School and identity construction among working-class girls in a context of linguistic and cultural diversity in Barcelona[1]

Maribel Ponferrada-Arteaga
maribel.ponferrada@uab.es

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Abstract

This paper presents the results of a research project into school experiences conducted among Catalan youths from a working-class background and of minority status in Barcelona, in a complex multilingual situation. The aim of the project was to reveal and reconstruct the representations and practices of the teaching staff in relation to gender, social class and ethnicity through a variety of disciplinary methods and academic devices which limit and control the way students can express their diversity.

The results show how the young people studied conform part of their social, gender and ethnic identity through their experiences at school, through their daily dealings with the school's communications and practices as well as through their interactions within their peer groups on a prestige scale, which was created by the institution itself. Traditional values and patterns of Catalan and Spanish society are still dominant: heterosexuality as the only and exclusive possibility of sexual identity, higher prestige of masculinity, invisibility of femininity in general and of women in particular, almost complete ignorance or attention to the cultural expressions of young people of different ethnic and linguistic origins.

As a result of these experiences, for young people belonging to the mainstream culture the path to academic success is marked by invisibility of gender and class. In the case of young people of immigrant and minority status their academic experience is dominated by social isolation from their peers and an academic labelling associated with challenge, temporality or exception. However, the experiences and strategies of female students are significantly specific, as the paper will show.

Keywords: gender, streaming, school practices, class, diversity, identity, ethnography

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Education, gender and ethinicity

The school experiences of working-class and minority girls have traditionally been the focus of very little study in comparison with that of males of similar origins (Safia Mirza, 1992), although in addition to this there is also a lack of studies or research into adolescents and young people in general (Delamont, 2001; Acker, 1995). Feminism and gender studies have analysed the differentiated experiences of women and girls at school and their incidence on gender identities (Arnot & Weiner, 1987; Delamont, 1980). Some girls develop what are apparently quiet identities at school so as not to be labelled as non-academic and to be successful at school (Stanley,1995 [1986]), or develop strategies of sexual harassment in order to defend themselves against unequal gender relations (Dubberley, 1995 [1988]).

Therefore, for young girls, and especially working-class girls, academic achievement could suppose a dual class and gender socialisation that implies shedding class-related cultural content and concealing sexuality and femininity (Payne, 1993). So, for working-class girls, school involves a dual class and gender acculturation, which in the case of young girls from minority groups in lower social classes implies even more complex dynamics, such as young black girls that are classed by white teachers as "those screaming black girls" because they do not assume the passive role that schools demand of young ladies (Dale Spender, 1993: 189). These girls from minority groups develop strategies in which they express the fact that they are not comfortable with this passive role although without going to punishable limits by keeping "within the bounds of tolerable behaviour" (Evans, 1993: 226). Adolescent girls experience specifically sexist situations at school that affect their level of educational success, because the way their female classmates insult them about their sexual reputations causes girls to exclusively focus their sexuality on engagement and marriage, thus contributing to the way males control academic resources (Lees, 1987). School not only transmits traditional gender models, but also contributes to the reproduction of the unique and particular patriarchal model of sexual identity: exclusive heterosexuality that is homophobic and imbued with misogyny and subordination of the feminine (Mac an Ghaill, 1994) that has a negative affect on the identities of female pupils and homosexual male pupils.

The Spanish and Catalan school continues to transmit sexism and gender stereotypes despite the changes, which although not appearing to cause academic failure, do affect the identity of young girls. The Spanish and Catalan women have higher levels of unemployment than men, take less responsible jobs, suffer more job insecurity, and at the same time, continue being the adults that are responsible (in all social classes) for the care of ancestors and descendants, and for domestic work. Combining public and private work has become a difficult challenge for Spanish women, the result of which being that Catalonia has the lowest fecundity rate in Europe due the difficulties of combining professional life with motherhood. In this context, in which the school, despite still not being fully co-educative, is seen by many young Spanish and Catalan girls as one of the few spheres of relative equality in comparison with the social and family environment, we are interested in finding out how school affects the identity of girls of different origins, especially in working-class environments.

In Catalonia, Subirats and Brullet's research (1995) claimed that more progressive and secular schools are those that pay the least attention to girls, and are the ones where traditionally male characteristics are most valued, contributing to the greater insecurity of girls (Subirats and Brullet, 1988: 146) when their school experiences told them that it was males who received

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the most teacher attention and masculinity was what was most valued at school[2]. Also at spanish infant education level, woman teachers continue to unconsciously transmit and reinforce sexist stereotypes through their educational practices and discourse and their interactions with boys and girls (Arenas, 1996). Schools in Spain still appear to be sexist but this does not appear to affect school results obtained by girls, who suffer academic failure to a lesser extent than males. Girls from humble social environments, as well as adapting better than males to the criteria of academic excellence, feel that they are treated more equally at school than in their families or in society at large (Gómez-Bueno et al., 2002). In what remains a discriminatory social system, school "provides the most important experience of equality that a woman can get in our social system these days" (Fernández-Enguita, 1990: 130).

The anthropology of education has studied the relationship between identity and school among girls from minority groups. In the case of young North American girls of Sikh origin, success at school and the high educational aspirations of young girls from racial minorities even contradict stereotypes and low expectations (Gibson, 1988), making their ethic identity compatible with educational demands in a process of acculturation without assimilation. Another of the studies of the different forms of adaptation of minorities at school, that carried out by Davidson (1996), illustrates the capacity of the school institution for making young males and females from minority groups perceive their ethnic and academic identities as compatible. Based on Ogbu's model of the schooling of voluntary and involuntary minorities, Davidson asks whether the school can change the meaning that minority youths attribute to education for it to have a positive affect on those that manifest academic rejection as an element of their own ethnic identity[3].

