the extent to which upper middle class values about physical appearance and what is ‘natural’ and ‘acceptable’ are internalised in the school. This socially constructed nature of what is ‘natural’ and attractive in upper class society is most evident in the uniformity evident in the students’ appearance. I was immediately struck by this uniformity in my first visit to the school:

“One of the first things that has intrigued me is the similarity in the students’ appearance. ...I was immediately struck by how different these students looked to many of the young people I am familiar with. Despite the school student body being composed of many different nationalities, there was clearly a ‘Rathwood College’ look”

(Field-notes November 2011)

I noted in the sports hall photo gallery that when congregated together, Rathwood College’s students more closely resemble models in an American ‘preppy’ designer advertisement than a group of adolescents in their school photos:

“Many of these photographs look more like an ad for Ralph Lauren than a school photograph, the overriding theme in each photograph is international and cosmopolitan, each photo brimming with outdoorsy, healthy, confident, sporty and ‘fun’ young people”.

(Field-notes, November 2011)

As a group, these students are certainly very striking, all glowing with apparent good health and confidence, their privileged upbringing evident in their clear skin, shining hair and perfect teeth, and their trim athletic bodies:

“They have healthy complexions, long natural hair, always worn in a pony-tail for sports. They are very athletic looking, in fact, the picture of health. ...The vast majority of them appear to be what is commonly considered a ‘healthy’ weight. None looked underweight and only a handful of the students appeared to be any bit overweight”

(Field-notes, November 2011)

Adhering to strict traditional masculine and feminine gender guidelines, the school has very specific requirements for how students present themselves. The schools rules
stipulate that boys should wear their hair at a ‘normal’ length, which judging by the almost universal style among the male student and staff population, ‘normal’ is a very traditional hairstyle, with short back and sides and a longer ‘windswept’ top:

“None of the boys have crew cuts, shaved heads, or mullets. There are no ponytails, or even any evidence of hair that reaches below any boy’s collar. The trademark hairstyle is what I would describe as an early Hugh Grant ‘fop’ hairstyle, short at the back and sides and left a bit long and unruly on the top. A hairstyle that I would associate more with the male cast of ‘Four weddings and a funeral’ than with present day Irish schoolboys”

(Field-notes November 2011)

Any form of ornamentation or decoration of the male body is not allowed and appears to be strictly adhered to by the vast majority of male students and the male staff. Intrigued by the level of compliance in the school, I enquired of Mrs Garson how the school achieved this level of cooperation. I ‘confessed’ to her that as a teenager ‘my hair was a different colour each week,’ and asked what the response would be if a pupil arrived here with pink hair on Monday. Mrs Garson was quite emphatic when she stated that this would not be acceptable:

“The pupil would be expected to ‘get it sorted immediately…. there had been an issue a number of times with boys coming back after the holidays with their heads shaved’. Something she referred to as ‘an awful business’. She seemed to be at a loss to understand why anyone would want to do this to themselves, stating quite definitely that “nobody could look well with a shaved head”

(Field-notes, March 2012)

This adherence to upper class values in regard to their physical presentation is even more striking with the female students in the school, who presented with a largely homogeneous physical appearance. In keeping with standards among upper-class women, Rathwood girls, without exception, maintain a very ‘natural’ appearance. They wore no obvious make-up or fake tan, and only small discreet pieces of jewellery. The contrast in their appearance with their non-elite female peers was most striking in their hair styles. All the female students had long, apparently natural untreated hair. Despite
continually scrutinising all the female students I failed to locate one girl who deviated from the norm in the school:

“This uniformity in the girls hairstyles was especially striking. Rathwood girls, without exception, wear their hair long and uncoloured. Hair is not obviously manipulated in any way. There is also no evidence that the girls used hair gel, or used straighteners, or curlers. There are no roots showing, no highlights, or unnaturally coloured hair. No hair is poker straight or styled in an ‘fashionable’ hairstyle. Without exception, hair is left long and natural.”

(Field-notes November 2012)

The apparent lack of desire among the female students to express their individuality through their appearance is indeed noteworthy. Interestingly, from the students’ testimony it would appear that they do not feel that the expression of their identity is being suppressed. Saffron expressed the view that “the school is not really that strict about how girls look.” She feels that the school turns “a blind eye if girls wear an extra bracelet or an extra ring”, while Jocelyn expressed the view that it was best that the school does not allow “lots of makeup” as it would “be horrible if all the girls were plastered in makeup” (Interview June 2012).

Interestingly, this uniformity in the students’ appearance is also due to students policing their peers appearance, with any minor ‘impairments of judgements’ in one’s personal presentation met with disapproval. Maria, a 16 year old Spanish girl, experienced such disapproval when while watching a hockey match with a small group of classmates, she revealed a small very discreet design she had shaved on her scalp:

“The design was hardly visible even with her long dark hair pulled back. However, while nobody expressed outright disapproval, they looked totally bewildered as to why she would do this. They all seemed at a loss to understand why Maria would do this, the expression on two of the girls’ faces would suggest that they were concerned for their classmate’s mental stability. Nobody commented on whether they thought the design was pretty or ugly, they just asked Maria ‘why have you done this?’”

(Field-notes March 2012)
Such is the adherence to the ‘accepted’ standards about physical appearance that the solitary student that pushes the boundaries with his or her personal appearance has a notorious reputation among the staff. On each occasion that I raised the topic of rebellious or resistant pupils, the only pupils’ name that staff members mention is Douglas, the one student that obviously defies Rathwood’s strict code on personal appearance. In stark contrast to his school peers, Douglas had blonde highlights in his short hair which was always gelled. More strikingly he has a large tattoo on his upper arm. An example of Douglas being identified solely with resistance and rebellion is evident in Mrs Garson testimony when I asked her about the apparent lack of rebelliousness in the school:

“I said that apart from one or two students that look like they are trying to push the boundaries that the rest of the students appear to conform. She replied with an air of sad resignation, ‘there will always be 1 or 2’ who break the rules. She said that she felt quite sure she could name the students that I had in mind. Then without hesitation, the Principal said ‘oh you are talking about Douglas Carmody’”

(Field-notes March 2012)

While I am quite certain that Douglas would not stand out or look out of place in any group of teenage boys outside this community, the contrast in his appearance compared to his school peers is such that in field-notes I referred to him simply as “Tattoo boy”.

6. 4 Rathwood College uniform’ity

A Rathwood College uniform communicates much more than an association with the school as it essentially underscores the distinctive identity of anyone wearing it. The most striking element of this uniform is the straw boater that all students are required to wear. As an item that is usually only associated with the most elite of British Public schools, seeing the students similarly attired emphasises the elite status of Rathwood
College’s student body. However the boater does not only proclaim the upper class status of the school operating as a potent symbol and signifier of social status, but, as an item that is long associated with the public school, it also conveys the traditional values and ethos of the school. An ethos which the school states is based on its Church of Ireland moral code and on upholding commonly held tradition values (School website 2012). Accordingly, in the competitive market that is private fee-paying schooling, where some originality is necessary to convey what is distinctive about the school, having their student body attired in a manner which not only conveys the social status of the school but also communicates the philosophy of the school to the public is extremely useful in promoting the school.

Furthermore, with a detailed dress code for each day of the week at Rathwood College, school uniform rules are strictly enforced. With lengthy guidelines stipulating the precise attire for each part of the school day students are required to always present in the correct ensemble. Consequently, students are required to make several clothing changes everyday. Unambiguous guidelines specify the precise uniform required each day. For example, on Sundays in chapel along with their full school uniform, all students must wear white surplices in lieu of their black surplice, while boys wear the college tie instead of their house tie. These over-exacting guidelines even extend to what might be considered students’ downtime with all students obliged to adhere to a specific dress code even during their study period. Boys are ‘permitted’ to wear their own choice of jumper without a tie and their school uniform pants, while girls may wear their own choice of sweater and a skirt or a pair of smart comfortable trousers.
Variations for summer allow some deviation from normal school dress rules, with boys allowed to wear their ‘shirts with sleeves rolled up and no tie,’ while girls are permitted to wear their school shirt, with ‘all buttons properly fastened’ (School year book 2011/2012). Mrs Garson makes no apology for the strong stance the school takes in regard to the students’ physical appearance, stating that it would damage the reputation of the school to let standards slip in the school. She stated that she has “always believed in the importance of looking right, and makes no apology for taking a hard line on the uniform and the appearance of the students”. (Field-notes March 2012)

Enforcing uniform regulations is a constant issue in the school, in particular with the junior classes, with some students initially struggling to comply with all the regulations. An example of this was evident with the first year class who were obliged to change out of their sports clothes directly after their physical education class before they went to their lunch, despite having sports immediately after lunch again:

“As this group of first formers, have sports immediately after lunch again, the issue of what this group should wear to lunch has been raised in recent weeks. They had been expected to change into their full school uniform before they entered the dining hall, and then to change back into their sports kit immediately after lunch for afternoon sports. Their teacher announced to the class today that they have been given the concession whereby they do not have to change out of their sports kit, if they wear their blazer over it in the dining hall.” (Field-notes day 12)

The necessity for a special concession to allow the first year class enter the dining hall while still in their sports clothes reveals the importance placed on the appropriate attire at all times in the school.

An extensive sport kit, the cost of which would be prohibitive for most schools, is required for the wide range of sports and physical activities. Adding considerably to this
cost, many items of sports clothing bears the school emblem and for many students their name is also embroidered on each garment.

It was also noteworthy that when free from the school’s strict policing of their students’ appearance that the students dressed with a restraint not usually seen in teenage boys and girls. On the few occasions that I saw the students dressed in their own clothes, I noted that while they dressed fashionably and appropriately for their age, “none of them made any of the usual teenage fashion ‘faux pas’, with their clothes neither too tight or too short.” (Field-notes February 2012)

I would argue that this unrelenting concern with physical appearance in the Rathwood school community is indicative of the understanding among elite groups that not alone does the adornment of the human body express “fundamental dimensions of cultural identification and social participation - of who and what we consider ourselves to be” (Kaiser 1998, p.471), but also is instrumental in both “uniting” members of the same group and “segregating” them from members of other groups (Roach-Higgins & Eicher 1992, p.12).

6.5 Intimate bonds

The tendency among elite groups to deliberately fracture the natural familial bond by placing children, in some cases as young as three years old, in boarding schools with little contact from home has been a feature of elite life since the inception of these schools (Monbiot, 2012; 2008; Duffell 2000). Similarly, there was evidence that the
structure of Rathwood College is designed in such a manner as to encourage the transfer of familial type bonds from the ‘natural’ family to the ‘Rathwood family’.

In what is an unusual departure for a school that is run exclusively by a lay staff, the majority of the teaching staff and administrative staff also live on-site in the school. It is clear that having the school staff and students living together on-site is considered beneficial in the development of much richer relationships and a real sense of ‘community’ in the school. In this regard, Rathwood College mimics the British elite boarding school. For Mrs Garson, this “sense of community and togetherness” is central to the level of success enjoyed in the school (Field-notes, June 2012). She expressed the view that having the majority of the teaching and administrative staff living on site was really important to the success of the school:

“If teachers had to get into their cars half way across the city each morning to get to school that they would be stressed before they got to class each morning. Living on site also means that teachers are not rushing away from the school each evening when class ended too, which means they were available to get involved in activities with the students.”

(Interview, March 2012)

In their desire to further develop these bonds between the teaching staff and the students, the school emulates the English public schools house system with the students living in houses, overseen by their house masters, who operate in loco parentis, an arrangement Mrs Garson is confident everyone benefits from. In this distinctive feature of the school, housing is not arranged by the age of the students but is designed to create a more authentic family life setting by having children of all ages housed together. In the nine houses of differing styles and sizes, the students reside with a house master/house mistress and an assistant house master/house mistress who are usually also teachers in the school. Like parents, these house masters/house mistresses take
responsibility for the students in their houses, being the individuals that the students must report to on their return to the school or if they are seeking permission for an exeat. English teacher Philip, the housemaster in Benson House which is one of the smallest of these houses, “live[s] with [his] wife and two small children in a self contained apartment within the house, where [he is] responsible for 34 students” (Field-notes, November 2011). Philip expressed the view that the real benefit of the teaching staff and administration staff living on-site was that bonds formed between everyone who lived here. Mrs Garson concurred with this sentiment arguing that “because the overwhelming majority of pupils and staff live side-by-side in the College grounds, there is regular interaction between the two groups, both in and out of the classroom, and this enables them to spur one another on to ever greater success”. She is certain that the value of having “the majority of the school staff living right here in the school and available to our students at all times cannot be overestimated” (Interview, March 2012).

This house system is also credited with leading to strong brotherly and sisterly bonds forming, where “older students will usually assume a role looking over their younger ‘siblings’ in the house” (Mrs Garson Interview, March 2012). Even more remarkably, and presumably for similar reasons, students at Rathwood’s sports days are not segregated by age which results in “the fragile looking twelve year old student competing against his eighteen year old housemates” (Field-notes June 2012).

This familial atmosphere was most evident in the school dining hall where the whole school community congregates each day. Despite there being two separate dining halls,
there is no demarcation between the school management, school staff and the students. The whole school community queue together and sit down together to eat each day. I often remarked in my field-notes, on how relaxed and calm mealtimes were in the school. As I joined the queue for my first day for lunch, I remarked upon the good-natured banter between the teachers and the students in the queue (Field-notes November 2011). My notes revealed my surprise at how well-behaved the students were despite there being no apparent supervision or censoring of their behaviour by any of the adult members:

“The students queue, select their food, walk in an orderly fashion to their table in the dining hall, chat amongst themselves while eating and when they are finished they carry their trays back to the allocated space at the entrance to the kitchen. They do not pinch each other, they do not kick each other under the table. I have never seen a food fight, I have never seen any kind of messing with food. There is no jeering or slagging of each other or the staff. The seniors do not tease or ridicule the juniors. There are not even any raised voices in the room.”

(Field-notes December 2011)

I never got the sense that the students’ behaviour was inhibited in any way by their adult company, with neither group appearing like they are on their best behaviour around each other. As is often the case when adults have to share the same space with teenagers, the adult group may appear to tolerate the younger group. I got no sense of that in the dining-hall, or of the staff being frustrated with their younger charges. There appeared to be natural ease and comfort between the different members of the school community:

“The students do not try to make or to avoid eye contact with the staff as they pass each other here in the dining hall. I get no sense of deference from the pupils as they pass the group of adults at the bench inside the dining hall door. There may occasionally be a question for one of the teachers or coaches about something, but there is never any humble apologies for disturbing the adult group. They usually will say “excuse me sir, do you happen to know ...”. The staff member always answer them without any sense of urgency about returning to their adult conversation. On no occasion have I seen a student being corrected about their behaviour in the dining hall, or being questioned about what they ate or did not eat. Indeed I have not witnessed any behaviour that might have warranted correction. At no time in the teachers’ and coaches’ company, does conversation
stall while students are asked to keep it down. Even as Mrs Garson, the school principal takes her place on a bench among the staff. There is no change in the atmosphere in the dining hall when she enters and goes and sits in among the staff for her lunch. She is treated with no more or less deference than any other individual here.”

(Field-notes, December 2012)

This ‘ease’ and comfort between Rathwood’s students and the school academic and coaching staff observed in the school dining hall was not confined to mealtimes, also being evident at morning chapel and during any other exchanges I observed around the school.

6. 6 Hallmarks of ‘home’

The ‘total’ experience that is a Rathwood College education offers all the hallmarks of home without the family ties (Duffell 2000). The sight of babies and small children of the school staff members regularly joining their parents in the school dining hall or in the teachers’ common room is perhaps one of the most striking features of this family-like structure of the institution, where apart from the occasional student coming over to say hello, there is no greater fuss made of babies and toddlers than would be expected between any siblings at mealtimes. This ‘hallmark of home’ is also evident in the number of pet dogs that live among the school community. During afternoon sports many of the staff bring their dogs as they walk the grounds or go to watch a home match or practice session. The students are clearly very familiar with these dogs, calling them by name and playing with them. When I remarked on this unusual feature of the school to the school principal, she said that this is something she has always encouraged:

“While some people may find this strange, discouraging staff from mixing family with their work commitments, [she feels] very strongly that everyone benefits from having all of the community here mixing, with babies or toddlers frequently seen in the school and indeed often accompanied by the family dog. [She] believes that everyone benefits from the homely atmosphere here.”

(Field-notes March 2012)
This homely atmosphere clearly leads to the students developing a deep connection to their school. For first year student Tristan, the school has become a home:

“Yah, yah, here kind of is my home, I would say I spend, I am not sure but I am sure I spend at least half the year here, so I guess with boarding and staying the night and all that sort of stuff, and staying in most of the weekends, it is my home, I mean, I sleep here, I make good friends here, I have almost like a family here, I eat here, I do everything here, so I don’t think, do I feel at home here, I mean it is my home. But like I do feel it is a good home here.”

(Interview, June 2012)

Josh, another first year pupil who admitted to suffering from terrible homesickness when he first came to the school, appeared even surprised himself when he expressed a similar sentiment to that of Tristan about his feelings towards the school:

“I think I have grown to love the place. You know like I have made really good friends this year, and I do feel at home here like, its kind of hard to say it, but I really do like it here.”

(Interview, June 2012)

The school would also appear to assume greater responsibility for their students than might be expected in other schools. In compliance with the requirements laid down by the ethics committee in the University of Limerick in granting approval for this study, I requested permission from the school principal to conduct group and individual interviews with the first year class that I had shadowed. I was surprised however that the school did not require permission from the teachers or more interestingly from the parents of the students in question. While I was aware that the teachers involved would be informed of the situation by the principal, I know of no attempt being made to inform the parents of the students involved of the nature of the study or the level of involvement required by their children. The decision to grant approval, rested completely within the school.
There is much evidence that the distinctive socialisation processes in Rathwood enkindles solidarity within the school community. As a consequence of which Rathwood students’ primary identification is with members of this exclusive social network. The findings demonstrate that immersion in the ‘total environment’ is instrumental in the formation of a collective identity, with this primary identification with the Rathwood College community evidenced in both students and teachers testimonies. This was clearly evident in the numerous references in the data to Rathwood College being a ‘home’ and a ‘family’ from the school community. Tristan’s assertion that Rathwood College was not only ‘a home’ for him, but was a ‘good home’, lent support to Mrs Garson’s claim that “everyone benefits” from this intimate setting (Field-notes March 2012).

In comparison to previous accounts of boarding schools, as austere, barren spaces (Monbiot 2008; Duffell 2000) Rathwood College has clearly succeeded to a greater degree in creating ‘a home away from home’ for their students. The literature would strongly suggest that Rathwood is not alone in trying “to love, rather than beat, students into submission” with numerous accounts on elite schooling indicating that these schools have changed their modus operandi in recent decades (Cookson & Persell 1985, p.127). With abundant references in the data to the convivial atmosphere in the school, this testimony mimicked that from Khan (2011) in characterising life in the elite boarding school today as “enabling rather than constraining”. This congenial atmosphere was commented upon in the school’s most recent ‘Whole-School Evaluation’ by the Department of Education and Skills, which remarked on the
palatable atmosphere of well-being and respect in the school (Department of Education 20xx).

In the teachers’ common room, I often overheard conversations between the teachers about the students. As the students were being discussed, it was as if it was a family member due to the obvious enjoyment at the antics of the boy or girl being discussed:

"Mr Jones came in laughing, and then shared with the other teachers what he found so amusing. As he was recounting this amusing anecdote, which was about something one of his pupils had said in class the day before, several of the teachers joined in laughing and said they had heard the story yesterday. They seemed genuinely amused by the boy's antics, with one teacher wiping away her tears as she was laughing so much. As they chuckled away, about how funny the boy was, two of the other teachers shared other funny stories about this particular boy."

(Field-notes, January 2012)

There is great pride among the teaching and coaching staff in the bonds that they form with their students. In this relatively small school, the teachers and coaches are clearly very familiar with the different personalities of their students. In field-notes, I recorded how Bart, a junior hockey coach, shared his knowledge about the students:

"Bart starts giving me pieces of information again on all the boys playing hockey. He proudly reels off the ages of the boys and how long they have been in the school and tells me several stories about the boys, e.g. ‘that little coloured guy is Godwil, he is the youngest pupil in the school, tough little man’ or ‘that’s Ope, the tall guy, great player, he is repeating 1st year with ‘us’.”

(March 2012)

I also noticed incidents in the teachers’ common room where such was the familiarity with the students it did not require teachers to clarify which student they were talking about. In one conversation between a number of teachers, even though only the boy’s first name was used, the other teachers were quite certain about which particular ‘Sam’ was being discussed, despite there being three Sams registered as students in the school. I surmised in my field-notes that because of the teachers ‘total’ engagement with the students, that “it makes it quite easy to associate the correct student with the ‘character’
of the student that is being discussed” (February 2012). Similarly, among the teaching staff, there is such a level of familiarity with each other’s lives (even when the staff member lives outside the school) that they all appear well acquainted with each other’s families. The extent of this familiarly with each other’s families and their non-term schedules was most obvious when the teachers gathered in the school common-room upon their return from mid-term break or school holidays. As stories were shared between the staff, there was no clarification sought or required on who the particular “Michael” or “Isobel” was who also travelled to Malta, or who was the “Thomas” who “entertained everyone with his hilarious stories in Wexford” (March 2012).

No members of the community expressed concerns about a lack of privacy in living in what is effectively a goldfish bowl. It was always portrayed as a very harmonious co-existence on the school campus. In fact, it emerged quite clearly from the data, that rather than being constraining, the members of the community see life in this tight-knit community as enabling. I asked Andrew, a maths teacher and rugby coach who lives on-site with his wife, what it was like to live and work among the same group of people seven days a week;

“The staff don’t see a lot of each other during the week, hardly see each other, maybe bump into each other 2 or 3 times a week. During breaks, though, we meet up a lot more, meeting regularly and socialising together...it is great, we have a good time together, we get together a lot, doing things like going on skiing holidays together.”

(Field-notes April 2012)

While Michael, a history teacher in the school, admitted that his wife may sometimes struggle with life in the cloistered world that is Rathwood College, he had no such concerns or difficulties with the self-contained nature of the school. In conversation discussing the previous two winters’ very harsh weather, Michael stated:
“My wife had ‘gone stir crazy’ at not being able to get out of the school because of the dangerous driving conditions. It did not bother me at all, I had all I needed inside the grounds of the school. I had lots of company in the school, and could go for a run or a walk here, I had all I needed here.”

(Field-notes December 2011)

Cordelia, a full-time matron in the school sanatorium, whose husband was unsure of a teaching position being available in the following school year when he had completed his teacher trainer hours in the school, expressed reservations about the wisdom of them both continuing to work together, with the demands of the job, now that they are new parents to baby Clara and toddler James. She expressed the view that it would probably work out better for them as a family if her husband sought work in an ‘ordinary school’ where he ‘would finish work at four o clock’. She described the total commitment that is required with working in the school, where “there is really no such thing as being off duty, with informal as well as formal duties”. However, while she described the duties of teachers or staff members in Rathwood College as “all consuming and never ending”, she still feels that “we get back tenfold what we give to the school.” As we spoke, as if on cue, providing a perfect example of some of the informal duties involved in her role, a number of senior pupils came up to Cordelia and after addressing baby Clara by name, they all thanked Cordelia for a lovely evening, the previous night when she had them round to her home for dinner. As they walked away Cordelia smiled proudly at her young charges and was clearly grateful of her place in the school community, commenting that the “pupils here are so different to other students”. She asked me “have you noticed how different they are here?” (Field-notes June 2012). The all-consuming role of teachers with the extra responsibilities and commitments that is required is a recurring theme in much of the literature on elite schools (Khan 2011;

6. Vocational teachers

In many ways, in their all consuming role, the dedication shown by the teaching staff is of a similar nature and commitment to that of religious organisations who dedicated their lives to the education of Ireland’s middle class youth. For the majority of the teaching staff, teaching in Rathwood College is clearly not just a job but a way of life. In the company of the school teaching or coaching staff I regularly remarked to myself on the extent to which conversation centres around life within the school community. Even among the younger members of the teaching community, who might be expected to be more distracted by events in the ‘outside’ world, conversation largely centred on life inside the school. This enthralment with life in the school community was evident at school mealtimes where I was usually in the company of some of the school’s youngest teachers and where inevitably conversation was dominated by happenings within the school. My field-work was at a time when the Irish education system was under sustained pressure from reduced government spending on education due to the economic crisis the country was experiencing. Teacher unions were expressing great concern about teachers’ working conditions and had been vehement that these cuts had damaged the status of the profession. Yet at no time in the school was I aware of these events impacting on the school staff;

“While it might be expected that this is the normal conversation in most school staff rooms, from what I have been told by teachers in other schools, the issue of teachers working conditions has become a very hot topic in staff rooms in recent years. I have never picked up any murmur of discontent among the teachers.”

