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# **Risk, rakhi and romance: learning about gender and sexuality in Delhi schools**

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**Young people's experiences in three co-educational,  
English-medium secondary schools in New Delhi, India**

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A thesis submitted for the degree of  
*Doctor of Philosophy in Education*

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# **Risk, rakhi, and romance: learning about gender and sexuality in Delhi schools**

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## **Summary**

Based on multi-method research with Class 11 students (aged 15-17) and their teachers at three English-medium, co-educational secondary schools in Delhi over nine months in 2013-14, this thesis explores how young people's understandings and experiences relate to national and international understandings of gender, sexuality and education. The thesis examines the interplay between institutional practices and students' agency within schools (drawing on Connell's 2000 framework), while I use the concept of 'sexual learning' in order to consider young people's experiences both within and beyond the classroom (Thomson & Scott 1991).

Study findings indicate the influence of concerns about adolescent sexuality on school curricula and on disciplinary practices, which sought to maintain gender segregation in co-educational spaces. The thesis also reveals the ways in which narratives of girlhood and masculinities shaped young people's lives; particularly in the wake of the December 2012 gang rape case in Delhi, these gender narratives were both contradicted and reinforced by seemingly ubiquitous stories of sexual violence. Stories of sexual violence also formed a source of gendered, risk-based sexual learning, which reinforced risk-based narratives of sexuality within formal and informal sources of sexual learning accessed by young people.

The thesis also reveals heterosocial dynamics within school peer cultures as an important source of sexual learning. Students proved adept at negotiating assumptions about 'appropriate' interactions such as idealized rakhi (brother-sister) relationships, and formed less restrictive heterosocial friendships and romantic relationships. In particular, stories about peer romances emerged as an alternative source of sexual learning, which undermined dominant risk-based narratives of young people's sexuality and offered more positive understandings of pleasure and intimacy.

A key methodological contribution is the use of a narrative analytical framework in which Plummer's (1995) sexual stories are considered in terms of Andrews' (2014) political narratives. Using this framework, the thesis examines the text and context of 'small stories' told within research encounters, and the interrelations between these micro-narratives and macro-narratives of gender, sexuality and education in post-liberalization India. This framework facilitates the examination of interrelations between local experiences and national and international understandings in the thesis.

A key substantive contribution of the study is to address a lack of research on how young people learn about gender and sexuality in Indian schools. As the study largely captures the experiences of urban, middle-class young people, the thesis also contributes to the existing body of literature on middle-class experiences in post-liberalization India (e.g. Gilbertson 2014; Sancho 2012; Donner & De Neve 2011; Lukose 2009), and specifically underlines the importance of education as a site for middle-class young people's negotiation of gendered and sexual politics.

To my parents, Parvati and Vijay,  
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## Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>List of abbreviations, presentation of data sources .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Chapter One: Researching gender, sexuality and education in India .....</b>	<b>9</b>
1.1 Introduction .....	9
1.2 The 'sex education debates', 2007-2009 .....	10
1.3 India's daughter? Gender, sexuality and violence, 2012-2015 .....	13
1.4 Introducing the research .....	17
1.5 Structure of the thesis .....	21
<b>Chapter Two: Gender, sexuality, education and the nation .....</b>	<b>23</b>
2.1 Introduction .....	23
2.2 Policy context.....	23
2.3 Socio-cultural context: Post-liberalization India, 1991 to the present .....	29
2.4 Young people in post-liberalization India .....	35
2.5 Conclusions .....	42
<b>Chapter Three: Methodology .....</b>	<b>44</b>
3.1 Introduction .....	44
3.2 Conceptual framework .....	44
3.3 Researcher positionality and ethical issues .....	48
3.4 The fieldwork context: negotiating access, and introducing the schools .....	53
3.5 Research methods .....	64
3.6 Structure of following analysis chapters.....	76
<b>Chapter Four: Institutional anxieties – young people's sexuality in co-educational spaces ...</b>	<b>78</b>
4.1 Introduction .....	78
4.2 Co-education and gender neutrality? .....	79
4.3 Adolescence as a 'storm age' .....	84
4.4 The 'Reproduction' chapter: textual silences and absences.....	86
4.5 Sexual learning in the classroom .....	92
4.6 Institutionalized gender segregation .....	100
4.7 Less rigid gender boundaries .....	105
4.8 Conclusions .....	107
<b>Chapter Five: Gender narratives in the shadow of sexual violence .....</b>	<b>109</b>
5.1 Introduction .....	109
5.2 Narratives of girlhood at school.....	112
5.3 Fear and anger: girls' responses to cases of sexual violence .....	117
5.4 Narratives of masculinity at school.....	124
5.5 Protect and respect: boys' responses to cases of sexual violence.....	131
5.6 Conclusions .....	137
<b>Chapter Six: From rakhi to romance – alternative sources of sexual learning .....</b>	<b>139</b>
6.1 Introduction .....	139
6.2 Cautionary tales from media sources .....	140
6.3 Defining sex education – and Indian culture?.....	145

6.4 Rakhi relationships – institutional and student perspectives .....	150
6.5 Heterosocial friendships .....	154
6.6 Peer romances – heterosexual and caste boundaries .....	161
6.7 Peer romances – defining (and circumventing) physical ‘limits’ .....	165
6.8 Conclusions .....	171
<b>Chapter Seven: Conclusions .....</b>	<b>174</b>
7.1 Introduction .....	174
7.2 Study limitations .....	174
7.3 Key study findings; methodological and substantive contributions to knowledge .....	176
7.4 Implications for policy and practice .....	184
7.5 Concluding discussion .....	187
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>190</b>
<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>202</b>
Appendix 1: Ethical approval .....	203
Appendix 2: Information sheets and consent forms .....	217
Appendix 3: Student questionnaire .....	222
Appendix 4: Student demographics.....	239
Appendix 5: Student and teacher participants .....	244
Appendix 6: Focus group topic guides .....	245
Appendix 7: Examples of students’ ‘Be Ladylike’ and ‘Act like a Man’ brainstorm.....	248
Appendix 8: Semi-structured interview guides.....	251
Appendix 9: Participant observation schedules.....	254
Appendix 10: Example of data analysis and translation .....	261
Appendix 11: Materials used for data validation and feedback .....	262

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## List of abbreviations, presentation of data sources

### Abbreviations

AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
CBSE	Central Board of Secondary Education
CGS	Central Government School
FGD	Focus group discussion
GoI	Government of India
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
NCERT	National Centre for Educational Research and Training
OBC	Other backward caste
PT	Physical training
RIS	Ramani International School
SC/ST	Scheduled caste/scheduled tribe
SGS	State Government School
SRH	Sexual and reproductive health

### Presentation of data sources

Questionnaire responses (open-ended): ([class] [gender], [school] – [questionnaire item] response)

Student focus groups (mixed): ([school] Mixed Focus Group – [1 or 2])

Student focus groups (single sex): ([school] [Girls' / Boys'] Focus Group)

Student interviews: ([name of student], [class], [school] – interview)

Teacher focus group: ([school] Teacher Focus Group)

Teacher interviews: ([subject] [class]\* [ma'am / sir], [school] – interview)

Field notes: (Field notes, [date])

Classroom observation notes: (Classroom observations, [class], [school])

*\*Where two subject teachers participated in the research – e.g. English (11A) ma'am, English (11B) ma'am.*

### Class 11 academic streams at the three schools

#### *Central Government School*

11A	Science (Medical) stream
11B	Science (Non-medical) stream

11C Humanities stream

*Ramani International School*

11B Science (Medical) stream

11D Commerce stream

11F Humanities stream

*State Government School:*

11A Science (Medical and Non-medical) stream

11B Commerce stream

11C Humanities stream

**Translated data**

Data translated from Hindi is presented in *italics*, with significant Hindi words included in brackets. Translation occurred subsequent to data collection; a translator listened to audio recordings of focus groups and interviews, transcribed these files into Hindi (in Roman script), and translated the data into English.

**Anonymity and confidentiality**

The names of the schools and governing bodies have been changed, while all students' names have been replaced with pseudonyms (mostly chosen by the students themselves). Teachers' names have not been included.

## Chapter One: Researching gender, sexuality and education in India

### 1.1 Introduction

Sex education is against Indian culture [...] the younger generation should be taught about yoga, Indian culture and its values.

Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, 2007<sup>1</sup>

In 2007, the Government of India attempted to introduce the Adolescence Education Programme (AEP), a curriculum with a focus on HIV awareness and prevention, for all secondary school students in Classes 9-12 (aged 14-18) across the country. The AEP sparked the 'sex education debates' in India from 2007-2009, and these debates culminated in a ban on school-based sex education in twelve Indian states (Motihar 2008). The sex education debates, and the response by state-level officials (such as the Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister above), sparked my interest in researching gender and sexuality in Indian schools. I was particularly intrigued by this politician's claim to definitive knowledge of 'Indian culture' and his assertion that there was no place for 'sex education' within it. Moreover, the absence of young people's own voices within the sex education debates caused me to wonder whether the 'younger generation' themselves shared these definitions of Indian culture and sex education.