The school also affects the identity of young working-class girls of different origins, who identify themselves with it in terms of their future employment projects, seeing it as an instrument for becoming independent and autonomous in their gender relations and in society as a whole (Raissiguier, 1994). The school is thus configured by these young girls as an instrument that offers a certain liberating effect (Raissiguier, 1994), in which working-class girls from minority and autochthonous groups have the same educational and careers aspirations (Roux, 1991), but at the same time as a space full of contradictions, in which they can break free from domestic family work but at the same time are limited by discourses that regulate their sexuality and differentiated paths between the academic and professional worlds (Adely, 2004). In Great Britain, a study by Safia Mirza (1992) tells us how ethnic inequalities are reproduced despite the good school results and high educational and professional aspirations of young British girls of African-Caribbean origin who, in contrast to the stereotyped image of the black woman in Great Britain, have assumed, like their mothers, a femininity in which work is the priority and compatible with motherhood. Like Jordanian girls (Adely, 2004), French girls of Maghrib origin (Roux, 1991) and working-class French girls of different origins (Raissiguier, 1994), young Spanish gypsy girls also see the school as

[2] Research in Canada has observed the subordination and invisibility that girls experience in school and how these affect their low self-esteem and the way they see themselves. Girls perceive that they are more invisible to the eyes of the teachers (who take longer to learn their names, for example), and faced by the attacks of boys they develop such strategies are ridiculing them. Baudoux and Noircent (1995) Culture mixte des classes et stratégies des filles. Revue Française de Pédagogie. No. 110. 5-15.

[3] Other research into black minorities has provided evidence of how they reject school due to an understanding that school culture is white and that by being successful at school they are betraying their ethnic origins, a behaviour they call "Acting white" (Fordham, 1996).

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a weapon for changing the changing the social constraints on their lives, as they perceive that "the school system (despite all of its limitations) is the best springboard for attempting to improve life's opportunities and avoid or mitigate class, ethnic and gender subordination" (Abajo and Carrasco, 2004). So, girls from minority groups, like those of working class, exploit school to construct their own social integration projects, negotiating their way between their own and their families' aspirations (Grup Elima, 2001), perceiving study as an instrument for personal and collective promotion (Teres, 2004).

Finally, studies of **the cultures and micro-cultures of working-class femininity** (McRobbie, 1991; Wulff, 1988; Fonseca, 2002) provide us with a valuable perspective of how to deal with juvenile female identities and their relationship with the dynamics developed in the school environment. The culture of femininity that idealises heterosexual relations through the concept of romantic love, and that girls recreate in teenage magazines contributes to working-class girls' unresisting acceptance of access to such oppressive institutions as matrimony and motherhood (McRobbie, 1991). More recently, other female authors that have focused on the school experiences of working-class girls (Fonseca, 2002) have detected how the compulsive heterosexuality of patriarchal relationships continues to be taken in by these girls through the idealisation of romantic love, also on the basis of their relationships at school. The same working-class female cultures guide girls towards biological and sociological reproduction, but at the same time, provide girls with a certain self-realisation through cultural creation involving their own bodies: make-up, clothes, hairstyles, which girls use to achieve positive experiences where their voices are silenced and when they are the objects of unequal gender relationships, in the same way that Willis' young anti-school males used teenage clothes and fashion to confront school authority and gain dominance over conformist young males (Willis, 1977).

Among young working-class females in urban environments the consumption of youth fashion is used in processes of identity construction, and for girls in minority groups, said consumption is a way of getting closer to racial equality in a racist and xenophobic society, and at the same time a way of creating their own gender identities (Wulff, 1995). Consumption is used to culturally construct their bodies and public appearance through the manipulation of clothing, make-up and hairstyles, connecting their corporeal nature to their own aesthetic meanings, feeling that they are getting nearer to ethnic equality, even more so in the case of black and white teenagers in British working-class neighbourhoods that lived immersed in racism despite having been socialised together. These girls have learned to live together through the creation of a multicultural society based on adolescent femininity, the only thing that connects them to ethnic equality. Meyenn (1980 in Delamont, 1980) found groups of female friends that were differentiated through clothing and their relationships in school, but none gave any suggestion of disruptive or anti-school behaviours. All of these characteristics and experiences were transferred to the school environment and their relationships.

On the basis of these theoretical considerations of the school and the identity of young working-class and minority girls, we can ask the following questions:

- What does going through school mean to working-class and minority girls in contrast to what it means to boys?

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- What are the most important elements of educational practices and discourses that have an effect on their school experience?
- What is the interrelationship between educational practices and discourse and the academic identities of one group and the other?
- How do peer relationships and those between teachers and pupils intervene in the formation of identities and their impact on later lives?
- What specific experiences do girls have and what are their strategies in this respect?

The following sections present some of the main results obtained in the ethnographic research I carried out in a state secondary school and its environs for my doctorate thesis, investigating the social and gender identities of working-class boys and girls in contexts of cultural and linguistic diversity.

Setting the research: a school and a city in the periphery

The case study was based on an ethnography of a state secondary school (12-16 years) that monitored young boys and girls (who at the start of the research were aged between 13 and 14 years), over two academic years (2001-02 and 2002-03) of three school groups in the same third year of ESO (*Educación Secundaria Obligatoria* – Compulsory Secondary Education), paying special attention to girls of both autochthonous and foreign origin. This ethnography was based on the observation of interactions between pupils and between pupils and teachers in everyday school life: classes, break times, excursions, arrivals and departures. In-depth interviews were held with teachers and specialists (psychologists, directors) at the school, along with informal conversations with the children, the application of a questionnaire to 80 pupils in the three class-groups and group interviews with female friendship and affinity groups. We focused most intensely on the experiences of girls of different origins, their experiences, personal histories and visions of the future, which are largely invisible in educational sociology and anthropology.