(Field-notes March 2012)
It felt that this school’s teaching staff were removed from the difficulties being experienced in the world of teaching outside the school walls. I never got any sense from any of the teaching staff that they were concerned about the status of teaching. In fact, to the contrary I often remarked at the high esteem that teaching and scholarship appears to be held in the school community;

“Despite concerns being regularly expressed in recent years, about teaching as a profession having become a lower status profession, I get no sense of that being an issue here. Nothing about the teachers’ demeanours or behaviour would suggest that they see themselves as being in a struggling profession. They would, in the main, have the swagger and confidence that I would associate more with successful business people or with people in high status professions like law or politics.”

(Field-notes May 2012)

Furthermore, while reductions in teachers’ salaries is only one of a number of issues that Irish teachers unions have argued have damaged the status of teaching in Ireland (INTO 2014; TUI 2014; ASTI 2014), it is the primary factor that has been attributed to this crisis in the profession. However as Rathwood College is under no obligation to disclose the salary packages they offer their teachers, there is no evidence to suggest that this apparently greater satisfaction among teachers is due to higher renumeration packages than other teachers receive. Nonetheless, with the majority of Rathwood’s teaching staff living on-site, and much of the expenses of city living offset by the fact that life at a boarding school involves fewer expenses, greater financial security among Rathwood’s teaching staff may (or may not) be a significant factor in the apparent high satisfaction evident in the school.

6.8 Social selectivity

While modern elites are considered to be a more fluid group, not closed off from the rest of society, the opportunities for interaction with individuals outside this elite
community and accordingly from a different social class are few. Yet it is clear that rather than seeing themselves as being cut off from social opportunities, members of the school community see this as social selectivity. There is no sense that the school community see themselves as disadvantaged by this. The extent to which the school operates blatant social selection is most evident on the school sports fields. The vast majority of schools that Rathwood competes against in sports competitions are almost exclusively private fee-paying from the same province. During discussions with some of the school’s teachers and sports coaches about what the criteria is for selecting competing schools, no reference was made to the fact that nearly all of these schools are private fee-paying with the majority the most exclusive fee-paying schools:

“They justify the limited pool of schools they compete against, as due to scheduling problems with other types of schools and because of the activities that the school focuses on. Robert (Physical education teacher) has referred to scheduling problems with schools that do not dedicate Wednesday afternoons to sports and also those that do sport on Saturdays. This excludes the majority of schools in this area. The only schools that have a tradition of dedicating Wednesday afternoons to sport are the private schools. Furthermore, very few schools have the resources to open and staff their schools on Saturdays for games.”

(Field-notes, January 2012)

Another factor that mitigates against friendships outside the school community, is the seven-day boarding structure of the school, which allows for few weekends at home during the school term. With such extended periods being away from home, maintaining old friendships becomes very difficult. For example Josh, a first year, who had previously spoken with great pride of his very successful hurling career in his native County Galway, where he had captained his junior team at county level, prior to commencing at Rathwood, has surprisingly found his allegiance quickly switching to rugby after a short time in the school, after being unable to maintain his training and match commitments to his home county team and also to his local club. However after
having previously devoted hours every day to his hurling commitments, he appears to have quickly come to terms with this transfer of allegiances away from his home county that he had previously expressed such a commitment to: “ah when I go home, on holiday like, I go back and play for them for whatever club or county match whenever I can”. (Interview, June 2012)

While Rathwood’s students are exposed to students from all over the world, they are confined to interacting with students from the same social group as themselves. This is not a new phenomenon for this community as a publication on the history of the school noted the schools’ founder’s intention that by charging higher fees than were charged elsewhere, the school would attract pupils from a different class (Author A, 1995). With fees today still at the very high end, the school would not appear to have deviated much from that policy (School Website 2012). With no full scholarships offered by the school, opportunities for students from less privileged backgrounds is essentially blocked. Moreover the bursary system that the school operates, is designed to facilitate the families of old boys and girls of Rathwood, by providing funding first and foremost to the families of former students who are experiencing a ‘reversal of good fortune’ and secondly to the children of staff members (School website). The school website also provides detailed information on the different grant awarding bodies that provide financial assistance for Protestant children’s schooling. Twenty-seven organisations are listed that provide assistance for such children to attend Protestant boarding schools. The website also states that the school provides an additional substantial discount for the children of Protestant clergy and also a discount for the children of ‘Old boys and
girls’ of Rathwood. These grants are provided exclusively for Protestant children to attend Protestant managed, fee-paying schools.

The school’s ability to effectively isolate their pupils from all but the most desirable social groups is clearly considered to be a very attractive feature of the school. The school offers parents the security of knowing that their children are purposefully employed six days a week, with few opportunities or indeed requirements to seek social contact outside their social group. Field-notes reveal that this was clearly a key factor for Rosemary (who has her two sons enrolled in the school) in her choice of school for her children when they returned from abroad to live in Ireland. As Rosemary’s children had been educated in the international school system in Spain, where they would have been undertaking the International Baccalaureate, I wondered why Rosemary had not sent her children to the one particular private fee-paying school where it is possible for students to do the International Baccalaureate in Ireland:

“Rosemary told me that she had been told that the one school that it is possible to do the International Baccalaureate had been very difficult to get into, and anyway ‘the fact that it was only a day school made it less than ideal’. As both of Rosemary’s children were day boarders, I found this a puzzling drawback! I presumed that the intention was to enrol her children as boarders next year. This however, was not the case, as she told me she had no firm plans to enrol her children as boarders. Rosemary explained that her children attending a boarding school, even as day boarders, meant they did not have to go outside the school to make and meet friends. That although they went home at night, all their needs were going to be met by the school. They get to be involved in sports and clubs, get to socialise with friends and all within their school. She said that by the time they come home at night, they are tired and all they need is some Facebook time.”

(Field-notes March 2012)

Similarly, Callum, whose son is a first year pupil in Rathwood, also placed a great emphasis on a school’s adeptness at social selectivity when choosing a school for his children (his two younger children will be following their older brother the following year). He detailed the extensive research he engaged in when choosing a secondary
school. Callum stated that he visited schools all over Ireland. However as I noted in field-notes when “Callum spoke of ‘schools’ he was always only referring to private fee-paying schools” (March 2012). He clearly felt very justified in deliberating for such a time on the choice of school as his partner had a very unpleasant experience with her daughter in a local non-fee paying school:

“After having a bad experience at boarding school, Callum’s partner vowed to never send any of her children away to school. So when her daughter was making the transition to secondary school, she was duly enrolled in a local vocational school. However, when the girl was in her second year she ‘got in with a bad crew and was caught smoking in the school toilet.’ He said there was a suspicion that she may also have experimented with cannabis. Callum said he intervened and sought help from the ‘local church of Ireland clergyman’. This clergyman ‘strongly recommended that they take the girl out of the local school and get her into a ‘good’ school. The girl was quickly enrolled in an exclusive private fee-paying in South Dublin as a day pupil and then travelled each day from their home in Wicklow. He said the girl was ‘transformed’ in the new school, where ‘she excelled academically and socially and left the school a lovely person 5 years later’. He said that this girl loved the new school so much ‘she begged her mother to let her board after a year in the school. Her mother ‘relented’ and basically saw the error of her ways as she then sent all her younger children to boarding school when they were transferring to secondary school.”

(Field-notes March 2012)

This ‘cautionary tale’ from Callum on the risks associated with a wrong choice of school reveals the ‘dangers’ that dominant groups feel they may be exposing their children to if due care is not taken in isolating their off-spring from undesirable social groups.

6.7 Disconnection from past-life

My findings also demonstrated that as primary identification developed with the school, the bonds developed prior to attending Rathwood College proved difficult to maintain. While ostensibly the seven day boarding format of the school is held as mitigating against preserving old friendships, the findings would concur with Gaztambide-Fernandez’s (2009, p.10) assertion that in reality old friendships are no longer valid,
with “previous experiences and status markers that might be in conflict with the elite status that an elite boarding school confers on them”. I would argue that this disassociation from former relationships demonstrates how the distinctive practices and lifestyle in elite schools “put students through a rite of passage that stripped them of their sense of self and through which they developed loyalties to other members of the elite” (Cookson and Persell cited in Howard and Gaztambide-Fernandez 2009, p.2), or as Khan (2011, p.33) has described the process “soldiers are stripped of their individuality and built up to become ‘soldiers for their class’”. Interestingly, for Tristan and Jocelyn, the two seasoned boarders in the class who had both also boarded at an exclusive primary school, there were no conflicts with past life connections and their new commitments to their Rathwood community. They both expressed to me their delight when they got the opportunity to compete against their old school in inter-school cricket and hockey matches. The strong bonds that they kept with their old school was apparent as Tristan and Jocelyn greeted their former schoolmates when they came to compete in inter-school games (Field-notes March 2012) and also evidenced in their interview testimony as they recounted their primary school experiences to me. I would argue that this lack of conflict between their old past life connections and their new life in Rathwood is due to the cultural ties and similarities between both these worlds, as well as Tristan and Jocelyn being deeply acculturated to the demands of the elite boarding school environment, which clearly ensured their easy transition to the regime at Rathwood College.
This lack of connection to the outside world\textsuperscript{12} was also evident in the invisibility of mobile phones in the school, an absence I frequently noted. Even as students walked the grounds at their lunch break, or as students transferred from one building to another between classes, I never caught sight of the students texting or making calls. In fact, in my time in the school I never noticed any students in possession of a mobile phone. My field-notes reflect my curiosity about this:

“I am really curious about something here, where are the texters?. They all talk over lunch, but there is no evidence of texting going on in the dining hall. I don’t see any evidence of mobile phones being used around the school during the day. I know that schools and organisations struggle to limit mobile phone usage, but most of these are fighting a losing battle, mobile phone usage is incessant, especially during break times. Yet, I have never heard a mobile ring here. Robert returns phone calls or texts when he checks his phone during his breaks. I have not heard any teacher instructing their class to make sure their phones were switched off. They obviously know it is not necessary. The students are not catching up with calls as they make their way to the sports fields, nor are they walking on their own with their heads down as they quickly send texts.”

(March 2012)

On a number of occasions in physical education class I saw students empty their pockets and ask the physical education teacher or coach to mind their possessions when they are playing sports. I saw watches and i-pods but I never saw a mobile phone.

\section*{6.8 Lack of a traditional hierarchy}

Rathwood College departs from Goffman’s concept in one significant regard. Like all total institutions there is a hierarchy and a chain of command. However in Rathwood College that hierarchy appears to be far more fluid. There is no panopticon feeling, no sense of big brother in the school. While the issue of control and discipline is always going to be a consideration in a boarding school, in an elite educational institution not

\textsuperscript{12} The totality of this disconnection from the outside world was apparent in the lack of awareness or sensitivity to students from vastly contrasting social backgrounds. This disconnection was discernible in the absence of any references to their working class or socially disadvantaged peers. This contrasts with Barnes (2007) who noted that the privately educated teenage boys in her study displayed high levels of hostility, mistrust and fear of their working class peers.
only is it less possible to coerce batches of individuals to perform tasks or behave in a certain way it is also undesirable. In this regard Rathwood College is not concerned with exerting power or powerless people. There are not two distinct classes in the school, with one class holding the power and the other the object of power.

It is clear that in the veritable microcosm that is the elite boarding school, students become very skilled at negotiating hierarchical relations (Khan 2011). Living together on the school premises, both students and teachers interact daily on numerous occasions and in different contexts, both formal and informal. Such intense interaction in the classroom, on the playing-fields, in the dining halls and in the chapel enables students to master the uncertain space between intimacy and respectful deference, learning to interact in ways which are both familiar and respectful. It instils in them, “an ease” (Khan 2011), a comfort in mixing in all company and in negotiating these hierarchies.

This open hierarchy, with its apparent lack of surveillance appears to promote a culture of compliancy in the school, where discipline issues are few. While a full timetable may leave little time for individual misdemeanours, it is clear that the culture of the school discourages infringements. Despite being ‘reassured’ by a number of the teachers that they do have occasional discipline issues in the school, all I observed at the school would suggest that violations tend to be of a minor nature. The culture of self-disciplining and peer to peer disciplining appears to promote self-discipline and self-control. When speaking to Callum (parent to first year student Edward and presently
working on a short-term contract, teaching in the school), I enquired about any discipline issues he may experience in the classroom, a question he seemed genuinely surprised by:

“He assured me that discipline was not an issue with any of the students, and expressed the view that discipline was not an issue in general in the school. He spoke about how he believes that the students here ‘self-discipline’. He explains that what this means is that the students don’t need to be disciplined by the teachers, they discipline themselves.” (Field-notes April 2012)

Callum is not alone in placing his trust in the particular model of education offered in Rathwood College to discourage dissent and to strengthen the bonds within the community, as attested to in the school code of behaviour, which stressed fairness and consensus, and most importantly “being occupied as the most effective form of discipline” (2012).

**Conclusion**

This chapter has presented the research findings related to the role the distinctive practices in the elite boarding school play in the reproduction of elite groups. The data revealed the distinctive rituals of belonging that this elite community employ to maintain their cultural identity and to establish boundaries between themselves and others. This desire to differentiate themselves from their non-elite peers was most striking in their cultural consumption, with the range of cultural products consumed within Rathwood College associated almost exclusively with the dominant classes. My findings reveal the central role of the ‘total’ environment of the elite boarding school in maintaining this cultural homogeneity, with the cloistered ‘bubble-like’ community providing the Rathwood scholar with fewer experiences and examples of diverse styles, behaviour and values. The totally of this process is such that it not alone encompasses
the academic, but also the social, physical and moral elements of Rathwood’s students’ lives. I have shown that central to this are the intimate connections nurtured within this tightly integrated community, with teachers and students living side by side in the school, and interacting daily on numerous occasions and in different contexts both formal and informal. I have also shown how the apparent lack of a traditional school hierarchy nurtures a culture of compliancy. Accordingly the chapter concludes by demonstrating how as a result of this distinctive socialisation process in Rathwood College, students primary identification transfers to the school community and accordingly they then see themselves as members of an exclusive social network. The transfer of allegiance accomplished at ‘elite schools’ through the magical operations of ‘separation and aggregation” results in the formation of “an elite that is not only distinct and separate but also recognised by others and by itself as worthy of being so” (Bourdieu 1998, p.102). The following chapter, which presents the second of the two findings chapters, describes and details the physical dimensions of a Rathwood College education, and calls attention to the distinctive bodily dispositions that are cultivated and nurtured in the school’s intensive physical education and sports programme.
Chapter Seven

PHYSICAL DISTINCTION

Introduction

In seeking to establish what role the physical curriculum in elite schooling plays in the social construction of elite bodies, this chapter presents my subjective interpretation of the key findings pertaining to the ‘physical’ dimensions of a Rathwood College education. The chapter begins by detailing the formal elements of the school’s physical curriculum, the physical education and sporting programme, underscoring the cultural distinctiveness of the programme and revealing the key concern with character development on the sports fields of the school. Then in one of the more significant findings to emerge in the data, the chapter calls attention to the role of the formal and informal physical curriculum in the cultivation of a range of distinctive bodily dispositions among the student body is discussed. Manifesting in their posture, gestures, facial expressions and in their relation to space, this essentially upper class embodiment was found to convey unambiguous information about these individual’s social class status. The chapter concludes by drawing attention to the significant ‘profit’ that is to be accrued from the possession of the cultivated and confident demeanour that is nurtured and moulded through immersion in Rathwood’s intensive physical curriculum, revealing how rather than operating as just a cultural marker, it is also deemed indicative of the quality of the student’s character.
7. 1 Physical Curriculum

Following Shilling (2003) I recognise the embodied nature of schooling and accordingly define the physical curriculum as a range of both formal and informal processes, that extend beyond physical education and school sport to incorporate all processes that involve the management of the body. The transmission of this corporeal knowledge which is transmitted by means of the physical curriculum was observed in the bodily engagements of Rathwood’s students over the course of their school day. References in this thesis to physical education refer specifically to the time-tabled class where students receive instruction in a number of physical activities, while references to school sport allude to the daily timetabled sports session and also to all competitive team and individual sports students compete in.

7. 2 Sports ‘heaven’

The importance placed on the physical curriculum in Rathwood College is abundantly clear. This is most explicitly illustrated in the emphasis on physical education and sport in the school. The school website boasts of the very comprehensive sporting programme and the school’s extensive sporting resources (School website 2012). Set on over 200 acres, there is a wealth of physical education and sporting resources, which include dedicated facilities for a large number of sports. The quality of these sports facilities are such that they can be said to mirror those of a university campus, or because of the

13 The school’s sporting resources include six rugby pitches, four all-weather hockey pitches, three spacious cricket pitches, seven tennis courts, a golf course, a recently completed indoor swimming pool and a smaller outdoor swimming pool, indoor and outdoor basketball courts, and a number of cross-country runs. There is also a large sports and fitness centre, in which there is a very well equipped gym, several well equipped exercise rooms, and a large sports hall, which is used for basketball, badminton, volleyball, indoor football and hockey, and indoor cricket. The school also caters for archery, and number of equestrian activities, including horse riding, and polo-crosse.
international character of the school, more of “an exclusive international sports camp than an Irish secondary school” (Field-notes December 2011). A similar sentiment was expressed by English teacher and Hockey coach Philip when he remarked that he “always thinks it feels more like UCD here on a sunny day, than a school” (Field-notes April 2012). Indeed such is the range and quality of the physical education and sporting resources that I often remarked that for the sports enthusiast Rathwood College is “sports heaven” (Field-notes April 2012).

With a significant proportion of international students, it is clear that this rich sporting culture is one of the key factors in attracting students from abroad. For Mina, the school’s sporting culture was the primary factor in her choosing Ireland when she decided to travel abroad from her home in China to study. She said that while studying in an English speaking country was clearly beneficial for her, her decision to study abroad was due to her desire to play more sports. As a result, Rathwood College was chosen due to the school’s reputation as “a really good school with lots of sports” (Interview June 2012). Fortunately for Mina, the school has lived up to its reputation as she describes her overall experience of the school as “very positive”, a fact that she attributes in no small part to, the sports and physical activities programme in the school. In contrast to Mina’s enthusiasm for Rathwood’s strong sporting culture, Georgian Kaisa was hesitant about attending a “sports-mad school”. Despite this initial reticence, her testimony now also reveals a real appreciation of sport and physical activities in the school:

“Kaisa tells me that she is in her second year in the school and that she loves it here. In fact she declares that Rathwood College is “the best school in the world!”.”
I asked her what made the school special to her, to which she replied, without having any knowledge of what my study was focusing on, that it was the sport in the school. She explained that before she came here, she did not like sport, and participated in very little physical activity. However, this quickly changed here at Rathwood, when she “learned the meaning of what a team was, in my first days here”. Having never played hockey before she came here, she said she loves it now. And while she would not have chosen to be goalie, she said she does not move very fast, and her team asked her to be the goalie, so she is ‘okay with it for now’.…while rushing to the pitch she turned and said ‘saving a goal is the best feeling in the world.’

(Field-notes January 2012)

As the two girls quoted above attest, many students are not exposed to a strong sporting culture prior to attending Rathwood College. However, having been exposed to the sporting culture in Rathwood College they are quick to recognise its value.

Although I appreciated that those who were directly involved in teaching and coaching physical education and sports would have an interest in sporting activities in the school, I was surprised by the extent to which sport dominated conversation. From the teachers’ staff room to the dining hall, I frequently remarked on the number of conversations in which the subject matter was sport and, in particular sporting activities in the school. Indeed, such was the emphasis on sport that I initially suspected that this apparent ‘universal’ enthusiasm may have been for my benefit:

“I don’t know if it was the fact that I had just been introduced to the group, and I was clearly interested in the physical activities in the school, but so much conversation appeared to be dominated by school sporting activities”

(Field-notes November 2011)
While being in the company of Robert (the head of physical education and sport in the school) would have increased the likelihood of the topic being raised, such was the knowledge and interest from the majority of staff in the progress and performances in the different sports that it is highly unlikely that such interest could be convincingly feigned or inflated.

7.3 No debate required on the value of the physical curriculum

Despite the increasing importance placed on examination results and the far wider choice of extracurricular activities that must now be provided in the competitive market of elite schooling, the continued emphasis placed on the physical curriculum, and particularly on physical education and school sports, within the school is striking. The lack of any apparent debate as the value of the physical curriculum was noteworthy, with no justification for the strong emphasis on the ‘physical’ being sought or required by either the teaching and coaching staff, student’s parents or the students. I got no sense that the academic achievement and exam results are perceived as the ‘real’ business of schooling or indeed even more unusually, that physical capacities are considered inferior to mental capacities. The centrality of the physical curriculum to a Rathwood College education is made explicit in the detailed end of term school progress reports in which physical education merits equal attention alongside the conventionally more ‘meritorious’ academic subjects. With a paragraph devoted to each subject, the same amount of space is devoted to physical education as academic subjects. This is in marked contrast to any other school reports that I am familiar with.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{14} I received reports from a vocational school and a voluntary school that my sons attended.
which apart from only consisting of one line summing up the child’s performance for
the year and generally a one word summation of their behaviour for the year, there is
generally only a cursory mention of a student’s progress in physical education.
Furthermore the general positive tone from the teachers in the reports was also
noteworthy, focusing on where the student is succeeding rather than on where he or she
is struggling. This emphasis on the students’ positive progress was also evident in a
separate section of the school report, which documents where students “may be
excelling or showing a lot of interest in” any sporting or other extracurricular activities
(Field-notes June 2012). This is I believe, another significant departure from the way
other schools choose to report on their students’ progress.

Given the increasing importance placed on school league tables in recent years, this
continued prioritisation of the physical curriculum is even more noteworthy. As the top
places of these school league tables have been largely dominated by private fee-paying
schools15, failure to achieve a high ranking can be a cause for concern in this
increasingly competitive educational market, with a school’s reputation and as a result
their enrolment numbers, significantly impacted upon. With a school’s ranking in these
tables based solely on the percentage of their students that progress to Irish third level
institutions the same year they have completed their final exams, students’ success in
their academic endeavours is vital for a school to rank highly. Despite the school
consistently achieving excellent academic results, Rathwood College does not usually
rank in the top ten in these league tables, something which is clearly a major bugbear

15 Sunday Times School league table 2011; 2012; 2013
for Mrs Garson. She points out that with pupils achieving an average of 460 points over the past six years in the Leaving Certificate examination\(^{16}\), the school is one of Ireland’s highest academically achieving schools. However, Mrs Garson explains that in this regard, it could be argued that the school is a victim of its own success. She explains that with its considerable success academically and the very cosmopolitan character of the school (with its many international student and staff members), this has resulted in a propensity among Rathwood’s students to apply to prestigious universities outside Ireland\(^{17}\), thereby impacting the school’s ranking on Irish league tables:

“She explained that with significant numbers of their students going to university outside Ireland and also a great number taking a gap year, they fail to rank in the top ten each year. Mrs Garson said she found this ‘very frustrating’ as she knows that all of their students ‘will of course attend university’”

(Field-notes, April 2012)

Due to what she sees as the “shortcomings” in how these league tables are compiled, Mrs Garson is convinced that neither Rathwood College’s excellent academic record, which she argues is “outstanding by any reliable indicator or measure” or in the all-round quality education provided in the school, are given the acknowledgment they deserve:

“Mrs Garson is convinced that “other schools that do not give the rounded education that Rathwood excels at do much better on these league tables than we do”. A situation that she feels is unjust as it ‘really misrepresents the school and its students’”

(Field-notes April 2012)

\(^{16}\) The Leaving Certificate Examination is the final year exam for Irish second level students

\(^{17}\) Traditionally, only about 60% of Rathwood College leavers enter higher education in the Republic of Ireland, where they usually take up places at Trinity College or University College in Dublin. The majority of those that chose to study abroad opt to study in the United Kingdom, while others attend universities in Europe, S. Africa, New Zealand and the United States
Despite this issue with the school league tables arising each year, Mrs Garson is resolute in her belief that a rich physical education and sporting programme are essential components in a truly rounded education.