Schools, and secondary schools in particular, are widely seen as 'one of the most formative arenas' in terms of gendered, sexual and cultural politics (Nayak & Kehily 2008: 110; Lukose 2009; Alldred & David 2007; Bhattacharjee 1999; Epstein & Johnson 1998). This thesis explores young people's experiences of gender and sexuality in the context of secondary education, from their own understandings of 'Indian culture' to the ways in which they negotiated expectations of 'appropriate' gendered and (non-)sexual behaviour in schools and beyond. Findings are based on multi-method research with Class 11 students (aged 15-17) and their teachers at three English-medium, co-educational secondary schools, which was carried out in Delhi over nine months in 2013-14.

In this chapter, I explore two key contexts which framed my doctoral research; the sex education debates of the late 2000s which formed an entry point into my doctoral study, and the national and international outcry following the gang rape of a young woman in Delhi on December 2012 2012, which profoundly shaped my field research. After this, I will introduce

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<sup>1</sup> In Gentleman (2007: no page numbers).

<sup>2</sup> The committee consisted of three representatives from the then-ruling Congress party, and one

the feminist theoretical and methodological frameworks informing the study, and outline the overall structure of the thesis.

## **1.2 The 'sex education debates', 2007-2009**

The Adolescence Education Programme was developed by the Indian Department of Education, in collaboration with the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO, responsible for the Indian government's national HIV prevention work since the early 1990s – Over et al 2004), UNESCO and UNICEF in the early 2000s. The development of the AEP was consistent with NACO's recommendation in the 2002 *National AIDS Prevention and Control Policy* (NAPCP) that school-based AIDS education with a particular focus on HIV prevention strategies should be 'imparted through [a] curricular and extra-curricular approach' (GoI 2002b: 9). The *National Curriculum Framework* (2005), developed by the NCERT (National Council of Educational Research and Training), also called for age-appropriate adolescent education during this period, in order to educate young people about 'risky situations like sexually transmitted diseases, sexual abuse, HIV/AIDS and drug and substance abuse' (NCERT 2005: 16).

The *NAPCP* (2002) is the first policy in India to explicitly acknowledge young, unmarried people as a 'sexually active section' of the population (GoI 2002b: 9), and the 2005 AEP curriculum materials similarly noted that during adolescence, 'young people are beginning to discover their bodies and experiencing the beginnings of sexual attraction' (NACO et al 2005: i). However, the curriculum materials emphasized that 'education about growing up, our bodies, sex and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) does not encourage young people to have sexual intercourse' (NACO et al 2005: i). Instead, reflecting the HIV prevention focus of the curriculum, the AEP promises to help young people 'realize the consequences of sexual experimentation, and avoid early pregnancies and STIs, including HIV' (NACO et al 2005: i).

Once the AEP curriculum materials had been developed, UNFPA began working with state AIDS control organisations to train AEP facilitators and teachers in 2005. The AEP training went on for almost two years before it met with opposition; according to stakeholders who had been involved in the development of the AEP, it was 'a few teachers in some schools' (not among those selected for AEP training) who were early objectors to the 'explicit' AEP materials being brought into schools (AEP Programme Officer, UNFPA – interview).

This opposition quickly escalated into a vociferous conservative backlash, but there were also those who critiqued the AEP for not going far enough. Delhi-based NGOs such as TARSHI, CREA and Nirantar critiqued the AEP's exclusive framing of young people's sexuality in terms of vulnerability to risk, and called for rights-based, sex-positive framings within a comprehensive

sexuality education (CSE) approach. In particular, TARSHI (2008) argued that the AEP materials ‘seriously underestimate[d] the ability of young people to make decisions about their lives’ (2008: 2). Meanwhile, Nirantar noted that CSE, rather than ‘adolescence education’, would crucially frame sexuality as ‘a central aspect of being human throughout life [which] encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction’, and which is ‘experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires [and] beliefs’ (in Katyal et al 2012: 9).

However, conservative opponents who felt that the AEP curriculum went too far, rather than not far enough, proved to be louder and ultimately more influential than sex-positive feminist activists during the sex education debates. In 2007, a petition against sex education was submitted to the Rajya Sabha (the upper house of the Indian Parliament), which established a committee to examine the complaints. The committee was presided over by the former chairman of the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party, the ‘Indian People’s Party’), the main right-wing political party in India, although the ten-member committee was largely made up of representatives from centre to centre-left parties<sup>2</sup>. Over eighteen months, the committee heard arguments for and (mostly) against sex education, and carried out consultations in six major cities across India. A report of the committee’s findings and recommendations were published in 2009 (Rajya Sabha 2009).

The *135<sup>th</sup> Report of the Rajya Sabha Committee on Petitions* (2009) advocated an abstinence-only approach to sex education in schools, with abstinence framed as a particular feature of Indian culture. This is apparent in the report’s opening quotation, in which the father of the nation himself states that sex education ‘must have for its object the conquest and sublimation of the sex passion’ (Mohandas Gandhi, quoted in Rajya Sabha 2009: i). Consistent with Gandhi’s mind/body binary, several petitioners argued that ‘education which [is] used for controlling or overcoming sexual passion instead of stimulating it should be taught to adolescents’, and objected to the AEP’s supposed ‘[promotion of] sexual gratification by way of masturbation and homosexuality’ (Rajya Sabha 2009: 14). Implicit in these objections is the morally conservative argument frequently used to oppose sex education; namely, that sex education encourages young people to become sexually active (Miedema, Maxwell & Aggleton 2011). Importantly, within the Rajya Sabha Committee report, this is located within particular cultural understandings. In contrast to the ‘unbridled sexuality of the Northern Hemisphere’,

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<sup>2</sup> The committee consisted of three representatives from the then-ruling Congress party, and one representative each from the BJP, the Communist Party of India (Marxist), two Bihar state-level parties, one Uttar Pradesh state-level party, and one Tamil Nadu state-level party. Excluding the BJP, these parties are affiliated with centre- or centre-left positions.



the report characterized sex in India as ‘a sacred union and tempered through self-imposed restraint and abstinence through societal regulation’, with sex restricted ‘within the institution of marriage’ and exclusively for procreation (Rajya Sabha 2009: 14). The alleged promotion of promiscuity by the AEP curriculum was portrayed as ‘a [Western] ploy to disintegrate the family system and rich cultural heritage which ha[s] been nourished for [the] last ten thousand years [in India]’ (Rajya Sabha 2009: 13). It is important to note the nationalist precedence of this East vs. West rhetoric; during the Independence movement, Gandhi emphasized the restraint, spirituality and purity of the ‘East’ over the excess, materialism and corruption of the ‘West’ (Mondal 2002).

The Rajya Sabha Committee Report (2009) provides a useful introduction to definitions of sexuality within morally conservative understandings of Indian culture; ‘Indian’ sexuality is located within the context of procreative, heterosexual marriage, and any ‘sex passions’ experienced outside this context are to be restrained and controlled. Within this framework, any discussion of sex or sexuality with young people which does not emphasize abstinence until marriage is therefore clearly ‘against Indian culture’. The Rajya Sabha Committee Report (2009) recommended that instead of sex education, schools should emphasize that ‘there should be no sex before marriage, which is immoral, unethical and unhealthy’ (2009: 51). In response to the Committee’s recommendations, and the wider controversies surrounding sex education, twelve Indian states (including the National Capital Region, where Delhi is located) banned the AEP and any other form of school-based sex education (Motihar 2008). The subsequent fate of the AEP, and its gradual re-implementation, is discussed in Chapter Two.

Chakraborty (2010) is among those who have critiqued the ‘homogenous and paternal construction of Indian culture’ (2010: 269) by conservative opponents during the sex education debates. After all, India is also home to alternative, more permissive sexual cultures – most famously, the *Kamasutra*, erotic temple carvings, and Tantric traditions (Doniger 2011). The disavowal of these erotic traditions within Hinduism can be traced to the Anglicized elite of the colonial period, and even further back to the time of the *Kamasutra* itself (around 3 CE). However, Doniger (2011) has noted that current right-wing Hindutva narratives of ‘Indian culture’ are perhaps the most aggressive in their claims that ‘Hinduism was always the pure-minded, anti-erotic, ascetic tradition’ that it has become (Doniger 2011: 71). Erotic Hindu cultures such as Tantrism are now a marginal phenomenon in India (except in certain areas of Bengal, Kerala and Assam – Dalrymple 2009), with sexual suppression glorified by dominant Hindutva discourses – most famously in the figure of India’s current Prime Minister, the celibate Narendra Modi. While Doniger (2011) highlights the ancient roots of tensions

between erotic and ascetic Hindu cultures in India, she also notes that these tensions have never previously ‘taken the form of one path telling the other path that it has no right to exist’ (2011: 72).

My own reading of the sex education debates, and the historical tensions behind them, drove my curiosity to explore young people’s understandings of Indian culture, and how they located gender and sexuality within this. Moreover, this also led me to adopt a critical perspective on any sweeping definitions of ‘culture’. As Cornwall, Correa & Jolly (2008) have noted, ‘talk of “culture” [and] “tradition” comes to be selectively appropriated by powerful political actors to impose their particular views on society’ (2008: 13); these ‘powerful’ definitions of culture and tradition can be invoked by anyone as a means of claiming authority, for example, to promote or restrict certain forms of gendered and sexual expression. Throughout the thesis, a critical perspective on culture involves considering ‘in whose name appeals to “culture” and “tradition” are [being] made’ (Cornwall, Correa & Jolly 2008: 13). Similarly, although exploring questions of tradition and modernity can perhaps ‘seem like a return to “tired” questions’, rather than seeking to define these categories, I am more interested in exploring how they are understood, experienced and adapted by young people in modern-day India (van Wessel 2011: 101).