Catalonia has been configured as a preferred destination for non-European community migration. These new immigrants are mainly settling down in urban environments in low-cost buildings near big urban areas, like Barcelona, the same locations that had been the traditional destinations of internal rural-urban migrations and from the rest of Spain to Catalonia, and which mainly added to the Catalan working-class. At the same time, the linguistic environment in Catalonia is as follows: Catalonia is currently a territory with political autonomy within the State of Spain, and has its own language, Catalan, a minoritised language during the Franco dictatorship and in social decline despite the protection conferred upon it by public authorities. Catalan is currently the common language of administration and is the language in which most subjects are taught at school, but it is not chosen as the social language by many young people of Spanish immigrant origin. This can be added to the fact that there is a tendency to construct ethnic affiliations on the basis of the family language (Catalan or Spanish), which are eventually reproduced at school. To this multilingual panorama we can add the linguistic usages of non-European Community immigrants, who learn Catalan as a formal language and Spanish as a language to be spoken between peers. School is thus converted into an arena for reproducing two ethnic and mutually exclusive dynamics: that of being foreign/autochthonous that reproduces being in/out and that of Catalan-ness/Spanish-ness, as other ethnographic studies in Catalonia have also noted (Serra, 2004).

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The city where the school is located is Sta. Coloma de Gramenet, a typical city (pop. 177.000) of the metropolitan fringe of Barcelona (Catalonia-Spain) with a traditionally working-class population coming from different migratory phases. The city grew during the years from 1950-70 as a result of internal rural-urban migratory flows from elsewhere in Spain and now continues to be a destination for non-EU immigrant populations, mainly natives of Morocco, followed by those of China and, to a much lesser extent, those of Ecuador .Both the Spanish and international migrant populations could be described as having low academic levels and taking lowly qualified jobs. Its configuration as an outlying, residential city with few services, with a high population density and at the same time the militant political traditions of its population in left-wing movements outline its history of forming part of Barcelona's "red belt", being a peripheral city of low social prestige, although progressively improving.

Teachers' representations and practices: class and ethnicity

The school is in one of the peripheral neighbourhoods of the city, what we could define as "the periphery of the periphery". The school's pupils are mainly the working-class children of second or third generation Spanish immigrants, Spanish speaking, while 19% of the pupils are of foreign (Moroccan, Ecuadorian or Chinese) origin, mainly concentrated in the early academic years, with different levels of knowledge of the school system and the languages used at school.

In the context of a population of low socio-economic standing, this school was considered since it was opened in the 1970s as "successful school" in a working-class neighbourhood, imagined by the teaching staff to be "an island" in surroundings interpreted and imagined as being deprived, which obtained academic achievements "despite" the socio-economic and educational level of the families. The staff and specialists' discourse, interpreted in terms of social class, refers to a vision of the neighbourhood as poor, problematic and in deficit, where the fathers "work a lot of hours" and the mothers are "depressive", where the pupils are seen as "malleable" and "emotional". Most of the teachers and other school staff continue believing today that the young people live in a socially underprivileged environment, where they are not encouraged by their parents to continue studying, and even where they feel better at school than they do elsewhere in the neighbourhood. However, most of the children in our study trust their families and feel that they support them more than the school does. They themselves have high and medium academic and careers expectations and believe that their families do too. The class issues mentioned by teachers also arise among the pupils, and although they are not as aware of them, they do have a certain perception of the differences in socio-economic level between some of the teachers and the pupils or even between the pupils themselves, who distinguish between "posh" and normal people, or class the teachers, who they perceive as different to them, as being "posh".

In relation to the presence of immigrant families in the neighbourhood, the school is perceived as a privileged administrative instrument for meeting immigrant families and as a space for eliminating tensions between the different majority and minority communities. Both teachers and staff feel that the outside, the community, is much more racist than the school itself. But the arrival of non-European Union immigrant pupils from poor countries and the School Reform (LOGSE), which has extended the school age to 16 years, has worsened the perception that teachers had of the school's pupils, both of autochthonous and foreign ones: as now "we get all sorts". This perception has encouraged and justified segregating practices before the arrival of foreign pupils, under the objective of achieving academic success for "at

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least" one group of pupils. Pupils have been separated by performance level into class-groups of different levels of curricular development and even with different teachers for some subjects, guided towards different types of studies and careers opportunities. The school has created a "discriminatory school order" (Payet, 1997) in which there is a greater presence of foreign pupils in medium and low-level groups, even though many of them were taught at primary school and know Catalan as well as they do Spanish. The group labelled "low" or, in their tutor's words, "because they can't do any better", is where pupils with cognitive or learning problems are taught, those with "special educational needs", which is also separated from the "medium" and "high" groups. A structure is therefore produced that is hierarchical in terms of prestige that places most young male and female immigrants outside of the academically prestigious groups and closer to the pupils perceived as academically and psychologically "deficient".

There is, however, an apparent egalitarian discourse in ethnic terms. The use of such terms as "welcome classes" or "new arrivals" seeks to avoid making being foreign or immigrant appear negative. All professional agents avoid the use of the word "immigrant" and the term is not even used to refer to the origins of their families. Neither are the terms "foreign" or "of foreign origin" used. The term "new arrival" is used to refer to foreign pupils that have not come up from primary school, associating a provisional state to foreign pupils, and making other young foreign males and females invisible. However, behind an egalitarian discourse that disguises and dissimulates inequalities, there is a concealed perception that foreign pupils contribute to the drop in the academic level and prestige of the school. Specialists in the care of foreign pupils and the *Departament de Diversitat* constantly negotiate with teachers for the entry of such pupils in ordinary classes, as some teachers show resistance to these young people entering ordinary classes on the backing of such excuses as: "It's not done right, they should not be in normal classes" or "there are no specific materials". Finally, as school results are not analysed by ethnic origin inequalities are made invisible, as well as differences in the academic careers (success and failure) of these boys and girls.