Notwithstanding the school’s excellent academic success and their understandable desire to maintain these standards, it is interesting that even during their final year, students’ commitment to the physical education and sporting programme must be honoured¹⁸. While fully appreciative that demands on pupils approaching their final exams may mean that their commitment to sport diminishes for a time, the school still seeks to curtail the students’ physical activities as little as possible. This unwillingness to curtail the physical education and sporting programme was most evident when Leaving Certificate students who were clearly under pressure in the weeks leading up to their exams showed some resistance to physical education class¹⁹:

“As the 6th years start arriving for PE, none of them are in their PE kit. Jennifer, their physical education teacher, tells them that they have to do PE and that they must run back and change. Some of the students protest, arguing that their mocks are only two weeks away, and they need to study. They ask can they just go to the library, or can they just sit quietly and study in the sports hall. However, Jennifer insists that PE class must not be missed. After pleading with their teacher for several more minutes, they finally accepted that they had to change and all were back within the 10 minutes”

(Field-notes March 2012)

On another occasion, a female student cited the school’s demanding extracurricular programme as the trigger that caused her to become visibly upset during the Leaving Certificate group physical education class:

“One girl seems very stressed, she took her teacher aside and told her that she can’t afford to lose the hour studying, that it could affect all of her results. I

¹⁸ Physical education is not an exam subject in Ireland

¹⁹ In Rathwood College, physical education class is an optional subject for students studying for the Leaving Certificate
overheard her say that the school ‘expects us all to get good results and then will not let us study’.”  
(Field-notes April 2012)

I did note however on each of these occasions that despite all their protestations, that once the students had conceded defeat, they all engaged fully and enthusiastically in their physical education class. Daria remarked on this when, despite being under pressure to prepare for her impending exams, she admitted to always feeling better after having some exercise:

“As the group of Leaving Certificate girls were discussing their study plans and up-coming mocks, they made several references to the pressure they were feeling. Daria, a German student said that when she is under this pressure, and there is a match looming, she is not happy about having to take the break from studying, however she conceded that when she did take a break she felt better, saying “once I am here and playing I am happy.””  
(Field-notes February 2012)

It was interesting that younger students held the view that continued involvement in the school physical education and sports program, even at exam times, would only strengthen one’s academic performance. Interviews with the first year pupils revealed very positive attitudes to the impact of physical education and school sports on academic performance. India argues:

“I think it helps because if you are studying all the time you’d realise and you would get really worried about the exam, because even if you did a little less sport it would still help you relax, and get your mind off things.”  
(Interview, June 2012)

Tristan expressed the view that rather than detracting from their academic performance that being active and being involved in sports boosts it:

“I think it does yah, it is kind of something to take our minds off, like boredom, if I had say 8 classes in a row with only lunch to separate them, I would be getting bored, in each class and when I am bored I can’t study, you know it’s almost like a little gap, sport is you know, you are exerting yourself in different ways, sport definitely isn’t a break, it isn’t a break, doss time, it is a break from academics, and you kind of need a break, you can’t do study, study, study, and it just gets boring and you can’t learn anything, and I guess they say that a healthy body is a healthy mind, and I think that’s true, I mean, I think there has been tests done to show people that do a lot of sports get better grades, like, there are reasons, at the end of
the day after sports, you are tired, you get better sleep, you know and your energised and there is something to look forward to”

(Interview June 2012)

Indeed, for thirteen year old Alex continued engagement in physical education and school sport at all times, even up to and during exam times is just common sense. He seemed genuinely surprised that some schools would side-line physical activity completely in exam years, asking “why would they do that, how is your brain meant to work if they don’t get out and do some sports?” (Field-notes December 2011). Similarly Koye was clearly of the belief that fitness is equally important to academic achievements “ummh its good to be smart, but you need your share of exercise…. Like, you need to be fit and smart at the same time. You need to balance the two” (Field-notes December 2011).

In a school that devotes such time and resources to the physical curriculum, there is much potential for discord between those seeing to the academic needs of students and those who attend to their physical education and sporting needs. Yet interestingly I observed nothing to suggest tensions between the two. The only issue that I was made aware of, involved Robert’s predecessor and related to the scheduling of students’ resource class during their physical education class. Of the fifteen students in the first year physical education class, three boys attended resource class. Robert related how this ongoing practice had previously caused some tension between his former colleague in the physical education and sport department and those who are responsible for scheduling students’ teaching support. Robert acknowledged however that, while this

---

20 According to the head of the resource department, the number of students allocated resource hours is significantly higher than the national average.
practice of time-tabling resource classes during their physical education class was not ideal, he accepts that in an over-crowded curriculum, accommodations need to be made:

“I remarked to Robert that Dominic (the boy who struggles most in the physical education class) seems to miss quite a bit of his physical education class. He explains that Dominic attends resource class each week at this time, usually for a half hour period. He said that there were different attitudes to this practice in the school. He said that Leo, his predecessor, was unhappy about learning support being timetabled during the students PE class but that he was ‘more pragmatic’ about it”

(Field-notes December 2011)

Having witnessed on a number of occasions the tolerance shown by other teachers when their students’ sporting commitments conflicted with their class-times, it is understandable why accommodations must be found from all concerned. This tolerance was evident in Mr Blake’s Latin class when class was disturbed for several minutes with some confusion about what boys were on the list for that day’s away cricket match:

“Mr Blake asked what students were missing today, he was told that Tristan and Ope were missing because they had a cricket match. Within minutes of the class beginning, the door opened again and Dylan was called out. When he returned he told his Latin teacher that he was now also required to play on the team. Instead of revealing any frustration at these interruptions to his class, Mr Blake told Dylan, in a very supportive manner that he “must check this out immediately”. He reassured Dylan that if he did not return that he would understand that he had gone to the match, and that he would get one of the other boys to bring back his books.”

(Field-notes May 2012)

It is no accident however that Rathwood’s teachers show such tolerance when sporting commitments clash with their scheduled classes. With skill in (and enthusiasm for) sport or another extracurricular activity, a key requirement for teachers being employed by the school this kind of tolerance is easily fostered. Mrs Garson expressed the view that while it is the quality of the teachers that make the Rathwood College such a successful school, being skilled in a sport or another extra-curricular area is one of the school’s requirement in a quality teacher:

“She said that there were 3 boxes that a teacher must tick in order to join the staff here. The first being they must have an expertise in some subject area, secondly a
The extent to which the school adheres to this requirement to be skilled in some sporting area is patently clear, with many of teachers employed at Rathwood having enjoyed much success in their respective sports, many at regional and national level, while there is daily confirmation of their enthusiasm with the large number of teachers present most days at afternoon sports.

Furthermore, I got no sense of any skepticism of the value of sport and physical education in the school. At no time did I feel the value and worthwhileness of my research topic was questioned. On the contrary, anyone with whom I discussed my research question gave the impression that they believed it was a perfectly acceptable topic. This appreciation of the topic did not appear to wane even when I explained that my study was a sociological inquiry as opposed to taking a more ‘practical’ approach looking at possible health or behavioural benefits that may be associated with participation in physical activities and sport. The physical curriculum clearly enjoys a very secure and elevated place in Rathwood College’s curriculum.

7.4 Physical education and sporting programme

In keeping with the school ethos that recognises a ‘physical’ education as essential to a full and rounded education, serious time, resources and money are committed to sport and physical education in the school. It is clear that the mixture of ethos and opportunity at Rathwood College provides the chance for all to succeed. Physical education lessons are timetabled for two class periods each week for all students from first year to...
transition year, with the senior cycle 5th and 6th year students\textsuperscript{21} having the option of taking physical education class out of a choice of 5 options\textsuperscript{22}. However, in a significant departure from the norm in Irish secondary schools, participation in sport is compulsory for all students six days per week in the school. This involves a two hour sports session every afternoon, bar Sunday, throughout the school year.

It is clear that for Mrs Garson, one of the main values of this intensive physical education and sports programme is “giving students the opportunity to blow off steam” by burning off students’ excess energy, resulting in students going to bed physically tired, thereby considerably reducing the potential for disorder:

“Having taught in a number of other boarding schools in the UK, Mrs Garson said that she has seen the importance of keeping the students busy. She said that “after a typical day here, the students are too tired to think of anything but sleeping”. She said that she saw just how “difficult it is to maintain order in a boarding school full of teenagers last winter when the weather was so bad that all outdoor sports had to be cancelled”

(Field-notes April 2012)

The role of physical education and in particular of school sport in creating a more convivial atmosphere in the school is also appreciated by students. First year student Tristan appears to have a good appreciation of the benefits of sport in a boarding school environment:

“Ammh I would say I would be getting into a lot of trouble, into quite a lot of trouble because I would be so bored, and just if that was say an hour and half, two

\textsuperscript{21}Irish Pupils take the Irish Leaving Certificate examination at the end of their final year

\textsuperscript{22}The other options are Art History, Computer Studies, Photography/Pottery, Recreational Art
hours of free time, you know you are sitting around, what do you do, you know, you
mess, so, or something, you know playing sports gets your mind off other things, ...
I think sometimes boys our age sometimes we have a bit of anger or something
built up, and then you know, sports help you let it out, so you are nice and calm the
whole time,.... if there’s no sports, there can be a lot of people, with you know, with
a lot of energy built up, or with a lot of anger or a bit of tension building up,
whereas with sports, it’s time to let everything go”

(Interview, June 2012)

It is noteworthy that while a number of references were made to the role of sport in
moderating students’ behaviour, there was no suggestion that there was potential for idle
students engaging in anything other than ‘high jinks and energetic play’. At no time was
there a suggestion that there was a possibility of any anti-social behaviour in the school.
Another interesting function of the school’s very energetic physical activity programme
is, according to English teacher Philip, that of a regulator of “raging teenage
hormones” (Field-notes June 2012). With over four hundred young men and women
living together in the school, long purposeful days engaged in a variety of physical
activities is considered the best method of encouraging students to overlook the charms
of their fellow students. Philip argued that “by trying to keep them as busy as possible,
….they don’t have the time and the energy to think about much else.” (Field-notes June
2012)
7.5 Physical education

The school’s physical education department delivers a rich physical education programme, with a wide range of activities\(^{23}\). The organisation of this programme is impressive, with all classes meticulously planned, with the aims and objectives clearly conveyed to all involved participants\(^{24}\). All classes start without any delay and with all resources that are required for the timetabled activity in place. The instruction at physical education class is of a consistent high quality, a key feature of which is the individual attention that the students enjoy. With some of the smallest class sizes in Irish secondary schools, with an average of fourteen pupils per class at junior level and an even more optimal nine pupils per class at senior level, individual attention is enjoyed by all students. This is evident when students are learning new tasks, with each students receiving individual feedback from their teacher:

“The class continue to learn the functional movements exercises this week. The teacher engages with each student. As they do each exercise, he checks each student to make sure they are all performing the exercises properly. For many of the exercises, the teacher will select one or two students, who he feels are performing the exercise particularly well, to demonstrate to the other students. For one of the exercises, several of the students were unsure if they were doing the exercise properly, and questioned their teacher about where they should ‘feel’ the exercise, as they were not sure if they could feel it in any of their muscles”

(Field-notes December 2011)

Field-notes record the thorough manner in which each of the different activities are taught to pupils. Before beginning a new activity the aims and objectives of the activity are clearly set out for the class. An example of this was when the class began their

\(^{23}\) Physical education class activities include tag rugby, gymnastics, hockey and basketball, cricket, dance, and athletics, tennis, football, aquatics, volley ball, orienteering, badminton, rounders and the recently introduced functional movement exercises.

\(^{24}\) For physical education, the planned curriculum for the year is posted in the sports and fitness centre lobby at the beginning of the academic year. There is a separate plan for the junior groups, for first year students, one for second years and third years, and one for senior students, which comprises the transition year, fifth and sixth year students. The curriculum is divided into three separate groups, representing the school three terms, with each activity allotted 3 lessons.
gymnastics module. Before the class was divided into groups of three and instructed to devise a short sequence that incorporated all the different ways of moving, Robert sat the class down to brainstorm on the different forms of movement:

"On the white board, using a Mind-map Robert sought contributions from his students, on the different way the body moves, the discussion continued until the different forms of moving were added to the Mind-map."

(Field-notes April 2012)

With the junior classes there was evidence that Rathwood’s physical education teachers do not see their role as confined solely to instruction in a range of physical activities. They also educate their students about how their bodies work, and how to read and take care of their bodies. This was most evident in Robert’s class:

"Robert regularly discussed the importance of being able to read and understand their own bodies. He advised them to regularly take note of their own pulse rate, not only when they were exercising but also when they were resting. In class, each student was asked for their pulse rate before exercise begun and also during and after they had completed their exercises."

(Field-notes November 2011)

It is clear that physical education was valued as a subject in its own right. There is no sense that physical education class was the poor relation to sport. This was evident in the first year students’ testimony, with five of the students commenting that they credit their physical education class with improved personal fitness levels. While Samuel admitted that he found some elements of the classes a “bit boring”, he did concede that he benefitted from the classes; “I don’t enjoy all the exercises, because they are not a game…..but they do help, I know they help….we are doing them for a reason so I am glad we do them” (Interview June 2012). Mina also expressed the belief that she has benefitted from her first year of physical education, “yes, I quite like it, I just feel like I am getting better all the time” ( Interview June 2012). There was also general consensus

25 These forms of movement included; Moves or travels, e.g rolling, running, walking, jumping: How it moves, for example quickly, slowly, strongly, lightly: Where it moves, for example on the floor, on a platform and with whom or with what, which such as with a partner or group, with a bench.
in the class that physical education is “very important for providing students with a
good grounding in a number of different physical activities” (Samuel, Interview June
2012). There is a clear demarcation between the school’s physical education and
sporting programmes with the majority of the first year class appreciative of the
divergent goals of physical education and the school sports programme. Tristan states
that:

“There is definitely a difference, I mean physical education is, is a much wider
range of activities, I mean we are kind of doing everything, and it is less about
winning and teams and it is more about how to do it, and also for PE, you are kind
of working on your body, and flexibility, and all sort of stuff, whereas sports is
more the actual game, so ya there is a difference” (Interview, June 2012)

7.6 School sport

In contrast to physical education that is confined to an individual class and led by one
teacher, school sports, aligns more with a whole school involvement, encompassing the
entire student body and the majority of teaching staff and extending over much of the
school grounds. The centrality of sport to the community is most explicitly
demonstrated in the separate summer and winter timetable which has been introduced in
Rathwood College for the solitary purpose of facilitating the school sporting
programme. This changing timetable is designed to facilitate the afternoon sports
programme during the dark winter months, when instead of following the conventional
Irish school timetable, with students’ academic classes rostered until four o clock each
afternoon, in the winter months Rathwood’s students break from academic classes at
lunchtime, so sports can be scheduled during daylight hours, with classes resuming at
four o clock when sports ends. This demonstrates how independent the school is, being
in a position to establish their own rules, being a boarding school and not being a slave
to a school bus system or to parents having to collect at a certain time. Moreover, having the majority of staff living on-site, results in teaching staff being more likely to buy into these initiatives, willing to work around students’ sporting schedules.

Timetabled for two hours per day, six days a week, afternoon sports is run by senior members of the teaching staff, assisted by other teachers and also a significant number of employed professional coaches. Information is clearly communicated to all concerned by means of weekly updated notice boards which clearly set out the sports programme for each student for the week ahead. Sessions are clearly well thought out and planned beforehand. The meticulous planning results in the delivery of a hectic sporting programme in a very stream-lined manner:

“There is no standing around, waiting to see what they will do today, waiting on the weather, or for who turns up. There is a plan and all participants are up to speed on what that week’s plans are. There is no lack of coherence or students engaging in random activities due to uncertainty about what is planned for their class. There are also no students doing their own thing on the sidelines - all appear to be working to a plan. Classes are never cancelled.”

(Field-notes March 2012)

The extent to which the school’s head of physical education and sport engages with those involved in coaching sports in the school would suggest that the decision related to the planning of these activities is not undertaken in an authoritarian manner by those in charge, but appears to be reached by consensus, with teachers and coaches arriving to physical education classes and to afternoon sports apparently totally in agreement about how the class should proceed.
7. Sport as a cultural marker

The range of sports the school participates in are almost exclusively high status sports; rugby, cricket, hockey, archery, golf, tennis, and polo lacrosse. Basketball is the only sport that the school offers that would not be considered a high status sport. Cricket, archery and polo-crosse would also be considered minority sports in Ireland. The emphasis on high status sports is evident in the foyer of the school’s impressive sports and fitness centre where large rugby, cricket and hockey images are proudly displayed. There is a large photograph of a cricket match in front of the cricket pavilion in the school. Despite the popularity of soccer especially among teenage males, there is no soccer coaching in the school, and only one block of soccer included in physical education. Similarly, despite the popularity of GAA games in Ireland, neither hurling or Gaelic football have ever been introduced in the school, and little apparent interest in following these sports at county or national level. This was evident in a sports dominated conversation with two teachers and a rugby/ hockey coach:

"After mentioning that I am from Tipperary, I said that it is a very strong GAA county, especially for hurling. I asked the three men present if any of them had any experience of any GAA sports. Two of the teachers said they were educated in South Africa, and that they had no exposure to these sports. The Irish educated teacher and coach just said “no, it was not played in our school”

(Field-notes March 2012).

Curiously, for sports that arouse such passion for many Irish people, the one anecdote that was shared about the GAA and people from “mad GAA country” portrayed those

\[26\] While rugby would not be considered a high status sport in Munster, in Leinster it is still largely associated with private fee-paying schools, which continue to dominate the game in inter-school competitions. Similarly while cricket has been growing in popularity nationally, at schools level (being generally confined to private fee-paying schools), cricket continues to be a high status sport.
involved in these games in a poor light. Bart, a very friendly and encouraging junior hockey coach, who I am quite certain intended in no way to cause offence, managed to typecast both Tipperary people and ardent GAA supporters like the old stereotypical Hollywood portrayal of the Irish:

“Bart shared with me a story about an experience he had many years before when had been down for a break from his Northern Irish school, with a friend who he was at school with. He explained that his friend’s family, lived near Cashel in County Tipperary, which he described as “mad GAA country”. He told me about visiting the local grocery store where they met the shopkeeper and several of his children, who were like “steps of the stairs”. He described how after all the children were given ice-creams, a fight had broken out between the children over who had got the largest ice cream, where, to Bart’s horror, the shopkeeper responded by shouting obscenities at the eldest child. He said that he had never heard of what he referred to as the “C word” until that day!”

(Field-notes May 2012)

The emphasis on sports involvement as a cultural marker is also evident in the repeated encouragement students receive to maintain their involvement in high status sports throughout their adult life. The physical education teachers and sports coaches can regularly be heard to advise students on not only the health benefits but also the many social benefits of staying involved in high status sports:

“At physical education class, the students were doing tennis today, Robert first talked to the class about the importance of being able to play a decent game of tennis. He talked about how social a game of tennis is. He said that wherever you go, ‘on holidays, or moving to a new place, that you can always get a game of tennis, and make new friends in the process.”

(Field-notes March 2012)

With many Rathwood students being the second or third generation of their family in the school, it is clear from students’ interview testimony that the school is very effective at developing a real appreciation and lifelong attachment to high status sports. Henry’s family sporting interests appear to be confined completely to high status sports:

“My mum played a lot of Lacrosse when she was younger, and my brother does a lot of cycling, and my dad just loves a lot of sports, cricket, golf and rugby, he watches it a lot, and we go out on weekends when we have time, and we practice rugby, and we pass the ball around.”
Although his parents did not attend Rathwood (although both parents attended other exclusive private fee-paying schools) Tristan’s parent’s sporting involvement is also mainly confined to high status sports:

“Ummh my Dad went to quite sporty schools, he went to the same primary boarding I went to, which is quite sporty and then his second school Harrow produced quite a lot of rugby internationals so, he played sport there and he played for a rugby club for a bit in his youth, he still plays for a cricket club, for the past 30 years, he was never really good at sports but he was really enthusiastic about them. Umm my mum is very good she played basketball for like Leinster, tennis for some club and you know, basketball and tennis were her big thing, and my sister does a lot of horse riding, so yah I’d say my family are very sporty.”

Dylan also felt that his family could be described as “sporty” as “dad had swam the English channel, my mum runs and my stepdad runs marathons.”

This prioritisation of high status activities was also evident in Lynette’s testimony, when she revealed the lengths she had to go to procure the equipment she required for her fitness studio:

“She approached the bursar in the school for funds to buy the necessary equipment, but was turned down….Not to be discouraged, she then organised and ran classes for members of the public, and from the money raised at these classes she bought most of the equipment herself. This enabled her to stock the very impressive range of equipment in the fitness studio, which includes a large range of mini trampolines, exercise balls in a range of sizes, a large punchbag and a large range of other fitness equipment all in large quantities.”

The lengths that Lynette had to go to, to obtain this fitness equipment is in stark contrast to physical education teacher Jennifer’s experience, when after casually remarking that

---

27 Interestingly given the generally lower female participation rates in competitive sports (Woods et al. 2010), reflecting Rathwood’s female student commitment and enthusiasm, student’s accounts of their parents involvement in sport would strongly suggest that not alone do the elite educated mother continue to prioritise fitness, but they also remain involved in competitive sport.
there was a shortage of volleyball equipment for her lunchtime class, she was advised to “just drop an e-mail to the bursar, and advise her of what you need” (Field-notes February 2012). It is noteworthy that despite being a qualified fitness instructor Lynette is the only obviously working class individual that I have encountered in the school that is involved in a teaching or coaching role. I wondered if it was possible that her lack of cultural clout in the school had disadvantaged her when she sought funding. I suspected that the lack of prestige for karate was probably also a factor when, despite being a black belt, her karate class failed to take off in the school. She explained that when she started running karate classes in the fitness studio a couple of years ago, she had “some interest” from students, however she explained that she no longer ran the class as she had “only a few students attending in previous years, and none attending this year” (Field-notes January 2012).

It is also noteworthy that in the private fee-paying primary schools that six out of the fourteen students in the first year class attended, they also focused on a similar range of high status sports. They described a physical education and school sport programme that did not differ significantly from what they are experiencing in Rathwood College. Henry who attended a private fee-paying primary school as a day pupil stated that with the exception of Gaelic football the activities were the same as here in Rathwood;

“am mh, not as much. I think about three times during the week.....we did gymnastics, basketball, indoor football, cricket, rugby we did everything that we do here, except for I don’t know if we do it here, we did Gaelic football.”

(Interview June 2012).

Tristan considers himself very fortunate to have attended the exclusive private boarding school he went to:
“I was quite lucky to go there because there was a lot of sports there” he described a range of activities that with the exception of soccer are similar to the range of sporting activities in Rathwood College. He said that “there was rugby, hockey, cricket, there was tennis, there was basketball for girls, there was horse-riding, ya there was quite a lot, there was football, a lot of things you could do there, so yah I did quite a lot of sports there.”

(Interview June 2012)

Interestingly, Tristan’s school also had a very similar sporting culture in the school:

“Everyday except on Wednesdays, usually games time was an hour and a half, but on Wednesdays your hour and a half was just playing outside, so it wasn’t organised. But we had organised sport 4 days a week.”

(Interview June 2012)

Jocelyn who attended the same school as Tristan, explained that in common with Rathwood sports was scheduled in the middle of the school day:

“We would have 2 classes in the morning, then we would have a prep session, then we would have break, then we would have another 2 classes, then we would have lunch, then we would have games, then we would come in and get another snack, go up and have another 2 classes, then prep and dinner.”

(Interview June 2012)

In contrast to the rich sporting experiences of the six students who attended private fee-paying primary schools, physical education and sport experiences for the other students differed dramatically. Samuel, who attended a rural primary school in County Roscommon, described a school with a very limited choice of activities:

“Every break and lunch, we played soccer, and we had like a basketball court, but everyone just played soccer on it, and we had a pitch as well, that we played soccer on. And we did PE there, but the PE was quite bad.”

(Interview June 2012)

Even for students like Alex, Lorcan and India who attended non-fee-paying Church of Ireland primary schools in an exclusive suburb of the city, physical education and sport was limited. Alex noted, “Well, you just really went into the hall, and played donkey or something, it was not intensive, like it is in here” (Interview June 2012). For India there was “hockey on Thursday, and that was really it” (Interview June 2012). The facilities in Lorcan’s primary school also contrasted sharply with the facilities he now enjoys in

215
Rathwood: “ya, see we didn’t have a giant grounds, or pitches, astro pitches, we had 2 basketball hoops on concrete ground, and any bit of grass was fenced off so we weren’t allowed on that” (Interview June 2012). In contrast, Josh, who attended primary school on the outskirts of a large town in Co. Galway, has fond memories of his time in the school, however the emphasis was almost exclusively on Gaelic games:

“It is quite a good sporting school...we did it I would say once every 2 days, because most of my teachers were really into sport, so they would bring us out anyway to play, we usually played hurling, or Gaelic football, a bit of football as well, soccer sometimes too”

(Interview June 2012)

However, the most striking differences between the experiences of the students who attended Irish fee-paying schools and those who attended voluntary primary schools was not related to the range or the intensity of the activities provided but rather to the vastly contrasting attitudes of the teaching staff to sport and physical activity.

While in each of the private fee-paying primary schools, sport or physical education was described as compulsory each day or on every second day; in marked contrast to this, in a number of the voluntary schools, the rostering of sport and physical education was dependent on the children’s behaviour. At Ope’s primary school in a small town in Galway, organised physical activities was viewed as a “treat” that would be allowed for good behaviour and that was to be denied if anyone misbehaved: “it was kind of a leisure activity, so say if we were good for a number of days, my teacher would say ‘Alright we have PE’ and we would go outside and play basketball or something” (Interview June 2012). While in Samuel and Saffron’s rural primary schools, physical education and sport was withdrawn as a punishment. Samuel stated:
“One thing I found extremely stupid was like … sometimes if something really bad happened, or if someone was talking in class or something, they wouldn’t give us PE, as a punishment.”