The sex education debates in India served as my ‘entry point’ into the ways in which gender, sexuality and education can be bound up within multiple understandings of nation and culture; however, events just prior to my doctoral fieldwork led to even more intense debates on India’s gendered and sexual politics, both within the country and on an international scale.

### **1.3 India’s daughter? Gender, sexuality and violence, 2012-2015**

Women know what ‘safety’ refers to. It means – you behave yourself. You get back into the house. You don’t dress in a particular way. Do not live by your freedom, and this means that you are safe. A whole range of patriarchal laws and institutions tell us what to do in the guise of keeping us ‘safe’. We reject this entire notion. We don’t want it.

Kavita Krishnan, December 2012<sup>3</sup>.

The details of the December 16<sup>th</sup> 2012 case have become grimly familiar. Jyoti Singh<sup>4</sup> was on her way back from watching *Life of Pi* at one of Delhi’s largest shopping malls with a friend;

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<sup>3</sup> In Tehelkha (2012: no page numbers).

due to a lack of transport options at 9pm on a Sunday evening, Jyoti and her friend boarded a private bus in order to get home. Jyoti was subject to a brutal sexual assault by the men who had commandeered the bus, while her friend was also severely beaten. After several hours, both were thrown out onto the road and left for dead by their attackers. The next morning, soon after the story of the assault broke, people took to the streets in Delhi, denouncing violence against women and calling for justice – the brutality of the attack, and the horrific extent of Jyoti’s injuries, shocked the city (Burke 2013b). Politicians failed to read the public mood, with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh remaining silent for over a week. Instead, as angry crowds filled the centre of Delhi, thousands of policemen were sent to guard government buildings, and protestors were beaten with lathis (iron-tipped bamboo sticks) and fired upon with water cannons (Burke 2013b). Two weeks after the attack, Jyoti Singh died, and protests across India turned into demonstrations of ‘grief, and even shame’ (Burke 2013b).

The outrage felt by protestors all over India was eloquently expressed by Kavita Krishnan, a prominent feminist and the secretary of the All India Progressive Women’s Association (AIPWA). The quotation above is taken from a speech given by Krishnan during the protests in December 2012, in which she rejected ‘patriarchal understandings’ of safety which restrict women’s lives and perpetuate notions of vulnerability and weakness; instead, she argued, that regardless of time, place or clothing, ‘women have a right to freedom’ (in Tehelka 2012: no page numbers). Rather than initiatives for women’s safety in the wake of Jyoti Singh’s attack, Krishnan declared that ‘freedom without fear is what we need to protect, to guard and respect’ (in Tehelka 2012: no page numbers).

In the context of widespread anger and sorrow following Jyoti Singh’s death, reactionary patriarchal attitudes at the heart of ‘Indian culture’ were blamed by Krishnan and other prominent liberal activists (Tehelka 2012, Burke 2013b); much international coverage also asked why India had a ‘rape problem’ (e.g. Hota 2013). However, more conservative voices argued that it was not Indian culture, but Western influences which were to blame for rape. These included Mohanrao Bhagwat, a prominent member of the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, a Hindu nationalist organisation), who declared that ‘such crimes hardly take place in “Bharat”, but frequently in “India”’ (in Times of India 2013: no page numbers). Bhagwat was drawing a distinction between the rural, ‘traditional’ version of the nation (‘Bharat’, the name of the country in Hindi), and the urban, Westernized version (‘India’), and claimed that there

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<sup>4</sup> Under the Indian Penal Code (228A), disclosing the identity of a victim of sexual violence is prohibited; Jyoti Singh was therefore given various, fairly problematic pseudonyms by the Indian media, including ‘Nirbhaya’ (‘fearless one’) and ‘Damini’ (a Bollywood film character who avenges the rape of her maid).

are ‘no such incidents of gang rape or sex crimes’ in the ‘villages or forests’ of the former (in Times of India 2013: no page numbers).

Burke (2013a) has characterized the debates around the causes of violence against women as a ‘culture war’, which exposed the ‘tensions created by the rapid pace of economic change in India over recent decades’ (Burke 2013a: no page numbers). The lines drawn in this so-called ‘culture war’ are similar to those in the sex education debates, with liberal critics of patriarchal conservatism in India on one side, and conservative defenders of ‘traditional’ Indian culture on the other. Unlike the sex education debates, however, in the immediate aftermath of the December 2012 gang rape it seemed that liberal voices wielded the most influence, both in terms of public outcry and ‘official’ response. This included the Committee on Amendments to Criminal Law, which was set up by the government in late December 2012 in order to ‘provide for quicker trial and enhanced punishment for criminals committing sexual assault of extreme nature against women’ (Verma, Seth & Subramaniam 2013: i). Chaired by former Chief Justice of India J.S. Verma (the Committee became known as the ‘Verma Committee’ after its chairman), the Committee produced its 630-report in a record 30 days. Although it is primarily a document on legal reforms, the report is wide-ranging, and cautions that correcting the ‘societal mindset of its gender bias depends more on social norms, and not merely on legal sanction’ (Verma, Seth & Subramaniam 2013: ii – iii).

### *1.3.1 Implications for gender, sexuality and education in India*

As well as receiving legal advice from all over the world, the Verma Committee report was strongly influenced by the Indian women’s movement, with numerous contributions from academics and feminist activists. For example, the report argued that in India, ‘false morality is administered from childhood [...] patriarchy makes women accomplices in its institutionalization, and women themselves reinforce patriarchal norms over generations’ (Verma, Seth & Subramaniam 2013: 383). This reference to ‘false morality’ seems to directly locate and critique patriarchal norms within ‘traditional’, morally conservative versions of Indian culture, in which ‘the girl child is brought up to believe that she is not just the repository of the ‘honour’ of her own family but also that of her community/caste etc.’ (Verma, Seth & Subramaniam 2013: 282).

The report importantly envisioned schools as potentially transformative spaces in which these patriarchal norms can be challenged, arguing that ‘schools have to act as counter-socialisers to tackle gender bias and discrimination’ (Verma, Seth & Subramaniam 2013: 396). The report

therefore strongly recommended that the government followed UNESCO's (2009) *International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education* to ensure that children are able to access 'informed, non-prejudiced sources [of learning] on sexuality' (2013: 406). The report also noted that 'challenging the perception of sexuality as being purely heterosexuality is an ongoing agenda for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) activism and for counter-socialisation efforts' (2013: 406). To support these efforts, the Verma Committee report recommended that 'collaborating or networking with LGBT activists is a beginning to understanding different sexuality experiences' (2013: 406). In its call for 'clear, well informed and scientifically grounded sexuality education based on the universal values of human rights' (Verma, Seth & Subramaniam 2013: 405), the Verma Committee report seemed to transcend arguments over the place of sex education within 'Indian culture', and instead placed it within a 'universal' framework of human rights, which includes challenging gender discrimination and heteronormativity.

The Verma Committee report was hailed as a manifesto for Indian rights-based activism, with ground-breaking recommendations on the criminalization of marital rape and the recognition of LGBT rights as fundamental human rights (Kale 2013; Baxi 2013). However, even as the report's progressive recommendations were hailed by feminists and human rights activists across India, the government responded with the less-than-progressive Ordinance on Sexual Violence (2013). The exception to marital rape in the Indian Penal Code was not amended, while the death penalty in rape cases which result in the death of the victim was sanctioned, in direct opposition to the Verma Committee's recommendations (Kale 2013). Perhaps unsurprisingly in light of previous controversies, the government did not respond to the Verma Committee's recommendations on comprehensive sexuality education.

Following the trial and conviction of the men who raped and killed Jyoti Singh in September 2013, Burke (2013b) reflected that eight months after her death, Jyoti Singh's ordeal and death had not made much of a difference in India. Over three years later, this is hard to refute; Indian politicians' rhetoric may be peppered with commitments to 'women's safety', but the limited response to the Verma Committee's recommendations in 2013 reflects the lack of political will to effect change on an institutional level.

### *1.3.2 Implications for the research*

On a much smaller scale, the December 2012 gang rape case and the ensuing debates on gender, sexuality and culture in India had considerable repercussions for the young people

who participated in my study, as well as my own experiences as a researcher in Delhi. While the sex education debates served as an introduction to India's gender and sexual politics in theory, the post-December 2012 debates had methodological, practical and personal implications for my research.

Sexual violence was not initially a lens through which I intended to explore gender and sexuality in the context of education in India. However, the particular 'moment' during which I carried out the research meant that this became unavoidable. Jyoti Singh died less than a week before I arrived in Delhi for the first phase of fieldwork in January 2013; throughout the first and second fieldwork phases, there were daily reports of sexual violence across India, as well as the trial and sentencing of the six men accused of the December 2012 gang rape. Just after I left Delhi at the end of the third fieldwork phase in November 2014, there was outcry in the city as a young woman was raped in an Uber taxi on her way home from work.