Teachers, who do not officially have the nationality or birthplace of their pupils, do not speak openly of the origins of their pupils under the premise that they consider them all equal, but some teachers make sarcastic comments about the presence of pupils of foreign origin: "no, well there's certainly diversity". The only ones that seem to be in a legitimate position to give their opinion about the school careers of children of foreign origin are "specialists": the EAP psychologist, or the teacher in charge of care for diversity. There is therefore a desire not to generalise by collectives or use stereotypes, and one of the most recurrent expressions in interviews with the remedial teachers and psychopedagogist in the conversations was "there's a bit everything".

The fact that Spanish speaking Latin American pupils are put in ordinary classes from day one helps them to be considered just one more pupil and for them to feel integrated in school life. But despite the good intentions of the teachers specialised in "diversity" and their ongoing work with foreign pupils, thought has not been given to study programmes with the majority pupils that could affect the positive acceptance of foreign pupils, who do not tend to be integrated in groups of autochthonous schoolmates, and are often the victims of insults and jokes that cause an experience of academic detachment. These aggressions contribute to a process of ethnogenesis in which pupils of foreign origin end up being mainly identified as "foreign" even though the school speaks of equality. They feel they share a common experience of social exclusion that creates interethnic ties of solidarity. Racist comments made by some "autochthonous" pupils, "this school is full of moors and gipsies", also

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contribute to a climate of mutual social ignorance that is reflected in the poor relations between pupils of different origins.

The other emerging element is the relative identification with Catalan-ness in ethnic terms. Although most of the teachers are descendants, like their pupils, of Spanish immigrants, they use, in accordance with educational legislation, Catalan as the classroom language (although with a certain degree of flexibility) and in their interactions with other teachers. However, most of the pupils only use Catalan on very few occasions either in relationships with peers or in their oral contributions in class. Only schoolwork and examinations are written in Catalan. However, the language used socially (if not in the working environment) by the second and third generation children of Spanish immigrants in Catalonia continues to mainly be Spanish, and it is also the language chosen for forming relationships with people of foreign origin. Catalan is considered the language for academic work and social prestige while Spanish is used in the family, between peers and even in academic resistance, as some young people that speak Catalan to their teachers are insulted by their peers using the term "*catalufo*".

In this sense, although the school has started to recognise the linguistic diversity of the pupils of foreign origin, they do not legitimise or recognise the value of the schoolchildren's family language, Spanish. It must be considered that in the wider context of Catalan society, the Catalan identity has been identified with the Catalan language, which has led to the idea that the Spanish language corresponds to a Spanish identity, although there are young people that speak Spanish and were born in Catalonia and who mostly, despite not speaking Catalan in class, feel Catalan. This is an exclusive identification that leads some young girls, like Sara, a girl in third year C, born in Catalonia to a mother and father born in Andalusia to say "I don't want to be Catalan".

The school, in search of academic prestige, demands constant control and discipline, the excuse being the objective of achieving success at school. Thus, control and vigilance of time and space is produced both in and out of class, typified by the constant demand for punctuality, the continuous presentation of justification notes, and forbidding children to be inside or outside of the school buildings at certain times. Control of absenteeism is presented to families as an indicator of quality. This control is assimilated by most children and the most resistant pupils are rapidly expelled from the school, but a series of strategies is developed at the same time that are focused on avoiding conflict and verbal confrontation with teachers: some boys and girls escape from the school under the fence, lie and forge signatures, act cheekily or beg and smile a lot to get want they want. There are ongoing negotiations and the consequences of these are the acceptance without criticism of disciplinary rules and demands, subordination, and infantile behaviour in order to not seem dangerous in the eyes of the teachers. However, there is no evaluation of the quality of the work the teachers do, whose daily attendance is controlled.

The constant use of written warnings, called "*partes*", creates a disciplinary system without the possibility for dialogue that is also used to maintain control and order in the classroom. The indiscriminate use of the "*parte*" causes the most frequently cautioned children to reject school education and detach themselves from the academic environment. Girls even perceive that male teachers sanction their conversations and any help they give each other, something they find "unfair". Thus, excellence and academic achievement are associated to silencing strategies and non-participation. If pupils want to be evaluated well they should be quiet and participate "just enough", not making themselves visible and not challenging school rules. The consequences in terms of identity also include plenty of respect for hierarchies, rules,

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regulations, and silence as well as academic aspects. These disciplinary requirements include the prohibition of teenage expressions – the use of mp3, portable CDs and mobile phones is forbidden. This control, although not appearing in a regulated way in school rules, is also exercised by some members of the teaching staff in relation to outward appearance. Teachers tend to make critical comments about their pupils' clothes, make-up and hairstyles. Class and gender controls and regulations are applied to girls that wear tight clothing, wear make-up or speak loudly, who are labelled by some teachers as "*verduleras*", meaning greengrocer, and used as a term used to describe tacky or vulgar women. So, the appearance of these girls is associated to a non-academic identity and this affects the vision that teachers have of them, as we shall see later.

Being a girl in a high school

The visibility of girls' bodies and sexuality is also criticised, as some of the girls that make sexual comments to male classmates (when all they are often doing is responding to the sexual pressure exerted by the boys) are seen as excessive, "lionesses" and aggressive. The only normally tolerated sexual visibility refers to heterosexual partnerships and the promotion of romanticism, in other words, when girls have "boyfriends" at school. The strategies girls use to make themselves visible involve revealing the body, wearing flashy clothes and colours or publicly displaying their heterosexuality. The only possibility for appearing academic is to be quiet and discrete, and if sexuality is going to made public, to make sure it is "heterosexual". However, "invisible" girls, who dress discretely and do not make themselves visible in class, are seen as academic and have a better chance of achieving academic success. Girls that do not respond to this heterosexual model are seen as "lost" and out of place, which ultimately has an effect on their own emotional states.