(Interview June 2012)

While Saffron really enjoyed the sport and physical education in her last primary school, she said that in this small rural primary school, “there was rules like that if you mess in class, you don’t get PE that day” (Interview June 2012), although in Saffron’s school it was only the pupil who had “messed in class” that was not allowed participate in physical education or sport.

7. 8 Excellence versus inclusivity

It is interesting that, despite the undisputed status of sport and physical education in Rathwood College, aspects of the ‘physical’ education model in the school can be said to mitigate against it triumphing over other schools in the sporting arena. While the school enjoys considerable success in many sports, (with many notable achievements by both individuals and sports teams in the school)28, given Rathwood College’s plenteous physical education and sporting resources, greater success on the playing field might be hoped for. One of the main factors that mitigate against Rathwood College enjoying greater success is the school’s emphasis on inclusion over excellence. The goal in Rathwood, is clearly not about producing a small group of elite performers but about all students being given the opportunity to be the best they can be. This emphasis on inclusivity over excellence is evident in the school’s response to students’ successes in

28 These include three students being selected for the national and Leinster province tennis team, one student with the Irish national U18 basketball team, and one with the Ireland U16 team, and the another being selected for Leinster U16 cricket squad. The school senior basketball team was the runner up in the all-Ireland Schools’ basketball finals for the second year running. In rugby, one of the junior teams also were runners-up in their final. (School twitter feed, 2013).
sporting competition, with the most capable athletes and their successes being celebrated but never eulogised, while the more minor successes enjoyed by the less capable students are also duly acknowledged.

In this inclusive environment, all students regardless of ability, requirements or circumstances, are coached in a range of different activities. Josh describes this inclusivity:

“I would say everyone gets a place here, everyone gets a chance, you know it is not about putting a guy on the team because you like him, you know?... everyone gets a chance at training and stuff, and they just pick the team, I think it is pretty fair to be honest.”

(Interview June 2012)

In each of the more popular sports in the school (rugby, hockey, cricket, and basketball) teams are fielded at all levels and ages, ensuring that students of all competencies access proper coaching. The school is in the fortunate position of having the majority of the teaching staff living on-site and actively involved in sports in the school as well as employing a considerable number of specialist coaches. On one of my first days in the school I was quite taken aback by the resources all students enjoy:

“On this afternoon, I observed rugby being coached on four different pitches and hockey on three pitches. I recognised a number of the teachers that I had been introduced to at lunch coaching the students. I counted about twenty individuals involved in coaching the students on this afternoon, with approximately half teaching staff and half coaches.”

(Field-notes November 2011)

A high standard is sought in all sports that the school participates in, not just the school’s ‘first’ teams. This high standard and ‘honest effort’ is also required even from those students that do not compete competitively. An example of this is the senior’s developmental rugby group, which is composed of a small number of European students, who came to the school for one year during their fifth year. Although, the
majority of these students have had no experience of the sports played in the school, the school caters to their specific needs in this group:

“Richard, a rugby coach employed by the school is coaching a small group of senior students on his own. Robert explains that most of this group had only come to the school in fifth year and had not played rugby before. As opposed to being relegated to a group with an inexperienced or unqualified staff, they have been assigned a very experienced, obviously very enthusiastic coach. Robert explained that is no expectation that this group will compete at any level after coming to the game so late and that the sole objective is to just instil in the boys a love of the game.”

(Field-notes November 2011)

Accordingly, Rathwood College students do not get ‘written off’ if they are considered unlikely to excel. The student who previously had little exposure to sport or the late developer will still enjoy access to qualified coaches, with no question of any group of students being ignored while the most capable students are nurtured.

The school’s resistance to pupils specialising in one sport is also clearly an issue that may limit the school’s sporting success. With an equal emphasis placed upon hockey and rugby for boys and basketball and hockey for girls, the school is clearly at variance with many of the other exclusive fee-paying schools where students are allowed and even encouraged to focus on the one sport they enjoy most success in. It is interesting that this lack of specialisation, which is clearly frowned upon in Rathwood, is seen as a characteristic of Catholic schools. Philip, an English teacher and a hockey coach, appears to view this lack of specialisation as a particular feature of Church of Ireland schools when he stated that it was “only the Catholic schools that would focus solely on rugby”. (It is noteworthy that when ‘other schools’ were being discussed, this ‘other’ bracket was confined to private fee-paying schools, with no comparisons being made to non-fee paying schools).
Given that for many elite schools the success of their sports teams can be one of their most effective marketing tools in promoting and selling their school to prospective families, this is especially significant. This is evident in the high profile enjoyed by a number of fee-paying schools that have excelled in rugby. The two most prominent examples being Clongowes Wood College, and Blackrock College, which are two of the most successful schools in the history of the very prestigious Leinster Senior Cup rugby competition. It is clear that while both schools undoubtedly excel in many areas, most notably in their academic endeavours, it is the schools’ success on the rugby pitch that much of both of these schools’ reputation has been built upon in recent times.

Despite the fee-paying schools market apparently coming under increased pressure, and amid greater competition between these schools, there is still much certainty in Rathwood College about the model of ‘physical’ education they provide. Both for the Rathwood College community and the families who attend the school, there appears to be agreement about the importance of the physical curriculum to a truly rounded education. From the school’s point of view this is evident in the very significant annual investment in terms of financial output and prioritisation of the physical curriculum. For the families who chose to send their children to the school, their willingness to pay some of the highest school fees in Ireland is clearly a resounding stamp of approval for the model of education provided.

It is apparent that the principle factors that motivate the Rathwood community to adhere so closely to this particular sporting model is not driven by a desire for glory on the
playing fields. Given the relatively small size of the school and the lack of specialisation in a given sport, and most tellingly, the insistence that even the most promising students at a given sport must participate in a number of sports, underlines the unusual attitudes to what might be deemed the proven pathway to sporting success. Another factor that would strongly suggest that the school’s ultimate goal is not in winning competitions is the absence of any scholarship programme to entice exceptionally talented young sports people to the school. With no total scholarships offered by the school, the only financial assistance that is available are bursaries, These are for the most part, reserved for the families of past pupils and Church of Ireland patrons (School website 2012). Subsequently, with no financial assistance provided for enticing young potential sporting ‘stars’ to bolster and potentially even inspire school teams, the school will remain disadvantaged while competing with other private schools who have a much larger student body from which to choose when fielding teams. In a school that places such importance on the corporeal, and also having ready access to the necessary funding, this reticence to open its doors to exceptionally talented young sports man and women might seem remiss, if their motivation in prioritising a physical education was driven primarily by the desire for glory on the sports field. Given this unusual sporting culture in the school, it is clear the ultimate goal in Rathwood is not winning sporting competitions, a sentiment echoed by Daniel, an athletics coach, when he stated: “parents don’t send their children to Rathwood College to win a medal in the Olympics, there are other schools you send your children to if you want them to win medals” (Field-notes October 2012).
7. 9 Creating distinctions on the playing fields

Observing the school community, it becomes clear that they are set on what they see as a much higher goal than an accumulation of trophies. While they are undoubtedly appreciative of the thrill of the hard-fought win, the Rathwood community appear resolute in the belief that their physical curriculum goals concerns matters of far greater importance and much more far-reaching consequence, namely the power of sport to induce character. The potential for character building through engagement with sport and physical activity is a concern Rathwood College shares with the British public school model. This concern with character development appears to be central to the emergence and continuity of Rathwood’s distinctive sporting model. The foundation for this sporting model appears to be based almost in its entirety on the amateur sporting code or Corinthian Spirit which was developed in Britain’s Public schools, where sport has long been prized for it’s ability to cultivate distinctive attitudes and characteristics in their pupils. The influence of these Corinthian ideals are clearly recognisable in the school. The sporting code prioritises sportsmanship over winning and teamwork over the individual, and is credited with promoting physical and moral courage, loyalty and cooperation and the capacity to act fairly and to take defeat well, qualities that might be considered essential in elite circles. Mrs Garson’s testimony reveals the school’s adherence to Corinthian ideals, when I commented that watching rugby matches between all male schools and Rathwood I detected a very different attitude from all-male schools, who I thought seemed more competitive and determined to win. She said that this difference really summed up the different ethos between Rathwood and other schools, believing that “sportsmanship is always more important than winning alone”,

222
and said in her opinion that being fiercely competitive and winning was all that was emphasised in many of these schools, an emphasis she said that was “abhorred in Rathwood” (Field-notes April 2012). This distinctive school ethos is expressed in the school’s code of conduct which asserts the school’s belief in the fundamentals of sport as teaching teamwork, fair play and responsibility to others.

To an extent that almost harks back to another time, there is a marked emphasis on cooperation and team spirit over individuality and independence. It is repeatedly impressed on students that while a clear sense of one’s own individual worth is very important, a real appreciation of the value of others is of greater importance (Principal’s Christmas school address 2011). This value on the collective is also evident in the emphasis on achieving mutual goals, and on the adherence to the traditional values of the school community. Observing students participate in team sports, the importance of the Rathwood’s physical curriculum in imparting these collective values was readily apparent, with repeated references to the importance of team spirit and co-operation on the playing field a daily occurrence in the school.

For Callum, the school’s emphasis on developing these communal bonds within their physical curriculum has clearly been successful. He credits sport with being the ‘glue’ that helped his own son overcome his reserved and introverted manner and to quickly settle into the community life of the school. Callum had worried how his son, Edward, would cope in such a ‘sporting environment’ as Rathwood:

“Callum explained that prior to coming to Rathwood, Edward was not into team sports, he loved more solitary pursuits such as walking and cycling and being in
the outdoors with animals. However, now he is clearly delighted with his son having managed to settle very well into the school. He explained that his son had never enjoyed rugby, but he said that here in Rathwood that “despite not being in with a real chance of winning” he really enjoys it. He said that in his view sport is so central to the experience of settling into boarding school life, that he feels that they “bond through sport”. Callum said that despite his son having had no enthusiasm about having to live in such close proximity to all these other boys in the school, he now believes his son ‘has an allegiance to his classmates’. He said that in his son’s first days in the school, he was terribly homesick. He called home every night and talked to his dad for an hour. However, he has noted, that these phone calls home have become noticeably shorter, with “the boy increasingly preoccupied with classmates, he is always rushing away for a friend’s birthday cake or some other distraction.”

(Field-notes February 2012)

Interestingly, values such as individuality and independence, which might be considered essential qualities among the dominant classes are not encouraged. Traditional values such as obligations to others always trump individualistic values such as individual rights, with reliance on one’s team valued over self-sufficiency and group achievement valued over self-achievement. Members of successful teams take pride in what the team has accomplished, rather than focusing on the team’s biggest scorer. This distinction between Rathwood’s collectivist values and what they perceive as the individualistic values of other fee-paying private schools was a recurring theme in many of the participants’ testimony. The school principal and her staff emphasise these distinctions between Rathwood students and other fee-paying schools. This desire to create marked
distinctions between Rathwood and other schools was quite apparent from Mrs Garson’s testimony:

“Mrs Garson made several references to how they are distinct. When she spoke about the ethos of the school, she expressed the view that this ethos makes the school unique in Ireland. Like the teachers Nick and Philip had previously spoken about, she referred to the ‘Catholic rugby school’ and how the ethos in these schools is dramatically different to the ethos here in Rathwood.”

(Field-notes April 2012)

Rathwood’s students are expected to take part in positive spirit, with “a high standard of sportsmanship and conduct is expected of all college teams and supporters” (Robert, Field-notes February 2012).

An example of this sportsmanship was demonstrated by the school junior cricket team when, despite having been very excited about competing against a new visiting team, they behaved impeccably when three of the team were asked by their coach to make up the numbers for the other team:

“The coach explained that the visiting team had only had 5 players to field today, and asked would they agree to give them a couple of players to make up their numbers. From a couple of whispered comments from the home side boys, it was clear that the boys would have preferred not to play with the visiting team, yet as their names were called out to go play with the visitors, there was not a murmur of discontent or a grimace. Very graciously, they went and joined the other team, with their shoulders back, and betraying no sense of being hard done by at being chosen, they shook hands with the new team and introduced themselves with a smile ... This sportsmanship was also evident in the boy’s attitude on the pitch, with all the boys appearing to play to the best of their ability.”
Such is the emphasis placed on the acquisition of good sportsmanship in the school that Rosemary, mum to Hugo and Jeff, and Rathwood Board of Management member, appeared genuinely taken aback by my admission to unsportsmanlike behaviour:

“Rosemary asked me if I played team sports. I told her I rarely did because I am so competitive, and that need to win has caused me to be a bit unsportsmanlike on occasion. While she was laughing at some of my examples I provided, I felt she was a bit surprised that I did not get the fundamentals of good sportsmanship. She told me in a mock chiding tone that it is not about winning but is about the ability to play each sport properly to the best of your ability, to be able to follow the rules and to be ‘sportsmanlike’ with both your team-mates and your opponents. She argued that ‘this is of far more importance than winning’. And that ‘one must always enjoy the game and not let one’s competitiveness ruin your enjoyment and that of your teammates.’”

I would argue that the attitude to good sportsmanship exhibited by Rosemary exemplifies the sporting coding that Rathwood College excels at inculcating in their student body.

7. 10. 1 Joy in participating

Embracing the strong sporting ethos, there is a genuine commitment and enthusiasm for physical education and sport in the school, with the value of being physically active always encouraged. This is immediately apparent when visiting the school, with almost whole school involvement in the afternoon sports programme. Not alone is the level of activity in the school striking, but also as instantiated in the students’ testimonies, there is clearly also a desire to participate. Rathwood’s students need little prompting or coaxing to participate. Observing students’ enthusiasm as they make their way to their respective sports, this desire to participate is plain to see:
“On parking in the sports car park, I stand observing all the activity as boys and girls make their way to their respective sports...in cricket whites, boys and girls head out to the cricket pitch, carrying bags with packed with equipment, rugby players are running towards their pitches, hockey players in another direction, some more are heading for the tennis courts and a group of basketball players are boarding a bus for their away game.”

(Field-notes April 2012)

Rathwood’s students could never be described as idle or slow or slouching, they move lithely and energetically. Field-notes record my observations of the first year class approaching the sports hall for their physical education class, and how even the most challenged athlete in the class is beginning to embrace these Rathwood bodily dispositions:

“Alex, Lorcan and Tristan have arrived 10 minutes early for class, having sprinted to the sports hall after their morning break. As I watch the other students approaching the sports hall, I notice they are all running or skipping enthusiastically to their class. In fact, I noted today that even Dominic looks enthusiastic as he comes running down the path.”

(Field-notes February 2012)

It is interesting that when these students have the opportunity to sit back and unwind, many of the students continue to be physically active. I regularly remarked to myself about this constant activity, as I waited each week with the first year class as they waited for their physical education teacher to arrive. Field-notes record the activity on one of these occasions:

“Two of the girls had brought basketballs with them that they are returning to the store-room. The balls are bounced constantly between all the girls. India and Jocelyn also discuss and practice the correct arm position that will give them extra power in passing. The boys are discussing yesterday’s match while some climb up and down the stairs, and (despite it not being permitted) other boys use the exercise bikes, whilst looking out for their physical education teacher.”

(Field-notes December 2011)

Even when Jocelyn was ‘off-sports’ due to an injury, she still struggled to practice her basketball hoops:

“Jocelyn told me that she had broken 2 fingers in a basketball match last week. She told me she was x-rayed and is off sports for a few weeks which she described as such a ‘drag’. However she said that she still has been practicing her basketball with one hand.”
Similarly, when the senior girls’ hockey team arrives for their hockey practice, they do not stand waiting for their coaches to arrive, but instead do their warm-ups and then begin practicing their shooting:

“Even though there are none of their coaches here yet, the girls organise themselves into small groups and start warming up. It is such a cold day, my hands and feet are numb, yet these girls head out enthusiastically in their shorts and many in t-shirts. They start doing some stretch exercises and then start running around the perimeter of the pitch. They then spread out at all the hockey goals and start practicing shooting goals. There is no messing, no pushing, no shoving. Each girl takes her shot at goal, whether she is successful or not, they walk quickly back into line and wait to take their next go.”

This zeal for physical activity and sport is also evident at the school lunch break when, despite two hours of sports being timetabled directly after their break, the majority of students rush, completely unprompted, from the dining hall to participate in physical activity.

During their lunch break, some students take the opportunity to practice their preferred sport, while others attend a class or coaching session. Lynette, the fitness coach remarked that students treat her lunch-time classes as a “warm up session” for their afternoon sports. Yet observing Lynette’s classes I am struck by the energy expended by the girls:

“As the music blares the students are put through their paces. In the lovely bright fitness studio with mirrored walls and maple floor, the girls who attend are clearly very eager and committed, as they are put through a tough workout by their instructor.”

The extent to which students buy into Rathwood’s intensive physical curriculum is striking, with little or no resentment evident at their long busy days. There is no evidence of any coercion or supervision being required in getting all students to their
allocated sporting activity. Without prompting, students almost in their entirety arrive on time and in the appropriate sports kit. With equal enthusiasm the girls’ and boys’ teams, mainly in small groups of two or three, make their way to respective sports practice, the girls usually chatting between themselves as they walk, while the boys might run or pass a ball between themselves. There is no adult supervision required to make sure everyone gets to their allocated sport, or indeed when sports have ended to ensure they return to the school:

“I saw no teachers hurrying students along to sports, they appear to make their own way to the sports session without the need for any encouragement or reprimand from teachers.....later as the games finish up and the visiting teams depart, the home teams are making their way back to the school, there are none of them idling or heading in the wrong direction. They are walking along in small groups, quietly chatting mainly.”

(Field-notes November 2011)

This whole school community compliance with and enthusiasm for the intensive physical curriculum in Rathwood College would suggest that students quickly develop a deep appreciation of the school’s rich sporting culture.

7. 10. 2 Opting out against school ethos

Given the prevailing spirit of the school, it is not surprising to find that opting out of physical education and sport is counter both to the culture and the ethos of the school. Despite many of the students not being naturally talented at sports and team sports in particular, I observed little resistance to the school physical education and sporting programme. While some students acknowledged that they initially struggled keeping up with the intensive physical regime, all students expressed the view that the compulsory nature of the programme was beneficial for all. While Alex and Ope both admitted to “feeling out of their depth” when they came to the school, they were now both in full
agreement that despite this initial discomfort, they have benefitted from the extra time devoted to sport and physical education (Interview June 2012). Ope stated that despite initially feeling “slower” than the other students at the school, he “does very well in a number of different sports now”, something he attributes to daily sports (Interview June 2012). Similarly for Alex he stated, “at the beginning, I thought it was very tiring, but after a few weeks…you realise that it makes a lot more sense to have games everyday rather than once a week, if you want to be good” (Interview June 2012). Classmate Samuel wholeheartedly agrees with sport being compulsory, believing it is really the only option if you want a fit and active student body: “oh yah definitely.... If it was not compulsory people would just sit around all day and do nothing. I think it is very good” (Interview June 2012).

While some students would have preferred to focus on an individual sport, there appeared to be an acceptance amongst the majority of students that team sports were necessary and of value. Rosemary’s son Hugo expressed the view that there is too much emphasis on team sports, revealing his frustration at trying to locate other students to compete against in the individual sports (such as archery) that he has a preference for. He argues that in spite of senior students being free to choose the sporting activities that they participate in, in his opinion, most students feel obliged to focus on team sports, a situation he suspects is due to coaches and teachers putting pressure on students to focus on team sports. Aside from this grievance, and his preference for individual sports, Hugo still clearly enjoys team sports, playing hockey, badminton and basketball competitively for the school.
The data would strongly suggest that immersion in such a sports rich environment such as Rathwood successfully instills a real appreciation of physical activities and sport. This is evident in students’ testimony when they repeatedly reveal their preference during free-time for some sport or physical activity. Tristan states that during their free-time, “we might play a bit of tennis maybe or football, yah I mean our free time is usually spend doing something involved with sports” (Interview June 2012). Similarly Lorcan describes his free time as being dominated by sports, “We probably, you know, go down and kick a football around, and kick a rugby ball around and practice cricket in the nets, maybe in the summer months go down to the outside pool (Interview June 2012). I made particular note of the students’ own preference for physical activity over retreating to their dormitories on a number of occasions when afternoon sports were cancelled. Field notes from one of these days record the energetic activity engaged in by the majority of students despite afternoon sports being cancelled due to a parent/teacher meeting:

“There is still a bustle of activity on the school playing fields and in the sports hall. There is a group of boys playing rugby, there is a mixed group playing tennis, more playing golf and more practising basketball. There are also several walkers out today, mostly in pairs they headed off on walks of the extensive school site. There are no staff or coaches present, and yet the students engage in relaxed practise sessions or in leisurely walks.”  (Field-notes February 2012)

Even on these days that the scheduled afternoon session was cancelled, all students who were engaging in any physical or sporting activities wore suitable sporting attire.

7.10. 3 ‘Doing it for the team’

It was interesting that ‘doing it for the team’ seemed to be one of the primary motivations for sports participation. Henry and Tristan’s testimony evokes a sentiment that was evident in many of these young men and women’s narratives. Conscientious
Henry expressed the view that if a student deliberately tries to avoid sports, that they must take responsibility if they then let their team down in a match due to having missed out on training sessions:

“ammh well sometimes I mean if you were missing sports, because it was too cold or something, and you are just inside playing a computer game, and everyone else is learning new stuff, and what to do in matches, then when it comes to a match and they give you the ball and they say something like ….ammh a code or something, they would not know what to do, they would just look around wondering what to do, so they are missing out on things that they should know. It’s their choice, but it lets the team down, and if it happened in a match, it’s their fault.”

(Interview June 2012)

While Tristan acknowledged that there can be days that he might not feel very enthusiastic about getting kitted out for sports, he expressed the view that everyone must make that effort as it is an even greater crime not to care about your team:

“If say, it had been raining really heavily and you know it is really, really cold, and the pitch is soaking wet, or if you are really tired, and you know you might not want to, ammh it depends sometimes you could get away with it, but most of the times you couldn’t, and people tend not to skip anyway because ...you might get away with it from the coaches, but the people in dorm would give out to you, if you just didn’t go....just everyone really, I would be annoyed if someone and we are there working our hardest for the team....I think, I don’t mind at all people avoiding sports where I do have a problem is people not caring, I think it is selfishness, you have a team and everyone is trying their hardest and then just someone doesn’t care, you know, team sports, if there is one weak-link, you know you are just going to lose, and you know I don’t mind if you just don’t like it, you know you are not enthusiastic, when you are in a team sport you should try hard for the other people, you know try hard, you know just try your best and you know, then there is no problem, if you don’t like it, there is people who don’t like and decide that’s an excuse for them to do to do nothing in sports and not try, and you know not do anything, that annoys me.”

(Interview June 2012)

It was interesting that Josh felt he “does not really mind” if his classmates dont make an effort, he feels that “it’s something that is their choice if they don’t like or they don’t want to do them” but when considering these questions, he realised that he does not have any friendships with people who are not sporty:

“Like I guess looking back, it’s kind of weird, like most of my friends that I have made, ever, are really sporty, I have only realised that over the last few minutes, I never really noticed that, yah, it’s kind of strange.”

(Interview June 2012)
Similarly Mina claims it, “does not bother her” if some students do not engage fully with the school sports programme, although she did caution that those who attempt to opt out of physical education and sporting programme will lose out as “they will be very unfit in the future” (Interview June 2012).

Their classmate Dylan is not so tolerant of his sports-shy peers, expressing the view “they are just lazy” an attitude he clearly finds unacceptable as he argues “I just don’t really think they should be allowed” (Interview June 2012). Dylan (who has previously attended a very exclusive private fee-paying boarding primary school as a day boarder, and clearly had very high expectations of the sporting culture in Rathwood), is critical of what he sees as a lack of effort from some students, and of the school for not enforcing stricter rules. Despite the long purposeful day for all Rathwood’s students, Dylan argues:

“yaah but it’s, I don’t think it is enforced enough, like there’s, like, no one playing here (points to tennis courts beside us that were empty now at lunchtime) I think people should do it, I think during the breaks, its kind of weird, I thought people would be do more.” (Interview June 2012)

It was interesting that despite Mina, Josh and two other classmates claiming that it “did not bother them” if other students opted out of physical activities, there was an observable lack of tolerance evident in the whole first year class’s attitude to their very ‘unsporty’ new classmate Tia. Having joined the class after the Christmas break, Tia had demonstrated little enthusiasm for any physical activities. Her ‘unsportiness’ contrasted sharply with her classmates. Field-notes repeatedly noted the apparent lack of any bond forming between Tia and her classmates. Undoubtedly, Tia’s resistance to the sports culture in the school was a key factor in this:
“Increasingly, Tia stands out among the other nimble and energetic girls in this class. Arriving here in her school uniform and with her blazer wrapped around herself like a security blanket she looks grumpy and sluggish. With all the other girls very slim, hunched up in her school blazer, Tia looks more than twice their size.”