Don't use cabs. Don't go to school. Don't walk on the road. Don't use the bus.  
Don't use auto[s]. Don't live. Don't breathe. Because men rape.

@UnSubtleDesi, 8.46M, 7 December 2014<sup>5</sup>.

Krishnan's (2012) earlier quotation certainly reflects my own political frustrations with the promotion of 'women's safety' in Delhi after the December 2012 gang rape, but this tweet from @UnSubtleDesi (in response to the 'Uber rape') is closer to the personal fears and frustrations that, at least initially, shaped my day-to-day experiences while living, working, and often travelling alone while in Delhi. These experiences, combined with the critical reflexivity inherent in a feminist approach to research, have led me to reflect on my own gendered, sexual positionality throughout the thesis, and the ways in which this has influenced the focus of the research.

#### **1.4 Introducing the research**

While fieldwork and analysis were significantly shaped by the December 2012 gang rape, my doctoral study was guided by the following research questions, which were developed prior to fieldwork:

**RQ1:** How are gender and sexuality understood, experienced and 'learned' in Delhi secondary schools?

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<sup>5</sup> In Venkataramakrishnan (2014: no page numbers).

**RQ2:** How do these understandings, experiences and processes of learning relate to national and international understandings of gender, sexuality and education?

In terms of the theoretical and methodological positionings underpinning the research, I have adapted Connell's (2000) framework in order to explore the interplay between institutional practices and the forms of agency deployed by students in shaping their experiences of learning about gender and sexuality at schools. I use the concept of 'sexual learning' in the thesis, rather than 'sex education', in order to consider young people's experiences both within and beyond the classroom (Thomson & Scott 1991). Following Kehily (2012), Abraham (2002, 2001), Connell (2000), Epstein & Johnson (1998) and others, I am particularly interested in peer cultures as a site in which 'young people [are] active in producing their own identities' in terms of gender and sexuality (Alldred & David 2007: 5). I have also been influenced by Epstein & Johnson's (1998) emphasis on the role of sexual stories in shaping young people's sexual learning. The idea that gendered and sexual learning takes place through stories, which are themselves located within wider narratives of gender and sexuality, has been central to the development of my analytical framework within the thesis.

I carried out field research for the study in three English-medium, co-educational secondary schools in Delhi, over a period of nine months in 2013-14. The school education system in India is based around a 10+2 structure, with primary (Classes 1-8) and secondary education (Classes 9-10) for children aged 6-14 established as free and compulsory by the Right to Education Act (2009). This is followed by two years of senior secondary education (Classes 11-12), and the students involved in my research were in Class 11, and aged 15-17. Although some have argued that co-education is 'yet to be fully accepted' in India (e.g. Chanana 2005), the most recent All India School Education Survey (AISES 2002) indicates that nationally, co-education (defined as those in which 'both boys and girls are admitted to all classes' – NCERT & NIC 2006a: 473) is much more common than single-sex education at all stages of schooling<sup>6</sup>. As English-medium schools, however, the schools included in my study are in a minority within the Indian education system<sup>7</sup>.

I adopted a multi-method approach to research with Class 11 students and their teachers, and schools from three different schooling systems (private, central government and state government) were selected to include young people from a range of socio-economic

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<sup>6</sup> 95.46% of primary, 86.73% of secondary and 75.39% of senior secondary schools are co-educational in India (NCERT & NIC 2006a).

<sup>7</sup> 12.98% of schools in India are English-medium at primary stage, 25.85% at secondary and 33.59% at senior secondary stage (NCERT & NIC 2006b).

backgrounds. Overall, 180 students (74 girls, 106 boys) completed surveys; 41 of these students (19 girls, 22 boys) volunteered to take part in mixed and single-sex focus group discussions, and 30 of these students (15 girls, 15 boys) were then interviewed individually. A total of 25 teachers (18 female, 7 male) were also interviewed individually. In addition to quantitative and qualitative methods, I adopted ethnographic methods, which involved formal classroom observations, more informal interactions with students and teachers, and recording field notes on the experience of 'being there', living and working in Delhi.

Adopting a feminist approach to research, knowledge production is recognized as inevitably influenced by power relations within my study, particularly within interactions between myself as the researcher and participants as the 'researched' (Ramazanoğlu & Holland 2002; Allen 2005; Stanley & Wise 2008; Gaventa & Cornwall 2009). A critical, reflexive approach has been essential to acknowledging and exploring issues of knowledge and power within the research, and throughout the thesis, I reflect upon the implications of my personal experiences in Delhi and my researcher positionality for the knowledge produced through the research, particularly in light of my transnational identity as a British Asian woman born to parents from the Indian diaspora of the 1980s.

Gender and sexuality are conceptualized within a broadly post-structural feminist framework in the study, and are understood as both politically regulated (Foucault 1976; Butler 1990; Connell 2000) and constitutive of identities formed and embodied by individual agents (Connell 2000; Paechter 2006; Nayak & Kehily 2008). Following Nayak & Kehily (2008), I understand gender 'as a lived process rather than a proper object that we are each magically endowed with as an unwritten consequence of our sex' (2008: 5). Intersectionality is also central to the conceptualization of gender and sexuality within my research; this involves taking into consideration the 'complex, irreducible, varied, and variable effects which ensue when multiple axes of differentiation – economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential – intersect in historically specific contexts' (Brah & Phoenix 2004: 76). Following Indian feminist scholars including Lukose (2009), Chakravarti (2003) and Dube (2001), I pay particular attention to the intersections of gender, sexuality, caste and class in the lives of young people in my study. It is important to note that in spite of the three different school settings, the experiences explored in the research are those of a very specific sub-set of young people in India; namely, those from urban, English-speaking, middle-class, general caste, and Hindu backgrounds. The work of Gilbertson (2014), Sancho (2012), De Neve (2011) and others on the new middle classes in contemporary India has led me to pay particular attention to the intersections of gender and sexuality with 'middleclassness' in my participants' lives; this is



explored in more detail in Chapter Two, while participant demographics are discussed in Chapter Three.

In the early stages of my research, I framed the study in terms of exploring ‘young people’s experiences of gender and sexuality’ on one hand, and ‘competing discourses of gender and sexuality’ on the other. The research questions guiding my study still reflect these broad interests, but during fieldwork and data analysis, there seemed to be a considerable disconnect between young people’s ‘experiences’ in Delhi schools, and national and international ‘discourses’. Moreover, compared to the vivid accounts of students’ lives that I heard during fieldwork, this framework of experiences and discourses also seemed somewhat abstract. This led me to reflect upon how I was learning about young people’s experiences, and it became apparent that this was taking place through storytelling – students’ and teachers’ stories of their own experiences, about other students and teachers, and about their families. During initial data analysis, I was also struck by the ways in which these stories could be related to wider cultural narratives. This led to a narrative approach to analysis being adopted; while there are diverse approaches and understandings of narrative analysis (see Chapter Three), I was particularly informed by Andrews’ (2014) conceptualization of political narratives, as well as Plummer’s (1995) work on sexual stories. Consequently, I examine the text and context of ‘small stories’ told within research encounters – whether these are stories of young people’s own experiences, accounts of stories circulating in schools, or re-tellings of stories from media and other popular sources – and the interrelations between these micro-narratives and macro-narratives of gender, sexuality and education in modern-day India.

A key methodological contribution of the study is the use of this narrative analytical framework, which has meant that interrelations between local experiences and national and international understandings (RQ2) have been explored. By examining micro- and macro-narratives in terms of ‘the relationship between the stories of individuals and the stories of the communities in which they live’ (Andrews 2014: 86), it has been possible to consider the multiple and contradictory ways in which young people’s understandings, experiences and ways of learning about gender and sexuality in Delhi secondary schools are shaped by their active engagement with national and international understandings of gender, sexuality, education and culture.

One of the substantive contributions of the study is to address the lack of research on how young people learn about gender and sexuality in Indian schools, as identified by Bhattacharjee (1999) and reiterated more recently by Thapan (2014). The use of Connell’s (2000) framework has been central to this substantive contribution, as it has enabled me to

conceptualize schools both as institutional agents in gendering and sexualising processes, and as sites in which young people act as agents (particularly within peer cultures) by responding to and shaping these processes themselves. This is an important contribution to the literature, as although recent studies have explored the importance of peer cultures in young people's experiences of gender and sexuality in post-liberalization India (e.g. Gilbertson 2014; Twamley 2013; Sinha-Kerkoff 2003; Abraham 2002, 2001; Osella & Osella 1998), most of these studies have not examined the role of institutional contexts within young people's lives, even when working with school and college students. The concepts of 'sexual stories' (Plummer 1995; Epstein & Johnson 1998) and 'sexual learning' (Thomson & Scott 1991) have also proved to be valuable tools for exploring young people's experiences of learning about gender and sexuality beyond schools within my doctoral research. The research also provides a substantive contribution to the existing body of literature on middle-class experiences in post-liberalization India (e.g. Gilbertson 2014; Sancho 2012; Donner & De Neve 2011; Lukose 2009), and specifically, highlights the importance of education as a site for middle-class young people's negotiation of gendered and sexual politics.