Apparently, for most teachers and the school directors the **gender** question does not exist, and if it does, it is irrelevant. Their intentions are to educate boys and girls equally, they do not believe that one or other gender has different experiences in the school environment. There is no awareness of gender differences that do, however, exist both in official curricula and in the hidden curriculum. It is thought that a desire to educate equally is enough to educate equally, thus, involuntarily, concealing invisibilities, discriminations or absences of empowerment for girls, or for boys that do not feel comfortable with traditional masculinity.

In general, invisibility of the feminine and of women is detected in the school, although figures indicate that most of the teachers and pupils are female. When we asked a female fourth year teacher if there were more boys or girls in her class, she replied boys. When she counted her pupils to check the numbers she was surprised to find that most of them were actually girls and she had not even noticed. She answered "of course, as they [the boys] get noticed more".

As for the gender models that teachers feel are correct and incorrect, it is considered abnormal for girls to sexually harass boys but not the other way round. The girls can express their sexuality romantically but cannot harass the boys, while the boys can sexually molest the girls and practically get away with it.

What is positive in terms of gender models is the fact that these male and female teachers now consider it quite normal for women to have qualifications, training and a career, and this is transmitted in school life. Academic demands are applied both to girls and boys, and girls perceive this concern for their studies when tutors speak to their families. School and

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professional credits also play a role in the girls' identities, as all boys and girls do these credits, through which they define their working futures. In this sense, all intend to do paid work, and even girls that fail to pass ESO do not give up on that idea, even if it means precarious or badly paid jobs. Work is, for these girls, as for the boys, their priority identification.

However, some moments of the daily school routine do not favour girls, but rather make them invisible. In class, boys, be they the more academic or the more resistant ones, interrupt the girls and make them invisible, as male interventions are more frequent and require more of the teachers' attention. At break time the largest play areas have football goalposts or basketball nets, meaning the boys control these spaces with their games, while girls (and boys that do not want to play these sports) are pushed aside. At break time, girls hardly ever try to join in with the boys' games. The directors and teachers are well aware of this gender gap at playtime, but see no remedy for something that is natural at that age: the boys play football and the girls gather at one side or other of the playground, and as break time is considered the pupils' free time, no kind of intervention is made to control this. As the school has no other public "place" where the boys and girls can meet informally, this area becomes even more important in making boys and girls visible.

The school does not have deliberately mixed extra-curricular activities (there is only football) and even less so that are aimed only at girls and at improving self-esteem and empowerment. The girls even complain that they are not allowed to have their own girl's football team. If we consider also that in life outside of school it is the girls that do the fewer activities, their school lives become even more relevant. Perhaps that is why they put more emphasis than the boys do on the social relationships formed at school, because their social lives depend entirely upon them. It is only during physical education class that the girls feel more legitimised to take part in "male" games like these, although they are not always allowed to enter as equals. Neither does the school organise out of class activities that could be of interest to girls and boys that are not interested in football or computers, such as music, theatre, video, painting, dancing, literature, etc. Despite this, also divergent femininities seek to become visible in these teams: if that is all there is to do, we will do it.

When the staff speak of the ideal school pupil, what they are really talking of is a white, autochthonous male. According to the headmistress, the boy who does well in his studies has a "certain profile". The "boy who passes everything" she says, can even be detected physically, because he is tall, dark, "you'll see him in the playground"[4]. This is relevant, because the model of the ideal male pupil has been constructed, who can even be identified by his physical appearance and against whom the others are measured, which helps explain the logic of pressures and censures that teachers apply to attempt to adjust the profiles that diverge from this model of a tall, dark boy, through the censure and criticism of hairstyles and clothing that are related to more alternative identities that are not imbued as academic. Girls can never be adjusted to this profile, whatever they do, so it is a lot more difficult for them to be seen as "ideal pupils".

Contradictions also arise in the teachers' discourses regarding the perception of young girls that illustrate how different stereotypes of the "little woman" and the "supposed maturity of girls" are combined. Some say that they are "more mature" and others that they are "very girlie", so they never seem to be at the right moment. Generally, there are no conversations among teachers about the lives of boys and girls in terms of their gender, and the matter of

[4] I evidently did not see boys in the playground that could be identified in this way, to my eyes there were brown-haired, black-haired, white, well-built, thin and more or less all kinds of boys.

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domestic chores or unequal gender relationships in families are only mentioned when speaking of girls of Gypsy origin or a girl of Moroccan origin, although there are also Spanish girls in the same class-groups that do domestic chores and take care of their younger brothers, sisters, nephews and nieces. In other words, gender has disappeared from the agenda of school concerns because it is assumed that boys and girls are treated equally. However, most of the children that go to the psychologist are girls, especially in third year ESO. The argument this professional puts forward as an explanation is that girls "mature earlier" and therefore have a higher number of emotional problems, including diagnoses of anorexia and in some cases the consumption of certain substances: pills and joints.

Pressure in terms of girls' bodies exists both in and outside of the school, where some girls feel evaluated by their male schoolmates, and where the greatest social prestige in the centre is achieved by the more attractive girls, given the few options there are for girls in the city and in the school itself, they exercise their creativity, self-esteem and feel valued in other ways and for other capacities. Many of them do not eat breakfast and are ashamed of their bodies, missing out on out of school activities in which they have to wear a swimming costume.