(Field-notes February 2012)

Interestingly, no concessions appeared to be made for Tia having only arrived in the school since January with only very basic English:

“Someone asks where is Tia?….one of the girls said that she was going to the matron. None of the boys got involved in the discussion, but the girls seemed totally exasperated with Tia. When Mina, the other Chinese girl asked ‘does she ever do any sport?’, Jocelyn, assured her that Tia ‘did nothing’. The girls all agreed then that Tia is only looking for something to be wrong with her.”

(Field-notes March 2012)

As Tia’s enthusiasm for any physical activity was failing to develop, the lack of tolerance towards her developed into some hostility. Having come to yet another class unable to participate (she was now on crutches), I went to enquire how she had got injured. As I turned to speak to her, she was just heading out the door, and I missed the opportunity. When I then asked of Jocelyn, she delighted in telling me:

“It certainly wasn’t a sports injury anyway because she has done absolutely no sports since she has come to the school’. She made this girl’s avoidance of sport sound like something shameful. She told me that Tia had claimed to have fallen down the stairs and sprained her ankle, but she said that ‘nobody’ believes her, as she ‘hardly moves.”

(Field-notes March 2012)

This disappointment and lack of pride in students who are not seen to be “making an honest effort” was not confined to ‘inactive’ students classmates but was also evident in adult members of the school community’s testimony. I noted a difference in Mrs Garson’s attitude to Dominic, the least athletically accomplished boy in the class. She seemed taken aback that it was Dominic’s name that was the first name that came to my mind when she asked what students were in the class that I shadowed. She reacted “Gosh, Dominic is not a student that I would have expected to be the first that should come to your mind, especially given the nature of your study!’ She said that she was
delighted when I reported that he was making a big effort as she said that she has “told the boy’s mother to persist with him here” as she believes that “they can turn the boy around” (Field-notes April 2012). It is noteworthy that the principal’s belief that Dominic needs ‘turning around’ appears to be based completely on the boy’s lack-lustre performance in the school, both in terms of his academic and physical education, and not to the best of my knowledge emanating from any concerns about any behavioural issues.

This sense of disappointment at what appears to be perceived as a lack of effort was also evident in Rosemary’s testimony when she expressed concerns about her son’s attitude. Rosemary said that her day boarder son Hugo was ‘being a bit difficult’ about the length of the twelve and half hour school day at Rathwood. She said that he is complaining that he has time for nothing else besides school at the moment, a complaint I noted she seemed genuinely puzzled by. Then, as if she was making a mental note for herself, she said that she “must really talk to him about his attitude.” (Field-notes March 2012).

7.10.4 Desire to win, but not at any cost

While there is this undoubted appreciation of competitive sport in Rathwood College, the value that is placed on competitive sport in the school contrasts sharply with more conventional attitudes about the value of sport in schools. There is no doubt that there is much enthusiasm amongst the school community for sporting tournaments that teams representing Rathwood compete in. This is evident in the school’s efforts to disseminate
all information on these fixtures where together with the school twitter account and school website, the school’s electronic notice board reports daily on all these encounters. It is also apparent in the students’ behaviour on the day of important matches as they politely bombard their teachers and coaches with questions about the time and location of the fixture, and later as they rush excitedly to the playing field. Despite this evident enthusiasm for sporting competition, there appears to be a different value placed on this involvement, where triumphing over opponents is not the only goal in competition and it may not even be the principal one.

I recall being very puzzled as I first noted these different attitudes and behaviours on the playing field. Teams representing the school (and also many of other visiting elite schools) conducted themselves in a way that I found difficult to explain. While it was obvious that these players were enthusiastic and committed to the game, if I was not closely following the score, it was impossible to tell which was the winning team. Even, as the teams lined up to shake hands, there was rarely any triumphalism detectable from either team. On the first occasion I observed this I was confused by what I thought was subdued behaviour:

“Both teams played well, scoring was low. I had to ask the coach at the end who won as I could not tell from either teams or their coaches’ demeanour. Even as both teams shook hands I could not detect any sense of who the winners were.”
(Field-notes November 2011)

It later became clear that the teams were not in fact subdued, but were in fact demonstrating the corinthian virtues of even-temper and self-restraint:

“"The first game that I watched was a boys’ hockey game. I was in no doubt that the team playing were from a very exclusive school. I was told by one of the coaches, they were “probably the strongest school in hockey in the country”. It was a very competitive, intense game. And yet again there were no vulgar displays when either side scored."
An even more striking example of this was provided in a first years girls’ basketball match. In successfully embodying the Corinthian spirit the girls demonstrated that what mattered was not if you won or lost but how you played the game:

“The scoreboard said that the score was 18 – 2 to the home side. When I congratulated them on their impressive lead, the girls told me that the gap should be much bigger, but so as not to embarrass the visiting team they stopped recording the home sides scores when the gap got too big. Jocelyn said ‘this always happens, when the gap is above 16 between us and the other team, they stop putting up our scores’.”

This is also evident in the attitude among the Rathwood community to supporting their home team matches. In contrast to an almost ‘tribal’ onslaught that some sports and some schools attract, Rathwood supporters also adhere to strict behavioural codes. These codes are clearly detailed in the school code of behaviour which states that students must behave appropriately at all times, with only applause (instead of whistling and shouting) permitted at public performances, and coarse language is strictly forbidden (2012). Observing home side supporters during a competitive match, the extent to which they adhered to these codes was striking. While even non-league matches would garner some support from the school community, there was never any raised voices or inappropriate whistling or gesturing. A point for the home side might be acknowledged with applause or with a little cheer:

“As both games were being played, students and a number of adults connected to the school come and watch the game for a time. They are interested in the score and how the game is going. Yet, there is no loud cheering or hollering from either side when either team scores, just some quiet clapping.”

The contrast between this Rathwood attitude to competition and other schools was explicitly illustrated during a senior’s rugby match against a large all male famous
‘rugby’ school. In contrast to the quietly encouraging behaviour from the home side supporters, the visitors’ supporters, when out of earshot of their coaches, criticised their players performance on the pitch:

“Today as I stood beside 2 guys who had travelled with the visiting team I heard them call out putdowns to their own players several times. This only happened when the referee was not in earshot. Also every player seemed to have a nickname, Rigger, etc. I heard them make a number of comments to their own team, such as ‘come on Rigger, you are letting the team down etc’. I have never heard any critical remarks from the sidelines to any of the home team from their own supporters.”

(Field-notes March 2012)

This use of nicknames, which are such a common feature in male ‘rugby’ schools, to the extent that they often subsume the use of students names completely in the school, is also notably absent in the school. Rathwood students generally refer to each by their first name or sometimes male students use their male peer’s surname. This tendency for students not to label their peers with a sobriquet could be construed as being a result of the collective culture in the school which does not encourage the big ego or the individual 'star'.

The inscribing of these Corinthian qualities on Rathwood students’ behaviours is so effective that even on the playing field I observed a striking contrast with a visiting team:

“I noticed very different behaviours from the two teams on the pitch. For instance, every time Castlebridge (pseudonym) scored in the match, each boy on the team threw their arms in the air and cheered loudly. In contrast, when the home side scored they all clapped, but there was no cheer, no triumphalism. This difference in behaviour was also apparent before the match started when both teams were crouched together in a circle, getting their pep talk from their respective coaches. There was a few ‘polite’ cheers and the name of the school was shouted out a few times from the home team, but the Castlebridge team were much more vocal, very loudly spelling out ‘Castlebridge’, more aggressively. This I felt was designed to make them appear more threatening and more powerful than the home team.”

(Field-notes February 2012)
Despite their coach having admitted prior to the start of the match that “a win over Castlebridge is always being really important for the home team”, yet, even when the home team won the match their celebrations were very restrained. I noted how “they did not cheer, or punch the air, or raise their arms triumphantly, they just clapped politely” (Field-notes February 2012).

Whether the victory in Rathwood College is for an individual or a team event it is always important to win with ‘good grace’, the ability to win without gloating. The basketball coach made it quite clear that no gloating would be tolerated. When I remarked to this basketball coach that, despite her team having a great victory I got no sense of triumphalism from the home team, she told me that “it was only a friendly match and even if it was league match I would ‘kill’ them if they behaved like that.”

While the threat to exterminate any gloaters on her team may not be completely genuine, it is clear that all of Rathwood’s teachers and coaches that I observed adopted a similar approach to competition, always emphasising good sportsmanship on the playing field.

Being a relatively small school, always winning or making it into the top team was not a realistic goal, yet the students seemed very accepting of this, tending to regard engagement in school sports as a means of team-building. Interviews with the first year class revealed that, even in their first year in the school, students buy into these particular values about the role of competition, with their testimony revealing how the value of being part of a team is prioritised over that of winning. While first year students’ Josh and Tristan acknowledge that winning games would be their favoured
outcome, and that “losing badly is not very enjoyable”, their testimony echoes that of their class mates when they say that they appreciate that “winning is not everything” (Interview June 2012). The boys’ testimony would suggest that the values associated with being part of a team and contributing to the school are of more importance. For Tristan:

“Playing on a team with a bunch of guys I don’t know, that are all really, really good players, and you know, and you win it, you know its nice but I mean....what Rathwood has is, you know, you know every member of your team, really, really well, you are all really, really good friends, and I think it helps the team spirit, if not everyone is amazing. We had some people on our team this year, who weren’t amazing, you know, who weren’t really great players at all, and so that means that a win, with, you know, people that you really like, people that you know have made a big improvement, you know wouldn’t be the best players, that makes a win feel great, then you really, really want to win, you want to win for your friends, you want to win so people will start liking you, so I think it is a bit of both, ya winning is important but I think winning is so much more important , when you are playing with people you know, when you are playing with friends..... the matches were great fun this year, and I think another thing that I like, there were twenty boys in our year and because of the boarding school and all that, we spend almost all our time and its kind of a great feeling of you know, a great feeling of going with the people that you spend, that you live with, going out to play rugby, you know, alongside, its good you know, we had really good team spirit, you know we had to have good team spirit because we always saw the people, lived with them, so you know, I mean when you know guys like your brothers, who you are playing alongside really well, ya there was a really good team spirit.”

(Interview June 2012)

The references in Tristan’s testimony, to ‘brothers’ and ‘living together’ is noteworthy here with familial references revealing the sense of the collective in Rathwood College that is nurtured in the school community. Words such as ‘we’ and ‘community’ permeated much of the young people’s narratives about their sporting engagement. Josh and Henry’s testimony provide an example of this when, despite both boys acknowledging their love of winning, their testimony also attested to the importance of community in the school. Even though Josh feared that it might sound “weird” to admit he loved to win he did own up to his delight in winning, “I guess I am very competitive, cause I play for lots of teams, but obviously it’s all about taking part, but I really do
like, this is going to sound so weird, but I really like winning, I love winning.” He does appreciate that there are other gains from participating, namely being part of a team and being fit; “it is not about just about winning, it is about being part of the team, being part of the team is crack, and winning is just a benefit, if you win, it’s great, it is more about the fitness and actually being able to get out with your friends, and win if you can” (Interview June 2012). Thomas also espoused these Corinthian ideals when he stated “I like winning as well, but being part of a team is for me more special, cause then it’s also quite social, you get on with people more and you talk to them a lot” (Interview June 2012).

There is no illusion among members of the school community that this distinctive sporting culture is respected by other schools. Indeed on the contrary, a number of references were made by members of the school’s coaching and teaching staff that would suggest that they sensed that there was a lack of respect intimated to some of Rathwood’s sports teams. While this was an issue only with a number of private fee-paying all-male schools, the school’s coaches and teachers admitted to feelings of frustration at having to tolerate these attitudes. Robert expressed the view that while it can be frustrating trying to advance the schools’ teams into the higher divisions at rugby, he found it more frustrating tolerating this lack of respect:

“We get it how mixed schools like ours are discussed. I know that it would have been said to the Castlebridge team before they came out here today, and it would not matter that it was a developmental team’s match, that ‘they can’t lose to a girl’s school’ ”

(Field-notes March 2012)
However despite having to endure this lack of respect, nothing I observed would suggest that it causes the Rathwood community to question or doubt their particular model of education.

7. 10. 5. Self-mastery

The culture of self-discipling which was discussed previously in the total institution themed chapter is perhaps even more apparent on the sports field. Epitomising the Corinthian spirit, the sporting culture in Rathwood emphasises self-mastery and self-discipline. This is evident in the observable lack of disciplining and surveillance of students. Sport is credited with playing a key role in developing character in the students and the ability to co-operate, to follow rules, to be responsible, and to be disciplined. Callum, dad to Edward, credits sport with the lack of discipline issues in the school, arguing that as bonds develop on the sports field, Rathwood students do not want to let their teammates down by “stepping out of line”:

“Callum argues that the students don’t need to be disciplined by the teachers, as they discipline themselves. This is something that he credits sport with playing a key role in. He said that it is very important in a school like this where team sports play a huge role in the school, that one does not let down your teammates. As if you draw negative attention to yourself, you are not alone letting yourself down here, you are letting your whole team down.”

(Field-notes March 2012)

Dorothy, a badminton coach in the school, also remarked about the lack of disciplining that was required in the school:

“Dorothy explained that she did not actually coach the students, that they were essentially a ‘self-organising group’. I asked what she saw her role as, if it was not to coach, was it discipline or to control the class? She said she saw herself more as a facilitator, as in her experience discipline was not an issue with these students.”

(Field-notes March 2012)

Rathwood College staff clearly feel much pride in their students’ ability to discipline themselves. This was evident when I remarked to teachers Philip and Charlie that I have
never seen any teachers checking up on or needing to reprimand the pupils during the
sports session and as the students make their way to and from the session. Charlie
argued that the “students would, of course, break the rules, but because they know they
will get detention if they are caught, they tend to know better than to draw attention to
themselves”. Similarly when I remarked to Robert on the impeccable behaviour of one
of the school’s rugby teams, he seemed really happy I had noticed, as his chest visibly
puffed up with pride, he told me that the “team’s behaviour has been remarked upon
before” (Field-notes March 2012).

There is also a firm belief in Rathwood College that through involvement in physically
demanding sports young people develop stronger resilience. This stoicism is evident in
a number of the students’ testimony. Henry, a very shy, sensitive boy, exemplified this
stoicism as he spoke with great affection for his new school and in particular for the
sport in the school, despite having just broken two of his fingers while playing hockey:

“Henry told me he was enjoying being in Rathwood ‘very much.’ He said that they
played a lot of sports in his last school but not as much as they played here in
Rathwood. He said ‘I like how we play sport every day here, I am happy here’. It
was interesting that this conversation was just one day after having broken two of
his fingers in a hockey game. He looked very proud when he told me that the
hockey stick broke.”  
( Field-notes November 2011)

It is clear that the stoic culture in Rathwood discourages students from trying to evade
their sporting responsibilities in the school by feigning or exaggerating illness or
injuries. This was evident each week, as students who were on ‘matron’s list’ and
therefore excused from all physical activities looked frustrated and unhappy rather than
relieved to have to sit out while observing their classmates. Alex, who was ‘off sports’
for a few weeks due to an injury to his knee, made no attempt to look for sympathy,
claiming that he felt no pain:
“Alex told me that he has a chip in his kneecap. He is clearly very frustrated missing sport. He tells me he has had it x-rayed and is now ‘off sport’ for a few weeks. When I enquired about how he got injured, he claims to have no recollection of how it happened, and said it was not even sore.”

(Field-notes February 2012)

Enquiring one morning from an obviously very poorly, senior German girl, who was sitting on the sports hall floor, coughing and sneezing, what it takes to be allowed stay in bed for the day, I was told in no uncertain terms that “nobody” wants to be “bored and “confined” in their dormitories (Field-notes February 2012):

“I had presumed that the students who were off sports and who sat out PE classes, would have much preferred to be relaxing in their rooms. When I asked her if she felt cold on the draughty floor and would she prefer to be in bed, she said no, that nobody wants to be confined to bed that it is so boring. She said that everyone wants to get back to normal activities as quickly as possible. She said you would probably would have to have ‘a fever and probably be vomiting’ to spend the day in bed.”

This stoicism is certainly encouraged by the very pragmatic approach taken by the sports coaches to injuries on the playing field. I witnessed an example of this when a new pupil, on one of his first days on the hockey pitch, was hit on the hand during play. Despite being a painfully thin boy and clearly being in a lot of pain, Daniel (his hockey coach) made as little fuss as possible and got the boy back playing within a couple of minutes:

“One of the new recruits started shrieking in pain after getting hit on the hand by a hockey stick. Daniel, his hockey coach, calmly walks over to the boy and while he was sympathetic and spoke in a soothing voice, he pointed out to the boy that there was ‘no swelling’ and that he should ‘rub his hands together between his legs’. After a minute or two, he then announced very confidently, ‘see you are fine, well done, good man’ and then gently steered the boy back into play. Despite having been yelping in pain minutes before, there was no more complaints from the boy as he went back playing.”

(Field-notes September 2012)

Apart from this one incident with the new boy, I witnessed no other ‘dramatics’ on the playing fields of Rathwood College. While students were regularly hurt and sometimes even injured, the boys and girls of Rathwood do not seek to draw attention to
themselves when they are hurt. However, it is clear that this stoic attitude does not extend to foolhardiness with student’s physical well-being. Sporting injuries receive prompt medical attention in the school. With a full-time matron in Rathwood, and as evidenced by the number of students I observed on the sidelines enduring enforced ‘leave’ from all sports, it is clear that the school takes its responsibilities to the welfare of its students seriously.

7. 10. 6 Learning to lead

With an unwavering belief that the students of Rathwood will someday assume positions of authority, opportunities to experience ‘leadership’ are provided for all students. Particular features of the school physical education and sporting programme appear designed specifically for this purpose. In physical education, Robert gives his pupils every opportunity to lead:

“He then asks the students if they feel they know the functional movements well enough to do them by themselves. They are all quite confident that they know the exercises and the sequence themselves. He then asked for a volunteer to lead the group. Lorcan and Ope both volunteered. They both stand in front of the class and call out the sequence of the exercises.”

(Field-notes March 2012)

Playing rugby also, opportunities are provided for all junior players to lead their sports teams. Josh believes that sharing the captaincy at junior level is a good idea, as it reveals students’ leadership skills before the game becomes more competitive at senior level:

“All of us three here captained the rugby team this year, but to be honest at first year level I think it gives everyone a chance because it is not competitive, its good to see who can be a captain and who isn’t able, it will be good for years to come, I

---

29 Interestingly in the same way as the time and energy was committed to the physical education of their female students as their male students, the same emphasis was also placed on instilling leadership skills in their female student body.
guess it gives you an outline of who will make a captain, when you get to junior cup level. I think it is a good thing when it is not competitive.”

(Interview June 2012)

Tristan expressed some reservations about this rotating captaincy, revealing his doubts about all students’ suitability for the role, whilst also betraying what I suspect was his belief in his own inherent leadership capabilities and his own suitability for the full-time position of captain:

“I think he should probably only pick one captain, because I mean the captain is the leader, and you don’t kind of feel any responsibility to the leader if you know it is a leader today and just with the rest of you tomorrow. I think he should probably pick one captain for the season. I like, I love being a captain, I was a captain for my rugby club, well until I got moved up, I captained the hockey team, once or twice I captained the rugby team here.”

(Interview June 2012)

Also noteworthy was the apparent confidence the teaching staff had in their students. This is evident in the faith they show in their students to be responsible and to properly carry out whatever task they have been assigned, without feeling the need to double-check that all tasks were completed. In this following example, we can see how the teacher felt no need to check that the student knew how to follow out all the instructions properly:

“Robert asks for a volunteer to go to the sports supplies room and get his stereo, in order to do the beep test. One of the boys quickly volunteered. The teacher gave him his bunch of keys and he asked the boy was he familiar with sports supplies room. The teacher did not feel it was necessary to double check with the boy that he had the correct location of the storeroom. He also did not feel it necessary to request that the boy take care to properly lock the room when he was finished there, or to make sure to bring back the keys.”

(Field-notes May 2012)

I had regularly observed this teacher giving his keys to these first year students when they were required to open or lock up sports store rooms. At no time did Robert feel it necessary to remind his students that they must be responsible and take proper care of his keys, or question them as to whether they have completed the tasks as required.

246
It is interesting how aware these first year students are about how the skills they are learning on the sports field may be of benefit in their future careers. For thirteen year old Josh:

“Teamwork is very important, and I think that really helps, I’d say it would help in later life, because of sport and like, having to test your ability as well, like, competitiveness I guess will help a bit, yah I definitely do think sport will help in later life.”

(Interview June 2012)

Similarly, Tristan believes that the skills learned on the sports field will be of great benefit:

“Uhh, I think so, it will teach you to have that slight competitive streak but it also teaches you how you can almost deal under pressure, ummh my position in rugby, as an out half, there is some, you know there is some cases during the season where I was put under quite a lot of pressure, and you know, that will happen in careers and jobs and things in the future where I will be put under pressure, and I, you know, sport has helped me, you know, any pressures that I am under, I have to think myself, to get out of here, I have to go on instinct, something like that, so its kind of going to be the same, the same in a job.”

(Interview June 2012)

It is clear, that these leadership skills do not lie dormant until Rathwood students embark on their career. As demonstrated by Alex and Ope, these skills clearly manifest within a very short time of them being immersed in the culture of the school. I was quite taken aback by the adeptness of students as young as thirteen years old at leading and directing the interview process. In an incident that occurred the day after I had requested the class’s participation in individual and focus group interviews, I was literally doorstepped by these two boys, in their determination to be the first members of the group to be interviewed:

“As I left the library, Alex and Ope were waiting outside in the rain for me. They wanted to know when I would interview them. I explained to them that I first needed to speak to Robert about what time during the school day would be the most suitable for conducting the interviews. But the boys were clearly not keen to wait. I presume that they wanted to be the first to be interviewed. Alex suggested that if I wanted, that we could get started straightaway during their break. They both reassured me that they did not mind missing their break and said that they were happy to get started with the interview. I had intended interviewing 4 of the boys together, but Alex said that by the time they found the other boys that the
break would be over and they would have to go to their next class. Despite being quite unprepared, I then found myself agreeing to interview the two boys straightaway.”

(Field-notes June 2012)

The boys’ attitude and behaviour was also noteworthy during the interview, with the boys assuming a very mature contemplative demeanour:

“The two boys were so comfortable being interviewed. There was no giddiness, no embarrassment. They seemed to enjoy being asked about themselves. I wondered was it just that they enjoyed the attention, but they did seem to be also genuinely interested in the topic. These boys are clearly used to engaging in adult conversation. I felt that Alex was assuming what he considered was a suitable attitude and posture for a situation like this. He carefully contemplated each question I asked him, giving even the most mundane questions careful consideration.”

(Field-notes June 2012)

Their classmate Jocelyn’s impressive leadership skills were also evident when she effectively took command of her classmates who were expressing reservations about participating in a focus group interview;

“As we waited for their teacher to arrive, the girls in the class took the opportunity to get more information about what was involved in a focus group interview. I thought that two of the girls, Georgia and Mina, seemed hesitant about participating in the interviews. I tried to reassure them, telling them that they were not obliged to take part and that they should only participate if they were comfortable. Jocelyn, however, who I imagine has no idea of her leadership skills, took charge and responded for the group of girls, saying “not at all, we will of course take part, you have made the effort, so we will of course do our bit.”

(Field-notes June 2012)

However, I took it upon myself to speak to Georgia and Mina after class had ended in order to assure them that they were under no obligation to participate in any interviews. I gave them the opportunity to express any reservations that they may have had and felt unable to express due to Jocelyn’s ‘autocratic’ decision-making. Both girls assured me, however, that on reflection they were quite happy to participate.
7. 11 Physical manifestation of Rathwood College’s distinctive physical curriculum

In one of the more significant findings to emerge from my data, it was apparent that not only does Rathwood’s distinctive physical curriculum impact on the behaviours and attitudes of Rathwood’s young men and women, it was also found to manifest in their bodily dispositions. The great importance placed on the physicality of the body by this school also contributes considerably to the embodiment of Rathwood’s distinctive ethos and culture. It is also instrumental in cultivating distinctive bodies. The data strongly suggests that the school’s particular physical education and sporting ethos play a key role in cultivating these physical distinctions, with the values and traditions that are nurtured on the school playing field effectively manifesting on the bodies of the young men and women. In what is essentially the embodiment of the Corinthian spirit, these students’ bodies give human form to their elite status. The influence of the school’s distinctive sporting character is evident in the students’ attitudes and demeanour as they appropriate the attitudes, values, norms and behaviour patterns that have emanated from the Corinthian ideal. This distinctive bodily ‘performance’ manifests in Rathwood’s students’ bodily movements, in their posture and in their relation to space. It is also evident in their facial expressions and in terms of voice quality and accent. Given the prevalence of a range of very particular bodily dispositions amongst the established student body, I would argue that the distinctive socialisation at Rathwood is instrumental in shaping these bodily dispositions. As many of these bodily dispositions appear to be particular to the school, it could be argued that there exists a distinctive Rathwood body.
Interestingly, awareness and understanding of these distinctive bodily dispositions only emerged for me after I had spent some time in the field. Whilst I was immediately aware of a certain physical distinctiveness I initially attributed much of this difference to the students’ physical appearance. However, even as it became clear that this bodily distinctiveness extended beyond personal styling and wardrobe choices, I still struggled to distinguish what these differences were. Field-notes recount my early efforts at deciphering what sets these Rathwood bodies apart:

“I still can’t properly articulate what it is that makes these students’ physicality different. I can’t pinpoint what it is about how they move or look that sets them apart, but looking at them here today, the students of Rathwood’s definitely adopt a certain way of ‘being’ that sets them apart from other Irish teenagers.”