### **1.5 Structure of the thesis**

In the following chapter (Chapter Two), I review the policy and socio-cultural contexts shaping macro-narratives of gender, sexuality and education in India, and also locate my study within existing research in Indian and international contexts. In Chapter Three, I offer a more detailed discussion of the links between methods used and the conceptual framework, including reflections on my feminist approach to research and the narrative analytical framework adopted in the study. I also reflect on my researcher positionality, discuss the ethical implications of carrying out research on the 'taboo' topic of sexuality with young people in India, and introduce the three schools in which the research took place, including descriptions of the three school systems to which they belong, and student demographics at each institution. Chapter Three also includes a detailed discussion of my multi-method approach to data collection and analysis.

In Chapters Four, Five and Six, I present the main findings of the research. Chapter Four explores the tensions between apparent gender neutrality and production of gender difference within co-educational spaces through a range of institutional and pedagogical practices. Girls' and boys' shared investment in career-oriented narratives of education suggested a degree of gender neutrality; however, anxieties about adolescent sexuality within co-educational spaces complicated this image. Formal sources of sexual learning sought to

discourage adolescent sexual activity by drawing upon reproduction-and-risk narratives. Beyond the curriculum, disciplinary practices maintained gender segregation at the schools, revealing concerns about the close proximity of adolescent girls and boys within co-educational spaces. These anxieties seemed to be based on an assumption that young people's exploration of their (hetero)sexuality would inevitably disrupt their academic focus and achievement, but strategies of segregation ultimately seemed to be sexualising in themselves.

Chapter Five opens with critical reflections on the particular 'moment' in which I carried out PhD fieldwork in Delhi in 2013. After considering my own experiences of gendered, sexualized interactions in the schools and the city, I explore the competing narratives of girlhood and masculinities that shaped young people's experiences of schooling. These gender narratives reveal further ways in which gender was made to 'matter' in young people's daily lives. In the wake of the December 2012 gang rape case, existing narratives of girlhood and masculinity were both contradicted and reinforced by seemingly ubiquitous stories of sexual violence. The chapter seeks to locate girls' and boys' responses to cases of sexual violence within these often contradictory gender narratives, and also reflects upon stories of sexual violence as another source of gendered, risk-based sexual learning for young people.

Chapter Six explores alternative sources of sexual learning accessed by young people, including cautionary tales from popular TV shows and films, which reinforced gendered, risk-based narratives from formal sources of sexual learning. The chapter then considers students' responses to the claim that sex education is 'against' Indian culture and, in light of their overwhelming rejection of this idea, I discuss students' own definitions of what school-based sex education should entail. After this, I explore heterosocial dynamics within peer cultures at schools as an important site of sexual learning. Peer cultures provided an opportunity for students to negotiate and challenge the problematization of gender and sexuality within co-educational spaces. This involved playing with definitions of platonic 'brother-sister' relationships, and less restrictive heterosocial friendships which left open the possibility of romance. Risk-based narratives of sexuality were importantly undermined and redefined within peer romances, and while reinforcing heterosexual and caste boundaries, peer romances also played a key role in enabling students to understand sexuality in alternative, more positive ways than other sources of sexual learning available to them.

Finally, Chapter Seven draws together the multiple, at times contradictory micro- and macro-narratives of gender, sexuality and education explored throughout the thesis. I discuss the substantive and methodological findings of the study in terms of their original contributions to knowledge, and their implications for policy, practice and future research.

## Chapter Two: Gender, sexuality, education and the nation

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the policy and socio-cultural contexts which have shaped macro-narratives of gender, sexuality and education in contemporary India. The 'idea of India' has been a 'deeply contested one from the moment of its emergence in the nineteenth century' (Menon & Nigam 2007: 135), and this chapter examines some of the ways in which gender, sexuality and education have been implicated in the 'idea of India' from independence in 1947 to the present day. The chapter begins with a review of post-independence education and health policies, offering a historical perspective on state understandings of gender and sexuality over the past six decades. The chapter then discusses the more recent socio-cultural context in India, the 'post-liberalization' period from 1991 to the present day, which has seen the unprecedented growth of the Indian economy, the advent of new consumer cultures, global media and communication technologies, and the rise of the 'new middle classes'. In the final section of the chapter, I focus on studies which have examined young people's experiences of gender and sexuality in post-liberalization India, and including those which have specifically explored young people's experiences of gender and sexuality within educational contexts. In light of the literature reviewed in the chapter, I conclude by outlining the ways in which gender and sexuality are conceptualized within my doctoral study.

### 2.2 Policy context

#### 2.2.1 *Gender, education and the nation*

The idea that young people should learn about 'Indian culture and values' through education can be traced back to the nationalist movement in India. Mohandas Gandhi saw education as a key site of struggle against the British, arguing that the colonial education system was 'unsuitable to Indian needs' and gave Indians an education 'devoid of their culture' (in Sharma & Sharma 1996: 141). 'Infus[ing] education with a national spirit' was therefore essential in order to achieve independence from the British (Sharma & Sharma 1996: 141). Following independence in 1947, early education policy documents confirmed education's crucial role in forging the nation's identity. The *Report of the Secondary Education Commission* (1952), (known as the Mudaliar Commission after its chairman) argued that education should produce economically productive, morally upright, socially responsible and dutiful citizens. The *Report of the Education Commission* (1966) (known as the Kothari Commission, again after its

chairman) described a more explicitly Nehruvian vision for both education and the nation, stating that education which is ‘science-based and in coherence with Indian culture and values, can alone provide the foundation – as also the instrument – for the nation’s progress, security and welfare’ (GoI 1966: iv).

Both the Mudaliar (1952) and Kothari Commission (1966) reports envisage gendered versions of the citizen, and accordingly recommend differentiated curricula for girls and boys. Although the Mudaliar Commission (1952) explicitly rejects the idea that ‘the woman’s place is restricted to the home’ (1952: 42), the report nevertheless emphasizes that girls’ education must facilitate their domestic contribution to the nation. These early education policy documents imagine education as a means to enhance the gendered contributions of Indian citizens; economic productivity from men and boys, and domestic efficiency from women and girls. However, other contemporaneous committee reports on education, such as the *Report of the Hansa Mehta Committee* (1961) and the *Report of the Committee on the Differentiation of Curricula for Boys and Girls* (1964), strongly advised against gender-differentiated curricula, and argued that a common curriculum would promote greater equality between the sexes. These reports seem to have had a greater influence than the Mudaliar (1952) and Kothari Commission (1966) reports in this respect; India’s first education policy, the *National Policy on Education* (1968), contains no mention of gender-differentiated curricula, and a common curriculum for girls and boys was introduced towards the end of the decade (GoI 1974).

The idea of education as a means to reinforce gendered citizenship faded from the policy agenda after the mid-1960s, and was replaced by a focus on increasing girls’ access to education. This was emphasized in the Kothari Commission report (1966) and the first *National Policy on Education* (1968). Moreover, was enshrined in Article 45 of the Constitution of India (1947), which stated that all children between the ages of six and 14 are to receive free and compulsory education (GoI 2012: 23). However, it was the new *National Policy on Education* (NPE) (1986) which marked the clearest policy commitment on education for gender equality. With its emphasis on increasing access to education for girls and women, and scheduled castes and tribes, the *NPE* (1986) has been hailed as a far-reaching, progressive policy (Rajagopal 2013; Ramachandran 2003). Based in India’s constitutional values, providing equal educational opportunities for girls and boys became a key focus for securing twin national goals of economic development and social justice (GoI 1986).

Shortly after the introduction of the *NPE* (1986), India’s commitment to the World Declaration on Education for All (EFA) (1990) led to a significant increase in domestic and international investment in primary education, and *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA), India’s flagship Education

for All programme, was launched in 2000 (Ramachandran 2003). Focusing on the universalisation of primary education for children aged 6-14, SSA incorporated *Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalyaya* (KGBV) in 2007, a specific initiative for girls' education. The right of all 6 to 14 year olds to free and compulsory education was further affirmed by the Right to Education (RTE) Act (2009), which also included a provision that all schools, whether privately or government funded, must enrol 25% of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (GoI 2009: 3).

In spite of criticisms of the implementation and funding structures of SSA (e.g. Banerjee 2014; Jha & Parvati 2014), UNESCO's 2015 *EFA Global Monitoring Report* revealed that India was predicted to be the only country in South and West Asia to achieve gender parity in primary and secondary education by the end of 2015 (UNESCO 2015). This is undeniably a significant achievement, and testament to legislation such as the RTE Act (2009) and high levels of investment in education over the past decade (increasing from \$14 billion to \$62 billion between 2005 and 2014, Lakshmi 2015). However, concerns about the quality of education and equality of learning outcomes continue. Prominent educationist Krishna Kumar has argued that 'the State's policy in education will remain inconsequential if cultural forces shaping the lives of girls are not taken into account' (Kumar 2010: 75). The major challenge remains 'how to deliver gender just, quality education', given the diversity of schooling conditions across India (Rajagopal 2013: 6).