The teachers' academic expectations were moderately differentiated by gender, generally favourable to boys, whose names top the lists of those for whom the teachers have the greatest expectations. Girls are seen as good students, but not "great" or "very intelligent" ones. One of the female tutors of the third year group classed as "high" thought that boys got the best results, and one of the male teachers said that non-conformist girls had appeared on the school scene since the extension of secondary education:

> "you could speak of hopeless boys and some brilliant boys and the girls were in between", but now that things had changed there were just as many hopeless boys as girls and moreover, no brilliant boys that stood out from the girls as "there are good girls as well".
>
> "The best pupils are usually girls; keen to get good marks, well organised for doing homework; disciplined, willing, in short: it is not about people with high IQs, or creative or ingenious pupils, but academically good ones"

Girls' positions and negotiations in the school

The structure of academic prestige and the lack of it affected relationships between peers, in their social and academic strategies. The "medium" group featured most foreign girls, who started to become the targets of attacks by some Spanish girls. This hostility, tolerated by some girls in order to achieve academic success, led the girls of Latin American origin to generally reject school, which ultimately led to academic failure. In the low level group, most young foreigners were males. The girls that became the targets of the hostility of the more academically resistant males was a small group of Spanish girls, while the only foreign girls (one Moroccan and one Chinese) were isolated from any dynamic of social relationships. In the high level group, of 30 pupils, there was just one Chinese boy and one Moroccan girl who had practically no social relationships with their classmates. The case of the Moroccan boy was that of a secondary school experience mainly characterised by isolation and solitude. The only foreign girls that had any friendly relationships with any Spanish girls, those of the least social popularity, were three Latin American girls. The experience of these three girls was one of a continuous struggle to be more socially successful than their peers, but whatever they did they were never accepted by the most popular groups of girls in the school.

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However, the girls were not inactive either in class or at break time, although that may seem to have been the case because they did not play football or basketball. Most of them sat talking on a bench or walked around the areas that were not taken up by football pitches. This period when they were talking, having breakfast, laughing, arguing or talking to the boys that weren't playing sport is when most work on cultural construction took place, as indicated by Wulff (1988). Some boys, the older ones, would also spend time talking to some of the girls, and the other groups of girls would go to different places to speak.

Even the foreign girls led visibility dynamics, especially the Latin American girls, whose strategy for integration at school mainly meant being socially accepted by more 'popular' groups of girls. Once, I saw how a group of young third years, led by a girl from Bolivia, asked for a ball to play volleyball, and after several negotiations because the teachers could not find the only ball left over by the boys, they got their own ball and played a game in the playground. Another of the girls, who studied *Bachillerato* (post-compulsory education) and played in the girls football team and also played football out of school, complained that the teachers showed little concern for the girls that trained and played football, while it did not seem to her that it was the same for the boys. This girl also said that the teachers continually advised her to stop playing football and to concentrate only on her studies. During the year, she got injured playing football, and when she asked for her exams to be changed, it was a female teacher who was the only one not to let her. This same girl spoke of the role of women and sport: “Things aren't like they were before, like in Barbie’s times, those girls that don't do anything, that are just seen and that's all”. Meanwhile, one of the third year boys trained with and played for a local football team and his female tutor always mentioned this as a major merit, an added responsibility, but never as something that could have a negative effect on his academic performance.

The girls do find their legitimate moments for making themselves visible, especially when the school organises cultural activities as part of the Christmas celebrations or at the end of term. At these festivals, choreography or poetry competitions are held, and the pupils that stand out are the girls, both among the audience and among those that appear onstage. During the Christmas celebrations, the groups that displayed their choreographies and dances were girls, and the audience that cheered them on from around the stage was also made up mainly of girls. During the Sant Jordi festival, the bookstall was run by a group of third year A girls, and during the awards ceremony for the best poems, once again it was the girls who collected most of the prizes.

In class, although the teachers generally treat boys and girls equally, dynamics occur that can cause their school experience to be gender differentiated. During observed third year C classes, in the ‘high’ level group, one of the more academic boys would always whisper the answers to the questions asked by the teachers, and when any girl was asked something by the teacher, there was always a boy that would interrupt. There were even moments when the teacher had to repeatedly tell the boys not to answer for the girls and to give them the chance to speak. When these dynamics of male visibility occurred or when the teacher unintentionally asked more questions to the boys, the girls started employing strategies to increase their visibility: they started asking about the subject, or said that they wanted to go up to the blackboard, threw pieces of paper at the teacher or made some kind of loud comment either about the class or about personal matters.

In informal chats with the girls, certain questions also arose about their relationships with male teachers. In general, they did not tolerate classes with strict male teachers or those that systematically exerted their authority, and rebelled much more quickly against these than

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against authoritarian women. Female teachers generally managed to maintain a good classroom atmosphere and did not have any more problems with authority than men, although the headmistress was concerned that "female teachers have to win respect while male teachers have already got it won". The girls and boys answered questions about the quality of their teachers and their methods for exerting authority, and if there were any gender differences it was in the relationships that girls had with male teachers, whose exertions of authority they tolerated less. There were none of these problems of resistance with female teachers that gave cause for any complicity with them and expressed their expectations and concerns with respect to their academic futures, even when they did exert their authority and discipline.

In third year C, the tutor was a woman that expressed her concern when things did not go well for the girls, who would phone their parents, and who would encourage them to make more effort, whatever their origins, their behaviours or their gender models. The girls would give her presents on her birthday and described her as "the best teacher we have ever had". No associations were made between what the girls looked like and their academic behaviour, and she spoke just as positively about those who were elegantly dressed and made up as those who were not. She told them that they could look pretty and well dressed but that that was no reason not to study. She did not consider the two strategies to be incompatible and that helped their identities as pupils to be compatible with what they understood as feminine.