(Field-notes February 2012)

Despite my initial difficulties in deciphering exactly what these differences were, I was quite certain that these bodies differed in some regard to working class bodies. I had first became aware of this variation between a Rathwood College body and the bodies of their working class peers on my journey home from the school as I drove through a number of very disadvantaged areas after leaving Rathwood. It was clear that the type of casual clothing worn by young Irish people from all social backgrounds does not differ dramatically nowadays (I accept that it undoubtedly differs dramatically in terms of the quality and design), with the uniform of jeans and hoodies evident with both groups. Despite these similarities in clothing styles, I realised that when viewed only from behind, that they were discernible differences evident in the comportment of young people from disadvantaged areas and those from Rathwood.

Increasingly cognisant of these differences, I then became alert to the bodily dispositions of Rathwood’s young men and women. As I closely observed these bodily
techniques I began to recognise a distinct homogeneity in the bodily dispositions among the student population in Rathwood College. The peculiarity of these dispositions became more marked for me when other schools were visiting to compete in inter-school competitions. As awareness grew of the variations in physicality from one school to another, I became quite discriminating at determining the degree of exclusivity of visiting schools based purely on their appearance and their bodily dispositions. Despite the vast majority of visiting schools being confined to the private fee-paying sector, there are still considerable variations evident among them. Accordingly, the contrast between the pupils from different private schools was quite surprising. Observing this hockey match, such was the contrast between the visiting teams appearance and comportment that I was surprised to discover that the girls were also from a private fee-paying school:

“I was surprised to see that it was also a private school, the home team looked so much more ‘private school’ than the visitors team. Despite all the girls being in the same age group, the visiting girls appeared much younger...and more self-conscious...they were also much giddier and appeared less ‘worldly’ than the home team.”

(Field-notes November 2011)

After a time in the school, as I observed teams arriving to compete in inter-school competitions, I could confidently determine not only whether the visiting school was a private school, but also whether it was in the top echelons; an elite fee-paying school.

7. 11. 1 The manifestation of polite society in the body

In their non-verbal communication these young men and women, whether consciously or unconsciously, send out very clear signals about their privileged class location. Their privileged status is reflected in their upright posture, in a confident and expressive
manner, an openness with their bodies, and a more expansive use of space around them. Observing the students relaxing during their lunch break in the school garden as they took advantage of the first warm sunny days, I remarked to myself that the scene was more reminiscent of a scene from a period drama (such as ‘Brideshead revisited’), than a typical lunch hour in the grounds of an Irish second level school. Although the majority of these students were seniors, and accordingly would be well acquainted with what is considered acceptable behaviour in the school, the degree of comfort exhibited by the students was noteworthy:

“It is a beautiful day here today, as a large group of students relax on the lawn. It is not enough to say that they are confident. There is a ‘comfort’ in their bodies. The fact that the vast majority of these students conform to today’s desired body type, slim, fit, and healthy looking must encourage this. This satisfaction with their bodies was evident in their posture, their self-assured talk and their movements. With the long limbs unselfconsciously stretched across the lawn, and the strong confident voices remaining constant as teachers and other adults walked past them.”

(Field-notes, June 2012)

This homogeneous upper class embodiment that was evident in Rathwood College contrasts sharply with the working class body as depicted in a number of recent sociological texts, the most notable of these accounts coming from Shilling (2012), Lawlor (2005), Skeggs (2004) and Adair (2002). In the same way that traces of social structures are evident in the embodied affluence of the Rathwood College student’s physique, the literature clearly reveals that social structures are also embedded in the bodies of the working classes. In contrast to the “refined laminated, orifice-less” controlled upper class body, there is an excessive physicality associated with the unruly corporeality of the working class body (Bakhtin 1984). Moreover, there are also substantial inequalities in the symbolic values accorded to these particular bodily forms, with significant value lying at the heart of an upper class bodily identity, while little value has traditionally been placed on working-class forms of embodiment and adornment. The undesirability of the working class aesthetic and physicality has intensified however in recent times, as common representations of the working class body has become increasingly stigmatised (Skeggs 2004). This has resulted in what was formerly a lack of appreciation of the working-class body having now slipped into a moral critique, with lack of ‘good’ aesthetic taste now perceived as a lack of morals” (Steward 2013, p. 94). As the working class body is now viewed as “ignorant, brutal and tasteless”, with the distinctive working class bodily dispositions “assumed to be markers of some ‘deeper’ pathological form of identity” (Lawlor 2005, p. 437). This has resulted in anything associated with the working class body being viewed negatively. For instance Steward (2013 p. 94) argues that while there is “nothing inherent in sportswear that lends itself to negative appraisal but when it is attached to working class bodies” it invites criticism. Similarly Lawlor (2005, p. 432) finds that “tattoos and piercings are held to be repellent, threatening, disgusting, signifying a collective, mob-like existence” when attached to working class bodies. Yet “when the middle classes have tattoos or piercings these cultural expressions are viewed as markers of individuality and so when appropriated by middle class groupings the very same expression of taste acquires value” (Steward 2013, p.95). Additionally, there is special disgust reserved for the female working class body, which is deemed to be guilty of every bodily transgression. In contrast to their ‘modest and discreet’ middle class female peers, they are constructed as “excessively sexual, vulgar and materialistic” as their bodies display the most despised signs of femininity (Lawlor 2005, p.115 ;Skeggs 2004).
In contrast to the awkward bearing and manner of many adolescents, Rathwood students, even in their first year in the school, display an elegant and graceful bearing and a maturity that seems beyond their years. At an age when most teenage boys are uncomfortable in their bodies, not sure of how to behave, mumbling at adults, the boys in Rathwood display none of this teenage ‘discomfort’. Observing students as they interact with the school staff, their accomplished polished demeanour was striking:

“The first boys to arrive were second year twin brothers. The boys made no attempt to avoid the coach, as both of them make eye contact, and without hesitation both boys directly addressed the coach, asking her ‘how are you today?’ One of them then walked over and asked the coach if there was anything they could do to help. The coach asked the boys to help her set up the equipment, which they immediately set about doing.” (Field-notes March 2012)

The coach involved in the above exchange only works on a part-time basis in the school and would have had very little interaction with the two pupils in question. Yet the two boys did not hesitate in immediately engaging with her and assisting her in the set-up of the sports equipment.

A striking feature of this Rathwood embodiment is the lack of any harsh or grating bodily automaticisms or gestures. Initially, completely unaware of the absence of jarring bodily movements in the school, it was only while observing the interaction between Rathwood’s sports coaches and visiting coaches from other non-elite school that the contrasting bodily automaticisms were illuminated for me. I then became aware of commonalities in bodily dispositions between Rathwood’s coaches and other coaches from other visiting elite schools. Most notably these coaches assumed a distinctive stance with their feet firmly planted some distance apart, a stance that appears to communicate the bearer’s strength and stability. There is also a pattern of restraint in
these individuals gesturing and bodily movements, with a complete absence of any ostentatious behaviour or exuberant gesturing. The restraint of these bodily disposition was brought into sharp relief one afternoon while observing a cricket match between the first year boys and a visiting community school:

“The visiting school had 2 coaches with them, an Irish man and a young Sri Lankan man (who I presume was responsible for the school having a cricket team). The Irish coach did not seem to ‘fit’ with cricket. He wore a GAA shirt. He was too fidgety and jumpy to fit in, and when he came over to speak to us, he was very ‘jokey’ and found the idea of a PhD on physical education practices to be ‘hilarious’. He hopped from one foot to the other when he was speaking to either myself or any adult members of the Rathwood community. As I noted this coaches bodily movements, I remarked to myself how unusual this type of behaviour is here, and is most certainly not common on the sidelines of a cricket match.”

(Field-notes May 2012)

I became aware that I tended to judge the Rathwood personnel and the other visiting coaches with these restrained bodily dispositions as more serious, more professional and more capable. In contrast to this, I dismissed individuals like this visiting ‘fidgety’ cricket coach, as less competent and a bit silly.

Either in the adult company of teachers or coaches or in the company of their fellow students, I saw very little evidence of any inappropriate mannerisms or behaviours such as belching or spitting. So uncommon were these behaviours, that on the one occasion where I witnessed a male pupil spitting I was quite taken aback. The extent to which Rathwood’s students successfully manage their bodies was brought into sharp relief as I observed a visiting cricket team prepare for their match. Watching this visiting team school from a non-elite get prepare for their cricket match, I observed behaviours that I would never have observed from the home team:

“Watching the visiting boy’s team prepare for their cricket match, I was a bit taken aback at the way they were walking around with their hand down their pants! I remarked to myself that they were a very uninhibited group. I then realised that what they were doing was putting in and adjusting their groin protector. Issues with
I later discovered that the wearing of this protective gear was obligatory for all male cricket players, something I was unaware of as I had never seen any of the Rathwood pupils either inserting this protective piece of kit or adjusting it on the pitch.

7. 11. 2 Embodied Leadership

Despite qualities like the ability to lead typically being considered an intrinsic component of one’s personal makeup, it is clear in observing the Rathwood school community that even our most seemingly personal characteristics can be learned competencies. The most abiding impression I got from observing the bodily dispositions of Rathwood students is one of a powerful expression of leadership. This perception of Rathwood’s youth as being successfully inculcated with the bodily dispositions required for leadership is frequently remarked upon in field-notes:

“The majority of these pupils, whether consciously or unconsciously, seem to exhibit many of the physical qualities which I would imagine are essential for future generations of leaders.”

(April 2012)

I noted that common to almost all the Rathwood community were a range of these bodily traits that appeared to communicate their bearers propensity for leadership, a distinctive demeanour that clearly communicated its bearer’s ‘natural’ authority. As they went about their school day, students always appeared to be clear as to what direction they were going. They walked with certainty and purpose. There was no stopping and changing direction or double-checking with passing classmates as to where they were going and what they might be missing out on. I also noted that even when standing still, the male Rathwood students in particular assume a very different stance:
“Standing with his head high, he rests his hands on his hips, feet firmly planted on the ground, and with his legs apart, there is no trace of uncertainty from Alex. He looks confident and strong.”

(Field-notes April 2012)

With their prestige effectively stamped on their bodies, this manifested in controlled tempered bodily movements, a firm stance and in the expansive use of the space around them. I interpreted these expansive bodily movements as indicative of Rathwood students’ sense of entitlement to the space around them, and the firm grounded stance, indicative of “their strong sense of ownership and belonging in the school community” (Field-notes April 2012).

With effective communication skills a requisite in leadership roles, the students of Rathwood will certainly not be found lacking in this regard. Such is their proficiency at communication that it is something that was remarked upon many times. Mrs Garson believes this is one of the school’s “real strengths”, producing students with the confidence and ability to communicate in any company. It is clear however, that this ‘Rathwood’ ability to communicate is not limited to impressive vocal abilities, which they undoubtedly have, (years of compulsory debating and public speaking clearly has paid rich dividends) but is also evident in their ability to use their bodies to command respect and to communicate their ‘natural’ leadership. While observing the cricket match with the visiting ‘fidgety’ coach, I witnessed an exchange between two of the first year boys with this coach that I felt provided a perfect illustration of this embodied leadership:

“As the two first year boys, Tristan and Saul (a very good cricketer and all round athlete) were leaving the pitch, after playing very well, they walked over to the visiting side’s ‘Fidgety’ coach to say goodbye. The manner in which they approached the man and spoke to him, would have been more appropriate from a very self-assured adult. Tristan walked over to the coach, who was sitting on a low
bench and (and I don’t think I imagined this) in an almost paternal encouraging manner; tapped his hand on the man’s shoulder. Despite the home side winning by a huge margin, Tristan congratulated the coach on his team’s “great effort”. He told the coach, not to be discouraged and that they should keep it up. They then thanked this man for coming today, and said they hope to see them again.”

(Field-notes May 2012)

It would be wrong to say that either of the boys were rude or deliberately condescending, but it was clearly not a conversation between equals. In the boys’ posture, in the way Tristan placed his hand on the man’s shoulder and leaned over from his standing position to the seated position of the visiting coach, in their tone, all of this suggested that the boys had the upper hand here. Yet, these were two thirteen year old boys interacting with a man who probably had two decades of teaching experience behind him:

“As they passed this man he had his back to them, and could easily have passed without even having to say goodbye. Yet, they both, immediately upon seeing the coach sitting on the bench, must have felt it was the right thing to do. That you do not sit back and say someone else will do it, they take a much more active role in their community. Rather than let this young team leave the school disenchanted at their big loss, the boys took it upon themselves, out of sight of anyone to impress, to bolster this team’s confidence and to leave them with a more positive impression of their day.”

(Field-notes May 2012)

It was not only the boy’s confidence and the ability to walk up to this man and talk to him, that was I was most struck by. It was the fact that two adolescent boys would, completely unprompted, feel it was something that they ‘should’ do.

7. 11. 3 Unapologetic

An important aspect of this elite physicality is a confident ‘unapologetic’ manner. It is interesting that Rathwood pupils not only feel entitled to speak to their teachers or the head of their house when they wish to, but it also seems that they expect the adult in question to be interested in what they have to say. This ‘unapologetic’ manner was most
apparent when students sought the attention of adults in the school community. I do not get any sense that the students feel that they are disturbing their elders, when they approach their teachers or coaches to speak to them. Instead, I get the sense they feel like they are communicating with equals. I surmised in field notes that for non-elite adopting a similar ‘unapologetic’ demeanour might be perceived as threatening or defiant.

“I think to be accepted as ‘respectable’ and ‘unthreatening,’ many young people learn they have to be apologetic. I see it so often in young people’s posture, in the way they grimace to demonstrate their discomfort, so the adult knows that they are not being cheeky or rude, when they try to get the attention of someone who is in a position of authority.”

(April 2012)

I noted that in Rathwood no effort was made to modify their bodily dispositions during these exchanges. They make no attempt to discreetly capture the attention of the adult in question but speak in a strong composed unhurried manner. Male students, in particular, make no attempt to appear non-threatening. They do not try to reduce their height by rounding their shoulders or crouching down. Rathwood’s students’ posture is, without exception, upright and confident. Students do no sway forward and backwards, or hop from one foot to the other, or visibly cringe as they approach adults, to demonstrate their unease (and humility). They also do not lower their eyes, but comfortably held the gaze of the adult they wished to communicate with. They walk directly up to the man or woman in question with a bold assertive firm stride, without fear of encroaching on their teachers or coaches personal space, betraying no discomfort in either their posture or their facial expression:

“After class, I walked back with Robert to the library. It was the first sunny day that I have experienced in the school….As we were walking, several students called out some news to Robert, or stopped him briefly in conversation. I did not know the majority of these students and I presume they had no idea who I was either, so they would not have known if I was a visiting supervisor, or a potential student’s parent. Yet, none of the students apologised for interrupting Robert’s conversation with me,
they just said ‘Sir’ and asked him whatever question they had, or shared whatever information they wanted to give him…They never start the sentence with “sorry, could you tell me etc” or “sorry sir”. I never hear ‘sorry’ here.”

(Field-notes April 2012)

This manner of communicating between the students and staff is clearly something that has been encouraged in the school. Mrs Garson stated that she has always encouraged this open communication between the students and the staff;

“Mrs Garson explained that this ease between herself, the teaching staff and the students was something that she has encouraged since she came to the school. She said that she has always told her students that they should not avoid making eye contact with any of the staff here, when I meet a student in the school ‘they should always be able to look me in the eye, and say ‘hello’. ‘

(Field-notes April 2012 )

I would argue that this ‘unapologetic’ interpersonal communication style is an important element of the elite physicality, communicating the directness and self-assuredness of the bearer.

7. 11. 4 Learned behaviours

Having closely observed the first year class from their first few weeks, the extent to which these distinctive bodily dispositions are learned is very clear. It is evident in their bodily response to the changing environment as their transformed social world manifested in different ways of acting and apparently feeling. This emerges quite clearly in the data, where the effects of this distinctive socialisation manifest in the transforming bodily dispositions of students. It was interesting looking at new recruits, the new first year class, and what a mixed bag they were. Field-notes record my impressions of the very mixed sporting abilities of the new recruits at their first hockey practice:

“While there is a few promising looking athletes in the group, there are three boys that I would worry for here. Two of the boys seem almost incapable of moving, they drag their feet as they move around the pitch, while the third boy seems too fragile
Having witnessed the changes in the previous year’s new ‘recruits’, I am quite confident that even the most physically challenged of these students will also quickly embrace the sporting culture in Rathwood.

Within a few months of being in the school, there was a discernible change in many of the student’s attitude and demeanour. I observed differences in how they held themselves, and how they moved. This was evident in my observations of Josh’s changing appearance:

“Josh, is ‘off sports’ for the first time today. I have noticed quite a dramatic change in this boy’s appearance since I started here in November. He did not seem particularly self-assured at the beginning. He seemed shy and a little lost. Today he walks with a confidence and air of authority. I actually think he looks like a mini version of a barrister. The new grown up haircut he got at his mid-term break has only added to this.”

(Field-notes February 2012)

This rapid transformation in Josh’s appearance from a timid homesick boy to the confident authoritative looking young man reveals the manner in which Rathwood students respond to their changing environment through their bodily movements and emotions. By the end of their first year, this embodiment of the Rathwood culture and spirit was evident in this whole class. While this transformation may not have been quite as dramatic as that undergone by other students in the class, even the bodies of Dominic and Tia, the two students in the class that would have experienced the greatest difficulties in settling in to the strong sporting culture in the school were beginning to show signs of a Rathwood education. Tia, having shown little enthusiasm or apparent potential, had begun to embrace the sporting culture of Rathwood:
“Another student that has transformed in recent weeks is Tia, the sports shy Chinese girl. She has the cast off her leg now and is allowed back to sports. She is in shorts and t-shirt today, and is running around enthusiastically, something I thought was not possible… She seems to have really embraced the sports culture of the school. She is not hiding under baggy clothes, her t-shirt is quite fitted as are her shorts. She looks much more slender, and is standing much straighter. She also now appears to be accepted as part of the class, as she is no longer left out on the sidelines.”

(Fieldnotes June 2012)

Similarly, Dominic who had often appeared the ‘hopeless case’ in his physical education class and on the sports pitch, seemed transformed after his first year in the school. The change was not so much in terms of his physical shape changing, or his agility or prowess on the playing fields improving dramatically, Dominic is still overweight, and still unlikely to excel on the sports field. However, there is a marked difference in his confidence and his comfort around his classmates. I also got no sense that Dominic felt like an outsider anymore:

“Even Dominic who struggles so much in PE class, looks much more at home on the rugby pitch. He stands so much straighter and he smiles more. Today is the first day, that I can see a difference in this boy. Robert has always said that some of the boys may take longer to get ‘find their feet’ in the PE class and on the sports field, but I wondered if this boy was always going to struggle. But while the transition is slow, there is definitely a change in the boy.”

(Field-notes September 2012)

It was interesting that there were no obvious changes in Tristan and Jocelyn in the year that I conducted my fieldwork. I surmised that this was because both of these students had attended primary level boarding schools and had essentially completed their apprenticeship in elite embodiment prior to their commencement in Rathwood.

It was noteworthy the extent to which the distinctive physicality observable in Rathwood clearly persists over time within this elite culture. This continuity becomes apparent in school photographs that I observed in the school and in the two books that have been published on the history of the school (Author A 1995; Author B 1982). With
some photographs dated from early in the last century, a significant contrast might be expected with present day photographs. Yet, while some changes are certainly evident in the style of the school uniform and sports kit worn, I noted a marked similitude in the demeanour and bearing in all these photographs. I first noted this apparently enduring disposition as I studied the photographs in the sports hall foyer commemorating the sporting achievements of Rathwood students. The photographs span several decades of winning teams in hockey, tennis, archery, rugby, golf, cross country and cricket:

"Despite the passage of time and changes being evident in the different sporting kits, there is something in all the photographs. What is most striking is the apparent comfort all these young people exhibit before the camera. Everyone, students and coaches alike look very comfortable in front of the camera... At an age when many adolescents are awkward and uncomfortable, the level of comfort in front of the camera is striking...it is evident in their stance and in their demeanour. With their head held high, they all look boldly and confidently at the camera."

(Field-notes January 2012)

This would suggest that the distinctive ‘Rathwood’ upright posture and confident demeanour that is seen to persist through the decades, and that so effectively communicates their subjects distinction, must be viewed as socially created forms of differentiation.

7. 12 Upright young men and woman

The possession of these distinctive bodily dispositions not only appear to ease the young men and women of Rathwood’s entry into elite society but also operate as a signifier of their good moral character. Rather than being seen as simply ‘learned’, a cultivated confident demeanour and agreeable manners are apparently judged in the Rathwood College community as the fruits of a good heart. Rathwood’s students regularly receive praise for possessing these valued bodily dispositions, the possession of which are seen not only as a personal achievement but also, it would appear, as the
evincement of their inherent goodness. The following quote by an invited speaker at the annual school Christmas service when he made special mention of the student’s distinctive bodily dispositions, illustrates the value that is placed on these forms of embodied cultural capital in elite circles:

“I am delighted to have been asked here today to Rathwood College, I have been very impressed by the young men and women that I have met here today. The wonderful confidence that they possess. I particularly remarked upon the firm handshake and clear eye contact from each of these young men and women that introduced themselves to me today, I am very aware that I would not be welcomed as warmly or in as graceful and cultivated a manner in many schools.”

(Field-notes December 2011)

It is quite clear from this quotation that the speaker has not considered the possibility that these valued bodily dispositions may simply be learned behaviours, but instead they are deemed indicative of the quality of the students’ character. Interestingly, the bodily dispositions that were remarked upon, namely the ability to look someone in the eye and to shake hands with confidence, are not only considered indicative of an individual’s sincerity, earnestness, enthusiasm, and trustworthiness, they are also the bodily dispositions associated with individuals that excel in leadership positions.

These assumptions about the moral character of Rathwood’s students was evident in the many references made to the virtue of these young men and women. The following quote from Bart, a junior hockey coach reveals his belief in the ability of the school to produce people of moral worth:

“When they come in here at 12, they are often lost and homesick, but the care that they get here, the busy regime in the school and the strong friendships that develop in the house system and on the sports pitch all contribute to the good people that this school produces, ... this system produces a product to be proud of.”

(Field-notes March 2012)

Interestingly Mrs Garson sees sport as playing the key role in the 'production' of this Rathwood man or woman, as she argues 'the product in Rathwood is not just a set of
examination grades, this product is the young man or women that emerge from this school, sport plays a vital role in forming this product” (Field-notes April 2012).

The lack of discipline issues in the school is also considered evidence of the inherent goodness of Rathwood’s young men and women. For Lynette, it is nearly unheard of to have a problem with any of the students’, she states:

“In all [her] time in the school bullying was not really a problem in the school,’ or if it was she ‘was not aware of it’. She said that on the contrary the students ‘look out for each other here, with the older ones looking after the younger ones’, a situation which she thinks ‘is lovely.’”

(Field-notes February 2012)

Lynette also praised the students for their “lovely manners” and how they always took the time to come and sit and chat with her in her office and always expressed their appreciation to her when they were leaving. Rather than being indicative of a good nature, these behaviours are also clearly influenced by a culture in the school that has encouraged the young men and women of Rathwood to initiate direct and open communication with the adult members of their community, a learned behaviour that is clearly perceived as evidence of a caring and positive attitude (Field-notes April 2012).