While dominant policy approaches in India have focused on improving access to education in order to address gender inequality, recent policy documents have also highlighted the issue of gender socialization within schools. Both the *Report of the Central Advisory Board on Education Committee* (2005) and the NCERT's *National Curriculum Framework* (2005) argue that the 'formal approach' of increasing girls' access to education should be replaced with a 'substantive approach' to promoting gender equality in schools (NCERT 2005: 9), including addressing the hidden curriculum and discouraging discriminatory practices (GoI 2005: 15). The *National Curriculum Framework* (2005) is the first Indian education policy document to conceptualize gender as more than a synonym for 'women and girls', arguing that unequal gender relations in schools 'stunt the freedom of both boys and girls to develop their human capabilities to their fullest' (NCERT 2005: 9).

Schools were also recognized as potentially transformative spaces in terms of gender norms in the Verma Committee report (2013), published following the Delhi gang rape in December 2012. However, as discussed in Chapter One, few of the Verma Committee's main recommendations for amendments to criminal law (for which it was established) were

adopted, and its additional recommendations on 'tackl[ing] gender bias and discrimination' within schools (Verma, Seth & Subramaniam 2013: 396) were similarly ignored. Although gender equality has been a post-independence education policy goal, and although recommendations for explicitly gendered approaches to education from the 1950s and 1960s have been replaced with policy understandings of education as an opportunity to promote social justice, there have been no serious government efforts to date which seek to 'transform traditional gender relations' in India by addressing 'deep seated gendered beliefs and practices' within schools (Rajagopal 2013: 6).

### *2.2.2 Sexuality at school: population control to HIV prevention*

Young people's sexuality is not explicitly discussed in early post-independence policy documents, but it is implicitly problematized in the Mudaliar (1952) and Kothari Commission (1966) reports. This is particularly evident in reservations about co-educational secondary schools; while both reports unequivocally support girls' education, they are less enthusiastic about the prospect of adolescent girls and boys being educated together. The Mudaliar Commission argues that 'during the period of adolescence, it is desirable that the education of boys and girls should be carried on in separate institutions' (GoI 1952: 43). Similarly, the Kothari Commission report states that 'public opinion is generally not in favour of accepting co-education at the secondary stage' (GoI 1966: 329); however, neither report offers any explanation for these claims.

The landmark report *Towards Equality: Report on the Status of Women in India* (1974), written by a committee of prominent representatives of the women's movement in India, challenges such assumptions about the dangers of co-education. The report strongly recommends adopting co-education as a long-term policy in the interests of 'efficiency, economy [and] equal opportunity' (GoI 1974: 274). Following the obliquely stated concerns of the Mudaliar and Kothari Commission reports, and this defence in *Towards Equality*, the issue of co-education has not been discussed in Indian education policies. However, as mentioned in Chapter One, co-education is now more common at all stages of schooling in India (NCERT & NIC 2006a). The decline in the proportion of co-educational schools from primary to senior secondary stage from 95.46% to 75.39% (NCERT & NIC 2006a) may reflect lingering doubts about co-education for older adolescents (Chanana 2005), but these data suggest that co-education is now the dominant model of schooling in India at all levels.

*Towards Equality* is also the earliest policy document to recommend 'sex education' in schools; the report identifies sex education as an area requiring attention, and recommends the appointment of an expert group by the Ministry of Education to prepare teaching materials on the subject (Gol 1974: 278). Other than this, education relating to sexuality from the 1950s to the 1980s was exclusively framed in terms of 'population education'. Population education was proposed as early as 1952 (Gabler 2012), but a formal programme for schools was not introduced until the 1970s. The first *National Population Policy* (1975) explicitly recommends the introduction of population 'values' into education, and subsequently, a school programme designed to 'increase awareness about India's population "problem"', to 'control rapid population growth', and to transmit the 'message of the small family norm' was introduced (Katyal et al 2012: 6).

The *NPE* (1986) similarly calls for education programmes which 'actively motivate and inform youth and adults about family planning and responsible parenthood' (Gol 1992: 29). In order to achieve this, post-1986 population education textbooks focused on 'family size and family welfare, delayed marriage and responsible parenthood' (Katyal et al 2012: 6). With the onset of the HIV epidemic in India, however, it was eventually recognized in public health circles that sex had to be discussed in more explicit terms. In the 1990s, the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) began to work on 'adolescence education', and young people's sexuality was specifically discussed in a series of health and population policies in the 2000s.

The *National Population Policy* (2000) mentions the need for 'education of adolescents about the risks of unprotected sex' (Gol 2000: 10), and identifies adolescents as a group whose needs, including 'protection from unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases', had not been specifically addressed in the past (Gol 2000: 10). Both the *National Health Policy* (NHP, 2002) and the *National AIDS Prevention and Control Policy* (NAPCP, 2002) discuss young people's sexuality within the context of HIV and AIDS, and present education for behaviour change as a means to reduce HIV infection. According to the *NHP* (2002), school and college students are 'the most impressionable targets for imparting information relating to the basic principles of preventative health care', and so the policy aims to target young people in order to raise awareness of 'health-promoting behaviour' (Gol 2002a: 14). The *NAPCP* (2002) advises that school-based AIDS education focusing on HIV prevention strategies is an important means of addressing young people's vulnerability to HIV infection.

With the framing of young people's sexuality in terms of HIV prevention, there was evidently a dramatic shift in the conceptualization of school-based sex education. This included a much more explicit focus on sex; as Chakravarti (2011) has noted, the HIV epidemic 'opened up the



mainstream discourse on sexuality in India' (2011: 389) (see 2.3 below). The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in 1994 also contributed to the 'paradigm shift' from population control approaches to those based on reproductive rights (Narayanan 2011). India's commitment to the ICPD Programme of Action (1994) as well as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) meant that official policy approaches in the country were now characterized by these merged health and rights-based approaches, which included an emphasis on empowering women and young people in order to improve health outcomes (Mathur 2008).

It was within this international and national policy context that the Adolescence Education Programme (AEP) was introduced in Indian secondary schools in 2005, and faced vociferous opposition from conservative politicians which ultimately led to school-based sex education being banned in twelve Indian states (see Chapter One). The wider context of this conservative opposition to the AEP is discussed in 2.3; however, the sex education debates did not conclusively put an end to adolescence education in India. A much-modified version of the AEP curriculum, with 'offensive' materials removed and re-oriented 'with a clear focus on age/experience and culturally sensitive information' (UNFPA 2011: 4), was re-introduced in five Indian states (Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan and Maharashtra) by the UNFPA and NCERT between 2009 and 2012<sup>8</sup>. By 2014, this modified version of the AEP had been introduced in approximately 1,000 Kendriya Vidyalayas (Central Government Schools) and Navodaya Vidyalayas (Residential Government Schools) across the whole country, with training of approximately 3,000 teachers completed (AEP Programme Officer, UNFPA – interview).

This overview of policies provides a historical insight into 'official' understandings of gender, sexuality and education in post-independence India, from gendered conceptualizations of the educated citizen to more recent calls for attention to girls' and boys' gendered experiences of schooling; and from implicit concerns about young people's sexuality and a focus on population control, to HIV prevention-focused adolescence education. While dominant policy approaches have largely understood gender inequality as a problem to be solved through instrumental solutions (i.e. increasing girls' access to schooling), issues relating to sexuality have been engaged with in ideological terms. Young people's sexuality has been understood as

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<sup>8</sup> While both the 2005 and 2012 AEP materials include information on HIV prevention, sections on 'reproductive systems in men and women', 'conception', 'contraception' and 'sex, sexuality and gender' in the 2005 materials are not included in the 2012 materials. The 2012 materials retain a section on 'the process of growing up', but illustrations detailing physical changes during puberty in the 2005 materials were removed (NACO/UNICEF 2005; NCERT 2012).

a potential 'problem' to be solved through education which emphasizes control and restriction, whether in terms of family planning or disease prevention.

The policy constructions and programme interventions reviewed here can be understood as part of the state's attempt to act as a 'regulator of intimacy', and to create and maintain an official 'Indian' moral code (Srivastava 2007: 333). However, the state's ability to control gendered and sexual morality has significantly declined in post-liberalization, globalized India (Srivastava 2007). As discussed in the following section, macro-economic policies adopted in the early 1990s have arguably been as important as post-independence education or health policies in shaping understandings of gender and sexuality in contemporary India.

### **2.3 Socio-cultural context: Post-liberalization India, 1991 to the present**

In 1991, the finance minister (and future prime minister) Manmohan Singh announced the liberalization of the Indian economy, introducing market forces into areas of the economy controlled by the state, facilitating foreign investment and trade, and easing banking regulations to increase consumer credit and to encourage spending (Baviskar & Ray 2011). Widely viewed as a 'truly ruptural moment in contemporary history' (Menon & Nigam 2007: 3), these policies 'unleashed' the Indian economy from the 'chastity belt of Nehruvian socialism and Indira [Gandhi]-era austerities' (Baviskar & Ray 2011: 2). Lukose (2009) has described the shift from 'midnight's children' of the past, as characterized in Salman Rushdie's (1980) novel, to 'liberalization's children' of today (2009: 6). While midnight's children were 'mired in the ideological baggage of Nehruvian nationalist development, with its focus on the rural poor and service to the nation', liberalization's children are characterized by an admiration of capitalism, 'guiltless consumerism', and a 'newly found confidence and ambition on the global stage' (Lukose 2009: 5-6).