Gender relationships between peers also influence the way the girls experience school, and these relationships vary depending on the group in which they are taught. In third year A, the girls' experience was of continuous harassment by the boys, a harassment that appeared in the form of insults and physical jokes (kicking, pushing...). In third year B even the boys that were not physically strong or socially prestigious only spoke about the girls, when asked, in terms of evaluations of their bodies, even though they had friendly relationships with them outside of class. In third year C, some girls complained that the boys never spoke and when they wanted to speak to them about "class stuff", they just made remarks about their bodies. In this sense, the results are similar to those found in other countries, in which working-class girls in co-ed schools are more valued in terms of their bodies than their abilities (Fonseca, 2002).

These comments made to girls about their bodies also form part of the construction of the male identity, their manliness being shown through comments about female bodies, ridiculing the homosexuality of other schoolmates, and openly expressing their heterosexual tastes.

> Virginia and Anna (Spaniards, third year C) say that the boys in their class: "don't speak, and what they do say, they screw up" and laugh. They add: "They either play football in the playground or do nothing, they don't speak, and if they speak its about the PlayStation, football or girls' tits", "when you speak to normal boys, about schoolwork and things like that, about class, normal stuff, they don't answer or they say stuff like your tits are this, that or the other, or say pull your trousers down more, your g-string's showing". They say that Alfredo sits at the back of the classroom so he can look at their knickers, that he's a very shy sort, very weird, but also the randiest. "The boys stop at nothing and in their diaries they keep cuttings of porno ads from newspapers", "they're filthy", "yes, dirty ads, pornos" "they are obsessed" and "they are always saying things to us like you've got small tits or lose some weight because you're fat". (FieldworkDiary)

Some of the Latin American girls also complained about the brutality of the relationships between peers at school and especially about the aggressiveness of the boys' behaviour: "the boys are rougher than the girls, and the girls can hit the boys, but they don't want to play football with the boys because they are so rough" says Sandra, an Argentinian girl in third

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year C (28.1.03). Another third year B girl, Gladis, from Ecuador, said this about the way they see themselves as girls and how they saw peer relationships between boys.

> Gladis tells me "you can write this down, we girls do better than the boys, we are more studious, more responsible" and another tells me, a Spanish girl (Lidía) "we are more mature", "they mature later, they spend all day playing like kids and hit each other all the time". (Field Diary)

If the girls generally complain about the way the boys are obsessed with sex and the brutality of their relationships with the girls, in conversations with the boys aspects also arise that are related with their concept of masculinity and femininity. The main subjects of conversation among boys were sport, the PlayStation and computers. When asked about the girls, these boys answered "hanging around, taking drugs" and only referring to the best known girls, precisely those that were not subordinated to the boys' criticism and evaluations because they were better known and were more socially successful than they were. The characteristic criticism of homosexuality also emerged in terms of the compulsive heterosexuality of masculinities (Mac an Ghaill, 1994) and gender gaps in the classroom.

> I asked them what girls are in their classes and they started describing where they sit: "Look, we sit like this: the boys on one side, and the girls on the other, and the fat queer next to me". I ask him why he is queer, whether that is an insult or whether it is because he is homosexual. Luis tells me its "because he speaks like this, (makes effeminate gestures) and has a nose-ring". And "because he gives my sister make-up lessons and things like that". I jokingly say to him "listen, if you were homosexual, and they called you a queer, what would you do?" They all start laughing, and he laughs, yells, and says something like "well I would have to hide myself away" (and he covers his face with his hands). He feels sick with embarrassment just thinking about it (Field Diary).

In the case of third year B, where the girls are the protagonists in daily school life, the boys avoid forming relationships with them, and when they were asked about their academic life with the girls the evaluations that emerge are again related to their bodies and sexuality.

> Tutor class. Third year B. I ask the boys in the group where I am why they haven't joined the girls to form a group and they answer that they are not mad, that they would only join up with the one they are interested in and their facial gestures suggest "sexually". They nod at one of the Spanish girls in J and A's group. They say they like another girl too and add "Maria for you and the other for me", and start arguing in a jovial way (Field Diary).

In the case of third year A, the hierarchy and subordination in gender relationships were even less subtle. Some Spanish boys verbally and physically attacked the Spanish girls in the same class, except for one who belonged to the "popular" group and defended herself against them through insults and, if needed, slaps and kicks. The foreign boys were the only ones that did not get involved with these girls or the foreign girls. These unequal and violent relationships made these girls' school lives highly disagreeable and they did not even want to come to school. In fact, although some of them passed ESO, none stayed on to study at school.

Criticism of homosexuality or the suspicion that somebody could be gay was also a subject that arose among the girls although not in such a critical way as with the boys. I myself was asked by one girl about my sexual orientation as I did not seem to fit the image of a woman that they perhaps had in their heads. At one time during my research I had very short hair and one of the girls laughingly asked me if I was a lesbian: "are you one those who 'understands'? Because you've got the same hair." The subject of lesbianism came up now and again, when speaking about a certain girl or sexual preferences, but always mockingly and sarcastically:

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"I'm bisexual: I like two boys" or if asked if they liked a certain boy they would answer "No, I'm a lesbian" (laughing).

Unconventional gender identities emerge: strong girls that shout, that want to play football, that wear revealing clothes and express their femininity, that enjoy major social success among peers, but at the same time are highly committed to their schoolwork: "we are *bachillerato* girls!". However, the school sees them as "non-academic" both because of their visible gender and class and their rebellious behaviour. The girls considered "normal" had to be discrete in their behaviour, neither too loud or too quiet, which is when they are clearly seen as more academic and when they are the object of their teachers' most positive expectations.