While it is undeniable that there are few serious disciplinary issues to deal with in Rathwood College, I would argue that this is more indicative of the ample resources at the school’s disposal than being due to the inherent goodness of Rathwood’s student body. While Rathwood’s students certainly appear to desist from engaging in any significant anti-social behaviour, I observed a number of incidents that revealed their capacity to be willingly uncaring. This was evident with the lack of concern for Tia, the new Chinese girl, when she struggled to fit in during her first few months in the school.
It was also evident in the lack of support from classmates when Alex deliberately fooled Henry, their shy sensitive classmate, into running out to join a cricket match he had convinced him he had been selected to play with:

“Alex called out to Henry, ‘are you not meant to be gone to the match?’ Henry said he did not think that his name was on ‘the list,’ but Alex told Henry that he was quite certain his name was on the list. Alex looked to Dominic for confirmation that Henry’s name was indeed on the list, who nodded in agreement. Alex seemed to take delight as he saw Henry getting agitated. Henry was clearly excited that he may have been chosen for the team, but also seemed worried that he might have missed the bus... After running to attempt to catch the bus, Henry came back looking a little crestfallen after being told that he was not on the team. Dominic and Josh joined in with Alex sniggering as Henry sat back at his desk... Mr Blake, their teacher seemed completely oblivious to Henry having been set up or to the boys sniggering when he returned.”

(Field-notes May 2012)

Despite having observed this unpleasantness on a number of other occasions nobody has remarked on this trait in Alex. On the contrary, it would appear his ‘natural’ charm and leadership skills may have served to outweigh or even camouflage this unpleasantness.

Observing Rathwood’s young men and women as they took advantage of the first days of summer sunshine, I was conscious of how unlikely it was that anyone would accuse these people of being threatening or menacing when they congregated together:

“I was struck today by how unlikely it is that anyone would complain of feeling uncomfortable walking past these groups of teenagers. While most teenagers face criticism when they hang out in groups, having committed no greater crime than gathering together. They regularly face demands to move on, often accused of being intimidating and threatening.”

(Field-notes April 2012)

While their non-elite peers need do no more than simply gather in groups to be considered a nuisance, it seemed highly improbably that any of these students would face such censure. Observing these young men and women as they relaxed together, I am conscious that there is nothing in the Rathwood demeanour that would cause unease
for any passerby, with their direct confident manner clearly attesting to their honesty and decency. This leads to the inevitable conclusion that the almost homogenous upright confident demeanour of Rathwood is also interpreted in moral terms, leading to assumptions being made about the innate goodness and respectability of these young men and women. With one’s physical appearance a signifier of worthiness, individuals who have mastered what is essentially a higher status bodily style are also judged to be of good character.

Conclusion

In its exclusive focus on the ‘physical’ dimensions of a Rathwood College education, this chapter documented the role that the physical curriculum in elite schooling plays in the social construction of elite bodies. The findings highlighted the almost complete adherence to high status activities, and the almost total omission of the ‘popular’ sports of soccer, hurling and Gaelic football in the schools’ extensive physical education and sporting programme, serving to underscore the cultural distinctiveness of the programme. The findings also revealed the elements of the physical education and sporting programme which could be said to mitigate against greater sporting success for the school. My findings however clearly demonstrated that the Rathwood Community eyes are set on what they see as a much higher goal than an accumulation of trophies and cup titles, namely the power of sport to induce character. It was shown that this concern with nurturing what I recognised as the mental and moral qualities of the Corinthian Spirit was central to the emergence and continuity of Rathwood College’s distinctive sporting model. This was evident in the marked emphasis on sportsmanship
over winning, on cooperation and team spirit over individuality and independence, and on self-mastery and learning to lead. Moreover as clearly borne out by the findings, the vast majority of the Rathwood community appears resolute in their determination to uphold these traditional values. Then in one of the more significant findings to emerge in the data; not alone does the distinctive physical curriculum manifest in the characters of the Rathwood community, but it was also found to manifest in their bodily dispositions. An essentially upper class embodiment, it manifested in the Rathwood scholars’ posture, their gestures, facial expressions and in their relation to space. The chapter then revealed how not alone does possession of these valued bodily dispositions provide ease of entry into elite society, operating as a cultural marker, but crucially it was also deemed indicative of the quality of their character. In essence, the hallmarks of a Rathwood College education, not alone testifies to one’s elite status, but also attests to one’s moral worth. The following chapter analyses and discusses the findings presented in this chapter.
Chapter Eight
THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE ELITE BODY

Introduction

This chapter analyses and discusses the findings on the physical dimensions of a Rathwood Education presented in the previous chapter. The chapter begins by drawing attention to the importance placed on the physical curriculum in elite schools, the centrality of which is revealed in the rich sporting culture in these schools. In demonstrating the class specific nature of the physical curriculum in elite schools, the chapter highlights the ability of dominant groups to tailor the physical curriculum to their own express purposes. In revealing the explicit focus on high status activities in elite schooling, the function of the elite school physical curriculum as a mechanism to create distinctions between themselves and their non-elite peers is disclosed. The chapter then draws attention to the central role of sport and physical activities in elite schools as a ‘training ground’ for character. Particular attention is paid to how this distinctive ‘physical’ socialisation becomes ‘inscribed’ on the body of those educated in these schools, which results in elite school educated young men and women, conveying unambiguous information about their privileged class location through their non-verbal communication. The chapter concludes by exploring how the possession of these distinctive bodily dispositions are interpreted as being reflective of their bearer’s moral worth, rather than a socially acquired bodily technique, an interpretation I argue that is
influenced by a strong meritocratic ideology that allows and encourages what is simply corporeal ‘stamps’ of a privileged life being adjudged as the ‘fruits of a good heart’.

8.1 Rich sporting culture in elite schooling

The findings of my research echo the large body of existing empirical literature (Bourdieu 1998; Bourdieu 1990; Shilling 2003; Shilling 1993a; Kirk 2004; Light & Kirk 2001; Lareau 2003; Lynch 1989; Gaztambide-Fernandez 2009; Khan 2011; Taylor-Gatto 2002; Tomlinson 2005; Lleras 2008; Frost 2001; Doble 2012; Tozer 2012; Goodbody 2012; Drinkall & Chappell 2012; Brewster 2012; Uttley 2012) documented in chapter five that have highlighted the centrality of the physical curriculum in elite schooling. This emphasis on the body and the production of corporeal knowledge is most explicitly illustrated in the prominence given to physical education and sport as an essential component of a ‘rounded’ education in these schools, where sport and physical activity are not mere adjuncts to the main business of the school but are considered as very much part of their main business. The literature reveals that this emphasis on the transmission of corporeal knowledge has been a central feature of these schools since their inception (Mangan 1981; Courtice 1999; Holt 1989; Simon 1991; Tozer 2012; Gaztambide-Fernandez 2009). This same emphasis is also evident in Rathwood College where both written and photographic historical accounts in existence in the school reveal the importance placed on providing a ‘rounded’ education from the school’s earliest days. While Rathwood College has experienced quite dramatic changes in recent decades, their physical curriculum remains relatively unchanged, in essence, being “one of the few requirements to escape the demand for change, the emphasis
[remains] on providing a physical education, with sport continuing to ‘play a crucial role’ (Armstrong 2012, p.16).

Despite almost all of the empirical literature on elite education originating outside of Ireland, marked similitudes were noted between the physical curriculum in Rathwood College and elite schools in Britain and the United States (Khan 2011; Howard 2008; Tozer 2012; Armstrong 2012), with sport and physical activity deeply woven into the fabric of all these elite campuses. The substantial investment in the physical curriculum in these schools was a recurring theme in the literature, with much evidence of the substantial resources invested in physical education and sport. Interestingly, the seasonal restructuring of the academic curriculum to facilitate the school sports programme that had seemed extraordinary in Rathwood College was found to be a regular feature of prep schools and elite boarding schools in the United Kingdom (Armstrong 2012; Brewster 2012; Drinkall & Chappell 2012). Similarly what seemed like a ‘remarkable’ commitment to physical activity with two hourly daily sports sessions in Rathwood College was found to be an established feature in the elite school.

8.2 A distinctive physical curriculum

The considerable physical and sporting capital invested in Rathwood College and other elite schools testifies to the ability of dominant groups to tailor their ‘physical’ curriculum. With the exception of Kirk (2002), Light and Kirk (2001) and Shilling (1993a; 2003; 2012) the extent to which physical education and school sport is adapted to serve the specific needs of their student ‘body’ has received little attention. In
highlighting the almost exclusive focus on a range of high status physical activities and sports in Rathwood College, my research revealed the class specific nature of the physical curriculum. Moreover the total omission of the ‘popular’ sports of soccer and GAA games reveals the extent to which the range of sports and physical activities provided in such schools operate as a cultural marker. Empirical literature (Lynch 1989; Lynch 1999) also reveals the association between the choice of physical activity provided in a school and the social class positions of their student body, with the range of activities offered in Rathwood College being almost identical to the activities offered in other Irish exclusive fee-paying schools. As previously noted by Lynch (1989) this exclusive focus on high status sporting activities is one of the most effective mechanisms by which elite schools create distinctions between their school and the non-fee paying sector. This desire to set themselves apart from other schools is evident in the almost exclusive focus on a range of high status physical activities and sports that are rooted in the lifestyles of the middle to upper class.

Interestingly, the range of physical activities and sports provided in Rathwood College bears more resemblance to the physical activities provided in the elite school systems of countries under British cultural influence than it does to the non-elite schools in the same Irish locality. Rathwood community openly seek to emphasise the difference between their school and other schools. Additionally, as revealed in my findings, the dramatic contrasts between the experiences of the fee-paying and non fee-paying students, was also evident at primary level in the practices and attitudes to physical education and sport that the student’s experienced in their primary education.
8.3. The ‘hidden’ physical curriculum in elite schooling

In illuminating the specific values assigned to sports participation in elite schools, this thesis attests to the particular set of social meaning that are embedded in the physical curriculum for elite groups. Manifestation of these ‘sporting’ values in Rathwood College was evidenced in the development of a range of particular character traits which were revealed as a key concern in the delivery of their physical curriculum. The findings clearly demonstrate that whilst sporting success is certainly sought after, and celebrated when it is achieved, there is a greater concern with character development on the school playing fields than there is with an impressive medal hauls in sporting competition. This concern with character is a concern that Rathwood College shares with other elite schools, where sport has long been prized for it’s ability to cultivate distinctive attitudes and characteristics in their pupils (Tozer 2012; Holt 1989; Mangan 1997; Doble 2012). In fact, for many observers of elite education, the prioritisation of the physical curriculum is a direct result of this “glorification of sport as the training ground of character” (Bourdieu cited in Mc Kay, et al, 2000, p. ), where “the lessons of sports [are considered] at least as important as those of the classroom in developing character” (Armstrong 2012, p.16). Historical cultural artefacts sourced in Rathwood College clearly demonstrates how these gentlemanly ideals of fair play and sportsmanship were prioritised and firmly instilled in the school from the outset, with historical accounts of the school recording this explicit desire by the schools founders, to inculcate the right moral code in their pupils (Author A 1995; Author B 1983).
Nurturing loyalty to the all-encompassing boarding school community has long played a key role in the cohesion of elite groups, a role that continues to pay rich dividends for these groups. The findings demonstrate that Rathwood’s physical curriculum also plays a key role in developing this communal allegiance. It is clear that in Rathwood College, significant value is placed on the physical curriculum for its ability to bring their student body together and “thus serve to affirm their common-bonds and to reinforce social solidarity” (Durkheim 1954, cited in Coser 1977, p.136). Remaining faithful to these traditional sporting values clearly still holds much value for the Rathwood Community.

8. 4. Learning to lead on the sports fields

Another key function of the physical curriculum in Rathwood College is the opportunity it provides for leadership training. In contrast to the Hobbesian concept of power and leadership (Hobbes 1963), in which the seizure of power is necessary to guarantee societal stability or success, in Rathwood, leadership appears to be sought and prepared for more as a result of the responsibility that their position in society bequeaths on them. This lack of appetite for a Hobbesian ‘power grab’ was evident on the school sports fields, with the lack of any one-up-man-ship regularly observed and remarked upon, yet Rathwood’s students’ destiny as leaders and the part that they will play “in shaping our future society” was a constantly reinforced theme in the community (Principal’s school awards night address 2013).

This concern with developing leadership qualities was also evident in both the physical education programme and on the sports field, with particular features of the physical
education programme apparently designed specifically for this purpose. It was noteworthy in the apparent confidence the teaching staff had in their students, to be responsible and to properly carry out whatever task they have been assigned. I would argue that this apparent confidence in their students' ability to do the right thing results from a greater emphasis on empowering the elite educated student rather than reminding them of their limitations. It is clear that the placing of such confidence and trust in their young charges is not simply a result of their belief in their students' remarkable maturity or virtuosity, but is without doubt a key component in the cultivation of leadership qualities among elites. In effect, elite educated students are not told about their limits, but only their capacities. Their self-belief is not shaken with constant supervision and inspection. Instead “they get a sense of the world not as rules and regulations, but ...as an open terrain to be negotiated...an open world before you” (Khan 2011). This Khan (2011) argues is in stark contrast to what disadvantaged children experience in their schooling.

Interestingly, the open hierarchy structure of the school, with its apparent lack of surveillance, appears to not alone promote a culture of compliancy in the school, but also is instrumental in developing leadership skills. In this culture of self-disciplining and peer to peer disciplining, Rathwood’s students do not look to an external authority for approval or clearance in how to act. While there was an absence of any explicit disciplining of or surveillance of students, the findings revealed that much of the socialisation of students that goes on in Rathwood College is conducted by their peers. These findings replicated those of Khan (2011) and Cookson and Persell (1985) who
observed that it was other elite educated students who teach each other how to dress, think and often what and how to study. This self-policing by their fellow students is for Khan (2011) “a really powerful idea”:

“The school works hard to be like a family. And families don’t put locks on their doors; they trust one another...It’s something admirable that the school tries to instil in its students. And it creates a deep bond between the students, along with the suggestion that those in your family (or class) can be trusted”

(Khan cited in Venkatesh 2011)

For the future generation of leaders these are valuable lessons for their future life; as “elites learn to subject themselves to their own rules, and to avoid external imposition of rules upon them.” (Khan 2011)

8. 5. Physical manifestation of elite culture

In one of the more significant findings to emerge from the data, it was found that the rich ‘physical’ culture advanced in Rathwood College is also instrumental in cultivating distinctive bodies, with the findings demonstrating that prolonged exposure to a specific culture can facilitate the acquisition of a range of socially inscribed bodily dispositions. The findings also demonstrated how these distinctive bodily dispositions were learned dispositions and not a ‘natural’ part of who these students were. This was evident with the students that I observed while doing my field-work, and also in the following September’s new first class that I observed during their first term. While both classes had a number of students that looked very promising, there were several in both groups that were unremarkable in terms of fitness or bodily confidence. However the transformation in the class that I observed for the year of my field-work revealed the extent to which the distinctive bodily dispositions observed in Rathwood College is an acquired disposition. These findings make explicit the extent to which our bodily
techniques are capable of being efficiently executed as a result of training or cultivation and as a result, demonstrate that rather than just being part of who we are “our bodily engagement with the world is derived from a cultural stock of acquired (practical) skills, techniques and shared understandings” (Williams and Bendelow 1998, p.262).

Analysis of my data strongly suggests that the Rathwood’s physical curriculum plays a key role in cultivating a range of distinctive bodily dispositions. The influence of this distinctive physical curriculum is evident in the students’ attitudes and demeanour. These “schemes of habitus” (Bourdieu, 1979, p.466) manifest in their posture, gestures, and facial expressions and in their relation to space, as this essentially upper class embodiment conveys unambiguous information about the Rathwood student’s social class status. A range of dispositions that was especially evident among Rathwood’s senior students, with their prestige effectively stamped on their bodies. The acquisition of particular bodily dispositions has been observed in a number of previous studies where it has been noted that “prolonged practical engagement in particular fields give rise to states of embodiment or habitus” (Ford and Brown 2006, p.128; Wacquant 2011; Wainwright et al 2006).

The findings presented in this thesis clearly reveal how even the most ‘personal’ bodily characteristics are socially created forms of differentiation. In the bodily expression of their habitus, the young men and women of Rathwood College reveal ‘their’ society, which is embodied in their physical being. These findings testify to the interrelatedness of the body and its social location, with ways of talking, of moving, bodily deportment,
and general demeanour clearly integral to habitus or as Marks (1999, p.129) notes, “the body adopts a particular habitual way of relating to the environment”. This demonstrates how the ways in which we relate to and treat our bodies reveal the “deepest dispositions” of the habitus at work, with the body operating as a “mnemonic device” upon which and in, the very basics of culture are imprinted and enacted (Jenkins 1992, p.76; Shilling 2003). Thus, it is in our habituation, with the repeated and affirmed performance of particular repertoires, that we form the unconscious dispositions of habitus, with every gesture and physical activity betraying an individual’s class-dependent social location and orientation to the world (Shilling 2003). In turn this process reveals the extent to which “meaning….resides in the body, and the body resides in the world’ (Williams and Bendelow 2002, p.54).

Moreover, I would argue that not alone do all our bodily dispositions have a ‘taste’ of one’s social class background, but crucially, there is also clearly much profit to be gained from the acquisition of socially valued bodily techniques. This thesis demonstrates that in developing a range of “dispositions that will advantage” them, the students of Rathwood College acquire a valuable commodity that can be converted into other valuable forms of capital (Khan 2011, p.83). In doing so, this thesis demonstrates that one’s bodily dispositions are also instruments of action and power, revealing the extent to which the “deepest dispositions of the habitus” are core to the acquisition of status and distinction (Bourdieu 1984, p.190).
8. 6. Bodily dispositions: a reflection of one’s moral worth

In some of the most important findings to emerge from the data, assumptions of ‘character building’ and ‘moral worth’ which are associated with possession of the distinctive Rathwood College embodiment were revealed. The findings strongly suggest that not alone is possession of these particular bodily dispositions considered a reflection of the bearer’s capabilities, but also that they are indicative of the bearer’s moral character. The findings clearly demonstrate that rather than being seen as simply ‘learned’, a cultivated confident demeanour and agreeable manners are perceived in the Rathwood community as evidence of a good heart. This was most explicitly illustrated in the words from the invited speaker at the Christmas school dinner, when he betrayed the value that is placed on these forms of embodied cultural capital in elite circles, as he lavishly praises “the clear and direct eye contact and firm handshake” (December 2011) that he received from the assembled students. Similarly in the praise Rathwood’s students regularly receive for their impressive oration skills, with their ability to stand confidently and convey their thoughts “articulately and authentically” to their school community is taken as further evidence of their inherent goodness (Fieldnotes April 2012). It is clear however that such impressive oration skills, are skills that require considerable bodily training in, in public speaking, and communication skills, the mastery of which Rathwood College excels at, and as was evident in the findings, also skills that the Rathwood community clearly take much pride in. Accordingly, the findings demonstrate that by reinforcing daily that all members of their community should communicate in a direct and open manner, the young men and women of Rathwood College are imbued with some of the most valued and personal forms of
capital (that of moral worth).

Although rarely acknowledged there are many long held assumptions about the insights that are to be gained from observing an individual’s demeanour, posture and comportment, with these most ‘personal’ of bodily dispositions commonly held to be truly reflective of one’s innate character (Tinnings 2010; Connorton 1989; Taylor-Gatto 2002). In fact, such is the belief in the ‘hidden truths’ that can be garnished by those proficient in ‘reading’ body ‘language’ that a body language industry has spawned in recent times (Kinsey Goman 2011; Bowden 2010). Held as a true gauge of an individual’s true feeling and nature, an individual’s bodily dispositions can be scrutinised to gauge their moral character. The credence that is given to these bodily revelations is evidenced in the language of moral character, which is replete with ‘bodily’ references: we speak of moral individuals as ‘upstanding’, having moral ‘backbone’, as looking you in the ‘eye’, while less desirable individuals are ‘crooked’, not straight, not able to look you in the eye. Consequently, we must conclude that with one’s bodily dispositions seen as being a signifier of worthiness, individuals that have mastered what is essentially a higher status bodily style are judged to be of greater moral worth.

I argue that it is the ‘misrecognition’ of these forms of physical and moral capital as innate personal attributes that is of most concern. Failing to recognise the value of these assets as valuable, transferable forms of capital, effectively hides a mechanism of inequality. Indeed, I would argue that without a true understanding of the value of these...
metaphorical forms of capital, it is “impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world” (Bourdieu 1986, p.46). Consequently, I would argue that the misrepresentation of the distinctive bodily dispositions that manifest in the elite school environment as testimony to the moral worth of these students rather than a class based advantage reinforces erroneous beliefs in the superior moral worth of the elite. Thereby allowing elite groups to not alone define their bodies and lifestyles as superior, but also as “metaphorically and literally the embodiment of class” (Shilling 2003, p. 149).

Conclusions
This chapter situated the physical practices in Rathwood College in the wider international elite education context. In documenting the cultural distinctiveness of the physical education and sporting model in Rathwood College, it was revealed how the physical curriculum in elite schooling is tailored to the social class makeup of their student body. Moreover, in highlighting the reach of the hidden curriculum beyond the classroom, attention was drawn to the elements of the physical curriculum through which dominant cultural values are reproduced on the sports fields of the elite school. Then in demonstrating how physical capital (in the form of body dispositions) is socially produced through a series of cultural processes in the elite physical curriculum, this chapter revealed the strong relationship between elite education and the social production of ‘valued’ bodies. This was revealed in the documented transformation of the bodily dispositions of the young men and women of Rathwood, where homogeneous bodily dispositions were observed manifesting in the Rathwood Scholar
and through which unambiguous information was conveyed about students’ privileged class location through their non-verbal communication. This chapter concludes by calling attention to how the misrecognition of these embodied distinctive dispositions as signifiers of superior moral worth, not alone calls attention to further advantages the elite educated student enjoys, but it also calls attention to the seemingly benign elements of this education, that receives little or no recognition, but which have the potential to significantly contribute to social advantage and inequality. In doing so, this chapter reveals how ‘the management and development of the body is central in its own right to the production of cultural and economic capital and the attainment and maintenance of status’ (Shilling 1992, p.3).
CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This chapter will provide a critique of the entire research process, and a brief overview of the findings of this thesis, the results of which are presented for the purpose of adding to the existing body of theoretical and empirical knowledge. This study set out to develop a greater understanding of the nature and significance of the physical curriculum in shaping the corporeal identities of students in elite boarding schools. Ultimately the two key questions this thesis sought to address were:

- What role does the physical curriculum in elite schools play in the social construction of elite bodies?
- Do the day to day practices within the elite boarding school foster a strong identification and connection with the elite school community, and accordingly facilitate the social stratification of the elite educated student?

This concluding chapter begins by reflecting on the findings which reveal the integral role the distinctive culture particular to the elite boarding school plays in the maintenance and segregation of dominant groups. The chapter then considers the findings relating to the central research questions, where in making explicit the distinctive ‘physical’ practices engaged in at the elite school, the central role of the physical curriculum in the corporeal construction of the Rathwood College scholar is
revealed. The chapter then discusses the contribution this thesis makes to our empirical and theoretical understanding of the ‘hidden’ learning that take place in these schools through engagement in the physical education and school sports programme and to the role of the elite boarding school in maintaining cultural stratification. The chapter concludes by addressing some of the limitations of this study and by formulating recommendations for future research in this area.

9.1 Key Research findings

The findings in chapter six reveal the role of distinctive cultural practices in the elite school in the social stratification and self-reproduction of elite groups. My findings clearly document how the model of education provided by Rathwood College is extraordinarily successful in achieving their goals, by extension, this success ultimately facilitates the reproduction of elite privilege and contributes to educational inequality in contemporary Irish society.

As a school that caters exclusively for the sons and daughters of the dominant classes, there is an explicit focus in Rathwood College on the development of a range of particular qualities that are required in elite circles, the combination of which, I would argue, manifests in the atypical mentality and lifestyle within the school community. These distinctive qualities are apparent in all aspects of the school life, from the academic, to the social, and from the physical to the moral.
The data revealed the distinctive rituals of belonging that this elite community employs to maintain its cultural identity and to establish boundaries between themselves and others. This desire to differentiate themselves from their non-elite peers was most striking in their cultural consumption, with the range of cultural products consumed within Rathwood College associated almost exclusively with the dominant classes. The findings revealed the central role of the ‘total’ environment of the elite boarding school in maintaining this cultural homogeneity, with its cloistered 'bubble-like' community providing the Rathwood scholar with fewer experiences and examples of diverse styles, behaviour and values. The findings identified that the intimate connections that are nurtured within this tightly integrated community, with teachers and students living side by side in the school and interacting daily on numerous occasions and in different contexts both formally and informally, as of paramount importance in maintaining this cultural distinctiveness. This was evident in the many ‘hallmarks of home’ in the school, which reveal the desire in Rathwood College to develop deep familial type bonds within the elite school community; most notable among these was the familial type structuring of the school ‘houses’ and the whole school community dining together each day. The findings also called attention to the heightened duty of care demonstrated by Rathwood’s teaching staff to their young charges, which strongly suggested that their students welfare and wellbeing was paramount. It was also shown how the apparent lack of a traditional school hierarchy nurtures a culture of compliancy, which results in even the most recalcitrant of students being won over. The findings demonstrated how the distinctive socialisation processes in Rathwood College inspires an intense solidarity within the school community that results in students disconnecting from past life.
associations, as a consequence of which, students then primarily identify as members of their new exclusive social network; the Rathwood community.