There has been considerable interest in the emergence of a 'new middle class' in India in the post-liberalization period. Until the 1980s, the Indian middle class was typically made up of 'salaried bureaucrats and professionals' (Donner & De Neve 2011: 3-4). These government servants, doctors, lawyers and private employees understood themselves as a 'modern, nationalist elite' (Donner & De Neve 2011: 4), and represented an exclusive group whose origins are usually traced to the colonial period, when English-educated Indians formed the 'middle' in the colonial class hierarchy (Varma 1997). However, in the post-liberalization era, the Indian middle classes have expanded. The combination of positive discrimination programmes (following the Mandal Commission in 1990), state-led economic development

and liberalization created ‘newly affluent sections among rural low-status communities’ (Donner & De Neve 2011: 4). The new Indian middle classes are now characterized by their diversity; successful traders, entrepreneurs and industrialists in rural and urban areas are now included among the middle classes in terms of income levels, educational aspirations and moral values (Baviskar & Ray 2011; De Neve 2011).

While definitions and the scale of the new middle classes in India are debated, several factors seem undisputed. Firstly, this newly moneyed section of the population is ‘not really in the middle at all’ in economic terms (Dasgupta 2014; Dwyer 2011). According to the broadest definition, the top 26% of Indian households belong to this income group (Sridharan 2011, in Baviskar & Ray 2011) – leaving over 70% of households living on ‘substantially lower’ incomes, and ‘at least 40% living below the poverty line’ (Baviskar & Ray 2011: 2). Dasgupta (2014) notes that the lifestyles of the Indian middle class bear resemblance to that of the middle classes in Europe or America, and Dwyer (2011) argues that the Indian middle class in fact constitute an elite within their own country. While they are in no way ‘middling’, Dwyer (2011) compellingly argues that the new Indian middle class is nevertheless ‘contesting the middle ground, the centre of Indian life’ (2011: 187)

Baviskar & Ray (2011) point to the sensuality of India’s post-liberalization consumer culture, which promises ‘a cornucopia of commodities magical and sensuous’ (2011: 8). New ‘economies of desire’ in post-liberalization India are not just about consumption, but ‘equally about desire [and] pleasure’ (Menon & Nigam 2007: 86). The ‘veritable explosion of the media’ from the mid-1990s onwards was a key factor in the creation of these new economies of desire, including the increased availability of cable and satellite television channels (Menon & Nigam 2007: 88; Lukose 2009). In cities, new technologies and spaces facilitated new kinds of intimacies, from the greater availability of cars, mobile phones and the internet (facilitating privacy and direct communications), and ‘arenas of consumption’ such as ‘pubs, discotheques and multiplexes’ (Menon & Nigam 2007: 92). Along with large migrant populations and a sense of freedom from traditional behaviour in cities such as Delhi, these new technologies and spaces ‘pulsate with the desire and possibilities of sexual adventure’ that represent the new face of urban India (Dubey 2005, quoted in Menon & Nigam 2007: 92). The particular relevance of these ‘economies of desire’ for young people in India is discussed in 2.4.

Uberoi (2011) and Srivastava (2007) caution against an interpretation of ‘a veil of prudish “silence” around sexuality [...] finally being lifted’ in post-liberalization India (Uberoi 2011: 277). Srivastava (2007) suggests that ‘the public sphere in India has been saturated with sex-talk from at least the beginning of the twentieth century, and across all levels of society’, from

relationship magazines in small towns to ‘footpath pornography’ in larger cities (2007: 332). However, both Uberoi (2011) and Srivastava (2007) do discuss the ‘sexualisation’ of the public sphere in post-liberalization India, including almost blanket media coverage of ‘spectacular sex-related scandals’ in the 2000s, from cases of school children sending sexually explicit images of themselves via MMS to murders with implications of ‘improper’ cross-class sexual liaisons (Srivastava 2007; Uberoi 2011). Episodes of moral panic ‘occasioned by supposed threats to Indian “culture” and “tradition” (Uberoi 2011: 272) can be explained by a variety of factors characteristic of post-liberalization India. For example, private 24-hour media requires content and audiences to survive, and ‘sex is important as content, for it can be endlessly reformulated as a topic of discussion: morally threatening, the decline of Indian civilisation, the lack of control over the young generation, etc.’ (Srivastava 2007: 332). This also provides an important context within which to consider the sex education debates of the 2000s, as well as the national outcry following the December 2012 gang rape case (see Chapter One).

The ‘economy of desire’ in post-liberalisation India, whether in terms of national media coverage of sex scandals or the emergence of intimate spaces on a smaller scale, also reflects the new sexual politics which emerged in the 1990s. As mentioned in 2.2, the onset of HIV in the 1980s meant that homosexuality was more openly discussed in the public sphere (Reddy 2010: 137). Gay cultures also emerged among the new urban middle classes in this period, particularly in cities such as Delhi and Mumbai (Dasgupta 2014; Reddy 2010); in the early 1990s, Ashok Row Kavi (one of the acknowledged founders of this culture in India) stated that ‘there have always been opportunities for gay sex [...] but it is now a movement, an evolving gay culture’ (quoted in Reddy 2010: 137). ‘Voices Against 377’ emerged from the queer movement in India, a Delhi-based coalition of LGBT organisations who campaigned against Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, which criminalized same-sex sexual activity as an ‘unnatural offence’ (Waites 2010).

Section 377 was ruled as unconstitutional by the Delhi High Court in July 2009, in a landmark ruling for LGBT rights in India. However, in December 2013, Section 377 was reinstated by the Supreme Court, with a two-judge panel arguing that only Parliament has the authority to overturn the provision (Sheikh & Narrain 2013). Just four years after being granted ‘the status of equal moral citizenship’, this ‘effectively re-criminalized millions of LGBT individuals across the country’ (Sheikh & Narrain 2013: 14). In what may appear to be a contradictory decision, the Supreme Court recognized transgender people as the ‘third gender’ in April 2014; Ung Loh (2015) has argued that these seemingly contradictory rulings are based in a false separation of

gender identities and sexual orientation in official understandings of gender and sexuality in India, and the conceptual difference between 'LGB' and 'T' in state classifications.

The LGBT movement in the 1990s, along with increasingly 'visible' sexuality in the public sphere, led to a considerable re-thinking on sexuality among Indian feminists. This has entailed moving away from a focus on heterosexual violence against women in the 1970s and 1980s, towards a 'proliferation of feminist discourses about sexual pleasure and desire' and an increasing 'appreciation of the containable fluidity of sexuality and desire' in Indian feminist politics (Menon & Nigam 2007: 94-5). However, this period also saw the unprecedented rise of militant Hindu nationalism. Since the late 1990s, the Hindutva movement has risen to considerable prominence. This movement, which includes the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) and the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party), the now-ruling political party, typically defines 'Indian' as 'Hindu', Hinduism as 'the core of Indian nationhood' (Froerer 2007: 1033-4) and subscribes to a (sexually) conservative, heteronormative conceptualization of Indian culture (see Chapter One). This resurgence of conservatism in the 1990s and 2000s has not been unique to the Indian context. The opening up of 'new avenues for discussing and problematizing sexuality and gender' that came with the global HIV/AIDS epidemic, and commitments and conventions relating to sexual and reproductive health in the 1990s and 2000s, also 'inspired the formation of opposition groups that routinely condemn and penalize non-normative sexual and gender identities and practices' (Worthington et al 2008: 2).

Episodes of 'moral panic' around sexuality in India have therefore played out within a post-liberalization context of increasing LGBT and feminist mobilisation around sex-positive, non-normative sexualities on the left, denunciations of 'un-Indian' sexual behaviour from the Hindu right, and a consumer culture in which new technologies and spaces present the allure of 'Western' modernity. Within this context, Indian middle-class life has been assailed by questions of identity, with many of its rhythms now 'indistinguishable from the ones in those foreign lands against which India [has] traditionally defined itself' (Dasgupta 2014: 141). Perceiving themselves to be the primary agents and beneficiaries of globalisation (Dasgupta 2014), India's new middle classes are often seen to symbolize 'modernity' by way of their 'consumerism, aspirational lifestyle [and] materialism' (Nijman 2006: 762). However, while particular consumption patterns are widely seen as characteristic of Indian middle-class lifestyles (Lukose 2009; Menon & Nigam 2007), it has also been argued that 'middleclassness' should not only be understood in terms of the consumption of commodities.

'Middleclassness' can be seen as a 'cultural project or practice rather than a social category or empirical condition' (Liechty 2003 in Donner & De Neve 2011: 13), involving 'struggles over

symbolic boundaries' through which class status is reproduced through everyday practices and in a relational manner (Donner & De Neve 2011: 12). While pre-liberalisation middle classes in India were 'susceptible to glorify India's past', Varma (1997) argues that they were nevertheless fully committed to the post-independence 'project of modernity', with 'modern [understood] in the Western sense of the word' (1997: 32-35). By contrast, 'middleclassness' in post-liberation India is understood as a more fraught, ongoing project of maintaining a 'fine balance' between ideas of tradition and modernity. Gendered and sexual moralities are of particular concern within middle-class understandings of how to be 'appropriately Indian' (Gilbertson 2014: 121; Donner & De Neve 2011).