The impact of academic streaming on the results and expectations of boys and girls

For both girls of majority origin and those of minorities, academic success depends on the invisibility of their ethnic, class and gender traits. Girls, although not the ones to get the best academic results, were the ones who passed each year in highest proportions, meaning there was ultimately a greater number of girls that obtained qualifications. Of the children that we started studying in the third year, 54.7% of the girls, and 54% of the boys finished compulsory education. Of those pupils that passed, most came from the *bachillerato* focused high level group, along with some from the medium level group and very few from the low level group. The school hierarchy was clearly indicated in both boys' and girls' school results, with more failure among the children in the low and medium levels, precisely those where most of the boys and girls of foreign origin were placed.

Of the children that passed obligatory education, most preferred to go on to *Bachillerato*, for different reasons: it was the most prestigious option, the only one that they could carry on doing at the same school, and that way they could stay with their friends. Even the boys and girls that did not have the academic level to move on to *bachillerato* went for that option in order to stay with their friends. Some young foreigners enrolled for *bachillerato* even though their monitors advised them not to do so and despite not having many friends. In terms of origin and gender, the group with the highest pass rate was that of Spanish girls, followed by Spanish boys, then foreign boys and then girls of foreign minority origin, of whom 28.5% passed ESO compared to 67.8% of Spanish girls. At this school, the girls that had the least possibilities of achieving academic success were those of foreign origin, although they still claimed that they aspired to medium and high-level professional and academic careers.

Without exceptions in terms of origin, all of the girls were interested in finding paid work even if it did not correspond to their studies, even those girls taught in low level groups and who ultimately failed still mainly identified themselves with paid occupations. Of the girls of foreign origin, those of Latin American origin, who were the majority, had practically no language related problems and some quickly managed to access high level groups, but awareness of the hostility they themselves and their friends received, as well as their experiences of being excluded from the socially popular groups led to their gradual isolation from the school. However, the foreign boys showed a greater tendency than the Spanish towards the option of employment, while of these, only those who had a chance of passing ESO had high academic and careers aspirations, although with major insecurity and a large amount of prudence and pessimism.

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Girls with conformist and academic identities achieved more success at school than the more rebellious and socially popular girls, but both groups passed ESO. The latter gradually modified their appearance and behaviour, but very few of them managed to successfully complete the first year of *Bachillerato*. As for the "invisible" girls, their quiet, conformist identities were a factor in their school lives being highly insecure and their having low self-esteem.

The effect of group levels and the social relationships within each group also affected their professional aspirations. The foreign girls in medium groups and some of those who were in high level groups had high aspirations that implied medium and higher university studies. However, the Latin American girls' strategies for maintaining a certain social popularity and being accepted in friendship networks meant that practically all of them, even those who had obtained very good academic results, went on to leave school at different points. Despite their career aspirations, the Chinese, Bangladeshi and Moroccan girls mainly ended up leaving school, and those that passed the basic certificate ended up dropped out of post-compulsory education. The foreign boys showed a greater preference for taking vocational studies than the Spanish boys, looking to find employment quickly and this seemed a safer way than taking university courses. Even one foreign boy who opted for *bachillerato* ended up changing to vocational training because he did not think that taking a university course would guarantee him a the perfect job opportunity. The Spanish boys were those that were most indecisive about their future employment, as their options depended on their academic results. Young working-class children, boys and girls regardless of their origin, mainly choose long-term options and do not want manual or low qualified jobs. So, only academic failure would sway them towards vocational training and the option of low qualified work, and specifically for foreign girls, the experiences of low social acceptance among peers acted as an element that detached them from the school.

Conclusions

The study made makes it possible to make the following generalisations (findings) about the school experiences of girls in subordinate situations and their impact on their careers and identities:

- **Cores of gender inequality**. The hierarchical structure of the school reflects and projects the division of social inequalities in terms of gender but also certain changes. Non-public identification of working-class origins with academic success.
- **Start of recognition of ethnic backgrounds.** Legitimisation of different languages in school spaces, except Spanish. Association of Catalan with school and Spanish with resistance. Identification as non-Catalans by some boys and girls with Spanish origin.
- **Discriminatory school order**, Academic prestige in *bachillerato* that descends down the levels and is redistributed depending on how each class group is labelled. Prestige in C where there are no non-EU pupils or foreigners.
- **Gender system**. The ideal pupil is "white Spanish male". The gender system is created by the classification itself and the associated prestige. Boys reduce prestige and visibility of the girls' cultural expressions.
- **Discipline**. Heavy emphasis on discipline as a vehicle towards social peace for educational praxis, but not the result of an educational practice.
- **Resistance** to authority or evident expression of youth culture is seen as non-academic and will affect school evaluations and academic prestige.

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In the light of the theoretical contributions in the first part of this study, we could attempt to answer the questions that the research formulated in this specific empirical context.

- The school experience of working-class and minority boys and girls means adaptation to an ideal student identity in which pro-academic attitudes are identified with normative conformism and social invisibility.

- A segregating school order with different levels of academic prestige, emphasis on disciplinary control, the idea of a working class construed in terms of deficit, united to the invisibility of gender and ethnic differences, are the factors that make up the school experiences of these boys and girls.

- An apparently egalitarian discourse that conceals ethnic differences makes the school incapable of recognising inequalities and consequently it does not organise its activities in terms of the real needs of the boys and girls' ethnic, class and gender specificities.

- The legitimisation of academic and social masculinity along with the invisibility of feminism and unequal gender relationships contribute to the girls having less self-esteem. Assertive strategies against peer groups, boys and teachers generate such censure that the girls are placed in the difficult position of having to choose between a conformist academic attitude or renouncing an academic career.

- Minority boys and girls live through experiences of social isolation in high-level groups or ethnic hostility in medium and low groups that lead them to gradually detach themselves from academic goals and help reinforce inequalities.

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