The findings in chapter six’s ‘physical distinction’ document the role that the physical curriculum in elite schooling plays in the social construction of elite bodies. The findings highlighted the physical distinctiveness of the Rathwood student body, amongst which there is (almost without exception), a total adherence to very strict cultural expectations regarding their bodily presentation. The almost complete adherence to high status activities, and the almost total omission of the ‘popular’ sports of soccer, hurling and Gaelic football in the schools’ extensive physical education and sporting programme, serves to underscore the cultural distinctiveness of the programme. The findings also revealed the elements of the physical education and sporting programme which could be said to mitigate against greater sporting success for the school. My findings however clearly demonstrated that the Rathwood Community eyes are set on what they see as a much higher goal than an accumulation of trophies and cup titles, namely the power of sport to induce character.

It was shown that this concern with nurturing what I recognised as the mental and moral qualities of the Corinthians Spirit was central to the emergence and continuity of Rathwood College’s distinctive sporting model. This was evident in the marked emphasis on sportsmanship over winning, on cooperation and team spirit over individuality and independence, and on self-mastery and learning to lead. Moreover as clearly borne out by the findings, the vast majority of the Rathwood community appears
resolute in their determination to uphold these traditional values. In one of the more significant findings to emerge in the data; not alone does the distinctive physical curriculum manifest in the characters of the Rathwood community, but it was also found to manifest in their bodily dispositions. The influence of the school’s distinctive sporting character was evident in the students’ attitudes and demeanour, as they appropriated the values and norms that emanate from the Corinthian ideal. Manifesting in their posture, gestures, facial expressions and in their relation to space, this essentially upper class embodiment conveyed unambiguous information about Rathwood’s students’ social class status. Their privileged status reflected in their upright posture, in a confident, unapologetic and expressive manner, an openness with their bodies and a more expansive use of space around them. The ‘learnedness’ of this upper class embodiment was incontrovertible, with the students bodily response to their transformed social world clearly documented in the data. The findings also call attention to the significant ‘profits’ that can be accrued from the possession of the cultivated and confident demeanour that is nurtured and moulded through immersion in Rathwood’s intensive physical curriculum, the most significant of which was the finding that not alone does possession of these distinctive bodily automaticisms ease entry into elite society for these young men and women, but crucially it was also found to operate as a signifier of their good moral character. These findings revealed the substantial profits that are to be gained for elite groups through their long association with the elite boarding school.
9. 2 Theoretical and Empirical Contributions

The findings of my research support existing arguments that the education system as it presently stands serves as a means to reproduce society’s inequalities, with culture as the key form of stratification (Bourdieu 1984; Bourdieu & Passeron 1990; Kohn 1989; Collins 1975; Lamont 1992). This research supports existing literature (Bourdieu 1984; Kohn 1989; Collins 1975; Lamont 1992) in recognising that not alone do differences in socialisation processes in schooling ultimately leads to the creation and maintenance of distinctive values and conceptions of the world, but also how these apparently ‘normal’ cultural ‘behaviours’ or ‘choices’ help to maintain social stratification (Winkle-Wagner 2010, p.4). The utilisation of Bourdieu’s conceptual tool of cultural capital provided explanatory power into how these apparently innate cultural ‘preferences’ are developed, the implications of these ‘choices’, and the central role they play in contributing to the established social order, and accordingly, in establishing and legitimating social hierarchies (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977).

The preference in Rathwood College, for cultural products associated almost exclusively with high status groups was also documented in the literature on elite schooling from Britain, the United States, and Australia (Khan 2011; Bourdieu 1994; 1998; Light & Kirk 2001; Light & Kirk 2000). Interestingly while similarities with the English public school might have been expected, cultural consumption in Rathwood College was also almost indistinguishable from their American and Australian elite peers. Conversely the findings revealed significant divergence in cultural consumption of Rathwood College’s students from their non-elite neighbouring Irish peers (Lynch
1989; Lynch 1999; Kennedy 2009). This disconnection with dominant groups from the cultural life of their compatriots was also observed in the literature concerning American elites, who it has been argued have “far more in common with their counterparts in London, Paris, and Tokyo than with their fellow American citizens” (Lofgren 2012). Historically, this tendency among elites to dis-identify with their non-elite countrymen was also noted by Arendt (2004, p.1) who argued that the nobles of pre-revolutionary France “did not regard themselves as representative of the nation, but as a separate ruling caste which might have much more in common with a foreign people of the same society and condition than with its compatriots.”

In calling attention to this cultural interrelatedness between international elites groups and the elite school educated Rathwood community, this thesis calls attention to the cultural distinctness of elite groups. Further, in undertaking extended field research in an elite boarding school in an Irish setting, this thesis makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the role that elite schooling plays in generating and maintaining these cultural preferences amongst dominant groups. Mirroring the findings of the recently expanded body of international literature on elite schooling, the analysis of my qualitative data has demonstrated that the culture of the Rathwood College serves as a vital distinguishing feature, marking the school community as a distinct social group. Moreover, my findings demonstrated that the distinctive culture and identity associated with the school is a key resource that is skilfully employed to aid in their social cohesion and maintenance of their community. The empirical findings of my research support existing arguments that elite schools are the most effective conduit for the
transmission of these higher cultural forms, a process that allows the bearer of these distinctive styles of presentation, manners, and tastes to be readily identified as a member of an exclusive social network. The findings demonstrate the central role a society’s shared cultural practices and values play in advancing the formation of a group’s identity. Accordingly, this thesis serves to demonstrate how in maintaining an effective monopoly on the most valued forms of culture, dominant groups are able to deny access to subordinate groups and thus preserve and reproduce the existing social structure.

In this section I document the contribution that this thesis makes to our understanding of the role the elite physical curriculum plays in the reproduction of elite groups to positions of privilege. By providing fresh insight into the class specific physical education and sporting practices in elite schooling and the wide range of implicit yet deep and lasting learning that takes place through participation in these practices, this thesis reveals the role of the physical curriculum as a key factor mediating and maintaining class privilege for dominant groups. While the existing literature (MacPhail et al 2005; Fahey et al 2005; Evans & Davies 1993; Laker 2000; Kirk & Tinning 1990; Halbert & MacPhail 2010; Siedentop & Tannehill 2000; Lund & Tannehill 2009; Foster 2000; Whitehead 2000; Bailey 2005) is rich in descriptions of specific outcomes for adolescents engaged in physical education programmes, this thesis is distinctive in its systematic inspection of the social class dynamics of such programmes. Bar Shilling (1993a; 1993b; 2012) Light (2001) Light & Kirk (2000; 2001) and Kirk (2002; 2010) relatively little specific attention has been paid to the relationships between
institutionalised regimes of physical education and school sport in educational settings and young people's lived experiences of class and culture. Further, the social class specificity of these programmes in an Irish context has previously remained uncharted.

Moreover, in highlighting the reach of the hidden curriculum beyond the classroom, attention is drawn to the elements of socialisation that take place in the physical education and sporting practices, that bar Kirk (2002; 2010), Light (2001) and Shilling’s (2012; 1993a; 1993b) contribution have remained largely unexamined. This thesis demonstrates how through the physical curriculum, dominant cultural values are reproduced on the sports fields of the elite school, which leads to students acculturating “the cultural norms, beliefs and values of the institution” and who are accordingly assimilated into the culture of the dominant classes (Sandford and Rich 2006, p.278). In doing so, this thesis makes an important theoretical contribution to established ways of understanding the significance of the physical curriculum in elite education, clearly illuminating how the messages communicated by schools’ physical curriculum can support or undermine the school’s official curricula. Further, in documenting the cultural distinctiveness of the physical education and sporting model in Rathwood College, this thesis demonstrates how the physical curriculum in elite schooling is tailored to the social class makeup of their student body. In so doing, this thesis elaborates on the existing literature (Kirk 1992; Shilling 1991; Evans and Davies 2006; Bain 1975; Fernandez-Balboa 1993) in revealing the hidden ‘physical’ curriculum that is in operation in schooling.
Finally, this thesis makes an important and original theoretical and empirical contribution to our understanding of the social reproduction of human bodies. Demonstrating how physical capital (in the form of body dispositions) is socially produced through a series of cultural processes, this thesis reveals the strong relationship between elite education and the social production of ‘valued’ bodies, and in so doing casts light upon the embodied mechanisms that ensures the reproduction or transformation of the elite social world. In documenting the evolvement of the bodily dispositions of the young men and women of Rathwood, this thesis bears witness to the embodiment of the distinctive ‘physical’ socialisation in the elite boarding school; an embodiment that was observable in the homogeneous bodily dispositions that manifest in the Rathwood Scholar and through which unambiguous information is conveyed about students’ privileged class location through their non-verbal communication. Moreover, this thesis is distinctive in its recognition of the misrepresentation of the distinctive bodily dispositions that manifest in the elite school environment as signifiers of the moral worth of these students, rather than a class based advantage, a misrepresentation that this thesis argues reinforces erroneous beliefs in the superior moral worth of the elite, which in turn allows elite groups to define their bodies and lifestyles as superior, worthy of reward, and as, metaphorically and literally the ‘embodiment of class’ (Shilling 2003, p.122).

The highlighting of these distinctive embodiment processes and the misrecognition of these bodily dispositions as signifiers of superior moral worth, not alone reveals further advantages that an elite education bequeaths, but also calls attention to the seemingly
benign elements of this education, that receives little or no recognition, but which have the potential to significantly contribute to social advantage and inequality. In doing so, this thesis reveals how ‘the management and development of the body is central in its own right to the production of cultural and economic capital and the attainment and maintenance of status” (Shilling 1992, p.3). As a result, this thesis “allows us to recognise the creation, sustenance and degeneration of social relationships as an inescapably corporeal process, and to highlight the significance of the embodiment of education” (Shilling 2004, p. xvii).

9.3 Limitations of the research

As in all research, there were limitations to this study. Fortunately, however, the limitation that had the most potential to impact on the quality of this research was identified and resolved at an early enough stage during the research process not to have had a lasting effect on the quality of the research. This issue was not related to issues with the methods employed, but was related to my own capacities and blank spots as an ethnographer. As I previously detailed in the methodology chapter, I initially struggled to embrace a fully reflexive approach, an issue that I believe had the greatest potential to limit this research. This challenge with assuming and maintaining a thoroughly reflexive approach was the result of my discomfort with heeding my own biography and my internal dialogue, the acknowledgement of which, I feared would prioritise my voice over that of my participants. However after being made aware of this disconnect in my writing by my supervisory team, I immediately undertook measures to rectify this issue. As I had previously stated, my good fortune in having maintained a lifelong habit
of journaling, meant that I had access to a constant ‘stream of consciousness’ in the numerous journals I had kept since commencing the research process. These journals allowed me a greater awareness of my connection to the research situation and hence my effects upon it. An awareness that I believed moved my research beyond a naive attempt to objectify the research encounter and towards an understanding that in social research, “the specificity and individuality of the observer are ever present and must therefore be acknowledged, explored and put to creative use” (Okely 1996b cited in Aull Davies 2008, p.8). Consequently, I am confident that these measures I undertook were successful, and these limitations did not affect the end result and the conclusions that I have drawn from the research process.

The one other issue is probably more accurately categorised as a missed opportunity rather than a limitation of the study. This issue concerned what I considered was my inability to take full advantage of the access that I was permitted by the management of the school where I conducted my fieldwork. Despite no restrictions being placed on what I observed and participated in, in the school, I was unable to take full advantage of this level of access. This was primarily due to family commitments and my residing over 100 miles away from the school, which meant I had few opportunities to observe the school community at ‘down’ times like weekends and evening time. I am confident however, that despite this missed opportunity that during the time that I did spend in the field that I succeeded in capturing an accurate and true representation of the community that I was researching.
9.4 Recommendations for future research

The research that has been undertaken for this thesis has highlighted a number of topics on which further research would be beneficial. Several areas where information is lacking were highlighted in the literature review and whilst some of these were addressed by the research in this thesis, others remain. In particular, this research highlighted how the persistent gaze ‘downwards’ in the social sciences in recent decades has resulted in a dearth of literature on elites and more specifically to quote Howard and Gaztambide-Fernandez on “studies that illuminate the internal logic in the lives of elite groups” (2010, p. 2). This dearth of literature, I would argue, has resulted in much of the practices by which elite groups produce and reproduce their elite status being misunderstood or indecipherable to most observers.

Furthermore, in light of the strong connections highlighted in chapter three between Irish elite educational institutions and the domination of high status positions, I would argue that the role elite schools play in determining who has access to power in Irish society certainly merits further investigation. With attendance at an elite school having the potential to positively impact on one’s life chances and particularly on one’s potential to reach the top of any given profession, a deeper understanding is required of the important exchange value an elite education has beyond school. These findings would be especially important in deepening our understanding of how this ‘advantage’ is operationalised, thereby enabling the transformation of their educational advantage into subsequent economic and occupational advantage.
Moreover, while I appreciate that this lack of insight into elite groups is largely due to the reticence by social scientists to ‘study up’, I would argue that the methods employed to study social class stratification has also exacerbated this issue. One of the fundamental weaknesses in the current research on social class is that due to their small number, in many of the methods employed to study social class stratification, the “distinctive elite … processes can be hidden or overlooked in attempts to describe the “larger picture” (Kingley and Lewis 1990, p.xv). For this reason, further studies employing observational and longitudinal methods such as the ethnographic methods utilised in this thesis are recommended to fill these knowledge gaps.

There are also several areas for further development, and applications for, the work undertaken in relation to the physical curriculum in this thesis and in particular in regard to the hidden elements of the physical curriculum. While the findings of this thesis focused specifically on elite educational settings, there is clearly a need for a similar methodology to be applied in other cultural settings. In calling attention to aspects of schooling that are only occasionally acknowledged and remain largely unexamined, the findings of this thesis revealed the role of the hidden physical curriculum in shaping bodies and in turn potentially shaping futures. For this reason I would argue that there is clearly a need for further in-depth research into the extent to which the social relations of power are embodied through the experiences of school and the physical curriculum in non-elite schools.
9.5 Final Comments

The aim of this thesis was to seek a greater understanding of the role of elite education in the social stratification and self-reproduction of the elite. Employing a cultural structuralist theoretical model to explain social-class-related inequalities in education, I sought to demonstrate how attendance at an elite school advantages dominant groups. In doing so, an ethnographic approach was chosen for the potential it offered to gain a true insight or ‘window’ into the life of the cultural group being investigated. I strongly believe that the value of employing this approach is evidenced in the resulting rich and nuanced accounts that emerged from this fieldwork. Its explanatory capabilities are attested to, in the resulting comprehensive analysis, where rather than merely contributing to a catalogue of cultural and social phenomena, recounting details of the day to day practices within the elite boarding school, this thesis sought to demonstrate the wider relevance of these cultural preferences. In essence, this thesis demonstrates the relevance of what others might simply dismiss as the cultural predilections of the elite. In doing so this thesis has cast light upon a range of mechanisms through which advantage is operationalised by elite groups. The unveiling of which brought to the fore, the centrality of the physical curriculum in the social construction of the elite scholar and the integral role the distinctive culture of the elite boarding school plays in the maintenance and segregation of dominant groups. Accordingly, in its elucidation of these two central themes, this thesis concludes that the systematic social differentiation in educational practices and the ‘serendipitous’ educational outcomes in elite education, cannot simply be explained away as the fortuitous result of the cultural preferences of the elite, but instead, must be understood as the result of powerful and incredibly potent
mechanisms, successfully employed by dominant groups to reproduce their social advantage.


Busby, A. (2011) “‘You’re not going to write about that are you?’:what methodological issues arise when doing ethnography in an elite political setting?’ *Sussex European Institute* [online] available: https://www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=sei-working-paper-no-125.pdf&site=266, [accessed 17th November 2013]


310


Holden, L. (2006) ‘Boarding Schools are Quickly Becoming a Thing of the Past, and There aren't too Many People Mourning their Passing, but maybe we are Failing to Recognise their Unique Benefits’ *The Irish Times*, 21st April, 11.


Kahn, S. (2011) ‘Putting Ethnographic Writing in Context’ in Lowe, C. and Zemliansky,


O'Sullivan, M. and MacPhail, A. (eds) *Young People’s Voices in Physical Education and Youth Sport*, Oxford: Taylor and Francis


322
Knowledge, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.


Tovey, H. and Share, P. (2003) *A Sociology of Ireland*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan.


Mr/Ms ________________.

Address 1
Address 2
Address 3
Date

Dear ________________,

I am writing to request your school’s participation in a study entitled ‘A sociological examination of the physical education and sporting practices within private fee-paying schools’. The main purpose of this study, which forms the basis of my PhD thesis, is to explore the inherent practices within the delivery of physical education and school sports in private fee-paying schools. This research is co-supervised by Dr. Martin Power of the Department of Sociology and Dr. Ann MacPhail of the Department of Physical Education and Sport Sciences in the University of Limerick.

The research will involve an initial pilot study in two private fee-paying secondary schools on one day per week in each of the schools over a two-month period from April 2011 to the end of May 2011. This first phase of the research will involve close observation of physical education and school sports in one class in each of the two schools that are selected during this period. Building on the information gained in this pilot study, the second phase will involve closer observation of physical education and school sports in one of the two selected schools on two days per week over a one school year period from August 2011 to September 2012. Attendance at the school will involve observing physical education classes and school sports sessions at the selected schools.
Focus groups and interviews will be conducted with certain individuals whose position, or experiences in the school appears to be significant in terms of the topic under investigation.

There is no obligation for you or your school to participate in the study. Your school’s participation in this study is entirely voluntary. If you do decide to participate there is no obligation on you or your school to complete the research. You have the freedom to end your schools participation at any time, if you so choose without prejudice. Any information gathered will be made anonymous and will be held in the strictest confidence.

If at any time you have questions about the study, I may be contacted at telephone 086 8237781. If you have any additional questions or reservations about the purpose of this research, contact Dr. Martin Power, Department of Sociology, University of Limerick, telephone 061 234721, or Dr. Ann MacPhail, Department of Physical Education and Sports Sciences, University of Limerick, Tel: 061 234155.

Thank you for your consideration of participating in this study.

Sincerely

_______________________
Student Researcher
School Principal Consent Form

Title of Project:

‘Physicality in the school day:
An examination of physical education and school sports practices’

Consent section:
I, the undersigned, declare that as principal I give my permission for our school to take part in research for this project.
I declare that I have been fully briefed on the nature of this study and our school’s role in it and have been given the opportunity to ask questions before agreeing to participate.
The nature of our schools participation has been explained to me and I have full knowledge of how the information collected will be used.
I fully understand that there is no obligation on our school to participate in this study.
I fully understand that I am free to withdraw our school’s participation at any time without having to explain or give a reason.
I understand that our school is entitled to full confidentiality in terms of our participation in the study and personal details.

____________________________________  __________________________
Signature of participant                                            Date
Please read the following information sheet in order that you will have an informed insight into the nature of the study that your school is being asked to participate in, the purpose and aims of the research, and your rights as a participant. If there is something that I have not addressed and you would like further clarification on, please feel free to contact me at the above contacts.

Title of Study:

‘Physicality in the school day: 
An examination of physical education and school sports practices’

This research seeks to explore the inherent practices within the delivery of physical education and school sports in Irish secondary schools. This research is co-supervised by Dr. Ann MacPhail of the Department of Physical Education and Sport Sciences and Dr. Martin Power of the Department of Sociology in the University of Limerick.
The impetus for this proposed study lies in the fact that there is a dearth of available information on this subject. The research will involve close observation of physical education and school sports during school term time from November 2011 to October 2012. The ethnographic techniques that will be employed for this study will include focus group and individual interviews, daily journaling, field notes, observations, and attendance at the school to observe all activities pertaining to physical education and sport within the school. Attendance at the school will involve observing physical education classes and school sports sessions at the selected school. Focus groups and interviews will be conducted with certain individuals whose position, or experiences in the school appears to be significant in terms of the topic under investigation. This may include the school principal or headteacher, teachers, coaches, parents or students.

Any information gathered will be made anonymous and will be held in the strictest confidence.

- There is no obligation for you or your school to participate in the study. If after this initial contact you do not wish to participate you are free to withdraw your school. If you do decide to participate there is no obligation on you or your school to complete the research. You have the freedom to end your schools participation at any time.

- The data will be held confidentially and destroyed by 2018.

The results of this research will form the basis of my PhD thesis and will be used in future academic publications.

You are free to contact me at any time to discuss the research and your participation. Obviously there is no pressure to be involved in this project, although any help or assistance you could provide would be very much appreciated. If you would like to participate in the study please feel free to contact me at the contact details provided on page one.
If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact

Chairperson of ULREG,

c/o Anne O'Dwyer,

University of Limerick,

Castletroy,

Limerick.

Email: Anne.ODwyer@ul.ie

Phone: 061 202672
APPENDIX 2

STUDENT INTERVIEW GUIDE

Students individual and Focus Group Questions:

• Do you think that this is a very sporty school? If you do, why do you think there is so much emphasis on the ‘physical’ here?

• Do you think the sporting and physical activity resources are good in this school?

• Which do you prefer academic class, like history or science, library, or physical activities, like sport or PE class?

• Which do you prefer sport and PE or other extracurricular activities, such as drama or debating?

• Do you think regularly participating in sport and PE is important? Why do you think so?

• Do you feel differently about PE and sport? Do you have a preference for either PE or for sport?

• Do you have a favourite sport or physical activity? Why is it your favourite?

• How many different physical activities or sports do you participate in, in Rathwood?

• What sports do you play competitively for the school?

• Do you think your attitude has changed to physical activity and sport since you have started in this school?

• Do you feel more confident of your sporting abilities? Are you pleasantly surprised or disappointed by what you have achieved in sport since you came to the school?

• Where do they feel they have improved most? Do you think there is any change in your fitness since you came to the school?

• Has your attitude changed to your physical abilities?

• Have you learned any new skills? What are they?

• Do you think that engaging in sports and physical activity enhances your self-worth, do you feel more confident or do you feel less confident?
• Are you on any other sports teams outside of the school?
• What sports clubs do you support? either locally, nationally or internationally?
• Do you watch any sport on tv?
• Do you think the teachers and staff here are interested in sport?
• Are you happy with the coaching here?
• Who is your favourite coach? or do you have a favourite coach?, Why is he/she your favourite coach?
• Does the Irish weather make it easier or more difficult to play outdoor team sports?, is it even a factor?
• Do you think your day is very long?
• Tell me about the physical activities in your primary schools
• What sports and activities did you participate in, in your primary school?
• Which of these activities do you still participate in? Do miss any of the activities that you longer participate?
• Do you keep in contact with your old classmates or old teammates?
• Was it difficult or exciting or both, when you first came to Rathwood settling in, to with the intensive school routine?
• Do you feel you are expected work harder here than students in other schools, or do you think that pupils in other school have to work harder?
• What are the most striking differences between your old school and this school?
• How does it feel to represent Rathwood College in inter-school competitions?
• Do you think your school punches above its weight in inter-school competitions?
• Do you think any of the skills you learn ‘on the field’ will help you in the future?
• Do you hope to, or have you experience in captaining teams in the school?
• Did you like leading the class in the functional movements, or would you prefer not to take charge?
• What matters most: winning, bringing home the cup or being part of a team?

• How are sporting achievements celebrated in your school house?

• Home or away games, do you have a preference?

• Is there some schools that it means more to beat in a game than others?

• Were you into team sports before you came here to Rathwood?

• Do you think that playing sports and physical activity helps or hinders your academic development?

• Does you think everyone in the school enjoy sport and physical activities?

• How do you feel about pupils that do not participate in any physical activity, or do you care at all?

• Are there some benefits to being ‘off sport’ for a week? Do you like getting the break from sports for a week?

• Do you ever feel like opting out? Do you ever hide in your dorm or disappear for a couple of hours to avoid afternoon sports?

• What purpose does games and sport serve for you, is it the opportunity to let off steam? Health benefits, fitness, weight-loss, or is mainly because its fun?

• Do you feel that you have any choice about what sports or physical activity you participate in?

• What physical activity do you participate in, outside what is timetabled? What do you do on sundays, or when you have a weekend at home or in the holidays?

• Do you feel there is a different attitude to the boys’ sports than the girls?

• Do you have a preference for a mixed or single sex PE class, would you prefer it to be just girls, or just boys?

• Are the boys or the girls more competitive?

• Is appearance and dress important on the sports field?

• How do you feel kitted out in your schools sports kit?

• What makes you proud?

• Do you miss home when you are here? How do you keep in contact with home?
• Are you still in contact with your old team mates?, weekends, holidays?

• Do you feel free to express your individuality in the school? Do you feel any pressure to look a certain way?

• What are the rules in the school on makeup and jewellery?, Do you think these rules are fair?

• Do you have any sporting heroes?

• Have you a female/male role model

• What is your favourite thing about your school?

• What is the best part of your school day?

• How do you relax?