This question of balancing tradition and modernity has had particular implications for middle-class women in the post-liberalization period. If urban middle-class Indians have been the primary beneficiaries of globalization, then the young, educated and professional middle-class woman is 'the icon of the new India' (Dasgupta 2014: 135). In contrast to women at the bottom and the top of India's economic scale, middle-class women who took up jobs in the 1990s were 'doing something novel' (Dasgupta 2014: 135). The increased financial independence that came with this employment, particularly in corporate environments, has led to middle-class women being able to experience new freedoms and consumption practices, particularly in spaces such as shopping malls, cafés and cinema halls (Dasgupta 2014; Phadke, Khan & Ranade 2011).

However, these new freedoms are still tied to old restrictions. The middle-class woman remains central to contradictory ideals of 'Indian-ness' in the post-liberalization context, and is expected to embody both modernity and tradition (Phadke, Khan & Ranade 2011). While her education and employment are seen as a measure of family, community and national progress (Phadke, Khan & Ranade 2011; Gilbertson 2014), her 'virtue, sexual choices and matrimonial alliances' are still 'fraught with questions of appropriateness and dogged by the assertion of caste, community and class endogamy' (Phadke, Khan & Ranade 2011: 23 – see 2.4). Consequently, any freedoms enjoyed by (particularly unmarried) urban middle-class women, are conditional on certain limits and restrictions (Phadke, Khan & Ranade 2011: 8). Women's conditional access to public space in the name of 'safety' has been seen as a means of controlling female sexuality; it is 'not just the fear that they will be violated, but also that they will form consenting relationships with "undesirable" men' (Phadke, Khan & Ranade 2011: 16-17; Krishnan 2015). This particularly relates to endogamous marriage practices, discussed in more detail in 2.4, but it is also important to consider the prevalence of (feared or actual) violence as a marker of urban women's experiences in post-liberalisation India.

Recent incidences of public violence against women in India have been discussed in terms of a conflict between expectations of women's 'traditional' role within the private sphere, and new, 'modern' visibility in public spheres (Dasgupta 2014; Gilbertson 2014; Phadke, Khan & Ranade 2011). Women who transgress traditional 'Indian' roles as wives and mothers by working, travelling or consuming within public spaces therefore become vulnerable to 'forms of violence and violent exclusion' (Banerjee et al 2012: 2). 'Eve-teasing' is one such form of violence used to circumscribe women's movement; a colloquial term for sexual harassment, eve-teasing refers to a wide range of acts, from 'verbal taunting and bodily touching to physical assaults' (Rogers 2008: 79). Indian feminists have been highly critical of this English-language phrase (which dates back to at least the 1980s – Baxi 2001), both for its victim-blaming, woman-as-tempter allusion to the Biblical Eve (Mohanty 2013), and its trivialisation of sexual violence (Baxi 2001)<sup>9</sup>.

According to Dasgupta (2014), the 'general intensification of misogyny' in Northern India in the post-liberalization era can be understood in terms of the 'transformation of Indian society' being 'laced with threat' and a loss of power for men (2014: 139). Kapur (2012) has similarly characterized recent cases of violence against women in India in terms of a 'crisis of masculinity' which, she argues, has developed in response to the combined effects of feminism and global capitalism in the country. However, Leach, Dunne & Salvi (2014) caution against understanding gender-based violence (GBV) according to a predator/victim binary in which GBV is 'mostly about what men do to women' (2014: 3). Along with critical masculinities scholars including Connell (2000) and Mills (2001), Leach, Dunne & Salvi (2014) argue that GBV should be understood as existing '*within* as well as *across* gender lines', i.e. by both males and females on both males and females, and manifesting in physical, psychological and emotional forms (Leach, Dunne & Salvi 2014: 3, original emphasis).

Such violence has clearly not been limited to public, urban spaces in this period, and similarly, the dramatic social, cultural and economic changes in post-liberalization India have evidently had implications for the Indian population beyond the urban middle classes. The urban and rural poor have been increasingly marginalized by the unequal outcomes of liberalization (Nijman 2006); if middle-class women are seen as ideal neoliberal subjects in terms of their consumption practices, working-class women in India (and other developing countries) have become ideal neoliberal subjects as disposable, convenient workers (Wilson 2015). In the

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<sup>9</sup> During fieldwork, I frequently encountered this phrase in media reports, everyday conversations and research encounters. While remaining mindful of these critiques, I use the term 'eve-teasing' when referring to verbal and physical sexual harassment in the thesis, in order to reflect its prevalence in everyday understandings of sexual violence in Delhi.

pursuit of 'global city' status, strategies of exclusion (including slum-clearing) have been adopted in cities such as Delhi and Mumbai, which have led to a dramatic loss of jobs and homes among the working classes (Baviskar 2011). Phadke, Khan & Ranade (2011) have also noted the increasing exclusion of 'unbelongers', or marginal citizens such as members of lower castes and Muslims, from India's urban spaces (2011: 10). While a growing middle class of rural and urban consumers has benefitted from the economic reforms of the past twenty-five years, significant inequalities have been compounded and exacerbated in pursuit of the 'India Shining' narrative of the post-liberalization era. Focusing on the lives of young people in both urban and rural India, the following section explores some of the tensions between ideas of tradition and modernity which have played out in gendered and sexual politics during this period.

## **2.4 Young people in post-liberalization India**

### *2.4.1 Youth cultures, pre-marital romance and sexual relationships*

The youthfulness of India's population is often emphasized; a third of the country's 1.2 billion-strong population is under 15, while more than half is under 24 (Burke 2014). In post-liberalization India, youth cultures centred around consumerism and media have also become a much-debated topic (Lukose 2009; Srivastava 2007). Rather than seeing young people in India as uncritical consumers, however, Lukose (2009) has argued that the 'consumption of goods and mass-mediated images [have become] a key site for producing youth identities' since the 1990s (2009: 9). New, 'globally inflected' spaces of consumption (such as the malls and cafés mentioned above) are structured by 'postcolonial preoccupations about tradition and modernity, public and private that have differential consequences for young women and men' (Lukose 2009: 95).

Clothing and fashion are an important site of urban, middle-class women's negotiations of 'respectability' in modern India; young, unmarried women's negotiations are particularly fraught due to a greater need to 'prove' their respectability (Lukose 2009; Phadke, Khan & Ranade 2011; Gilbertson 2014). Lukose (2009) talks about the popularity of churidar-kurtas<sup>10</sup> among young women in Kerala; as a modern but still emphatically 'Indian' outfit, the 'demure modern' of the churidar-kurta both 'enables and yet circumscribes women's participation in public' (2009: 76). Gilbertson (2014) similarly examines young women's attempts to balance

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<sup>10</sup> A combination of leggings and a full-sleeved, knee-length top; usually, but not always, worn with a dupatta (long scarf) around the neck.



'fashion' with 'respectability' through their clothing in Hyderabad, and notes that context is also crucial to these performances. Offering a comprehensive matrix of 'standard and respectable modes of dress by class membership', Gilbertson (2014: 142) captures the subtleties and class boundaries reflected in young women's choice of clothing in different contexts. Among middle-class young women, identifying 'appropriate' and 'inappropriate' choices of clothing can be a means of identifying and excluding those who are from lower-middle class backgrounds, as opposed to middle-, upper-middle class or elite backgrounds (Gilbertson 2014).

Interestingly, based on a recent study with young men in Tamil Nadu, Nakassis (2013) has argued that young men's choices of 'global' as opposed to Indian fashions and brands are not governed by concerns with negotiating tradition or modernity, but 'tensions and anxieties surrounding peer-group performances instead' (Nakassis 2013: 265). Other studies on youth masculinities in India have explored the importance of Indian cinema (both Bollywood and regional films) in providing 'anchor points' in young men's efforts to craft distinctive styles (Jeffrey, Jeffery & Jeffery 2008: 71; Osella & Osella 2004). These studies suggest that while young men's choice of clothing may have immediate implications for their status within peer groups, it is not as fraught with wider anxieties of perceived respectability as it is for young women – confirming findings from Phadke, Khan & Ranade (2011) and Gilbertson (2014).

In addition to studies on youth femininities and masculinities, several studies have explored heterosocial dynamics in Indian youth cultures (Gilbertson 2014; Sancho 2012; Sinha-Kerkoff 2003; Abraham 2002, 2001). Although youth cultures in India are still largely characterized by homosociality (Osella & Osella 2006), young people can form 'acceptable' heterosocial relationships by forming platonic, 'brother-sister' relationships (Sancho 2012; Sinha-Kerkoff 2003; Abraham 2001). These brother-sister relationships are framed within the context of the Hindu tradition of Raksha Bandhan, making these relationships specifically 'Indian' and safely non-sexual (in a context where pre-marital sex is widely viewed as unacceptable – Chowkhani 2015; Twamley 2013). Sancho (2012), Sinha-Kerkoff (2003) and Abraham (2001) suggest that young women and men alike view such relationships favourably, since they provide opportunities for heterosocial interactions in both rural and urban areas.

However, many studies have shown that young people's heterosocial interactions are far from limited to platonic relationships (Chowkhani 2015; Twamley 2013; Lukose 2009; Osella & Osella 2006; Abraham 2002, 2001; Osella & Osella 1998). Among the numerous anxieties surrounding sexuality in post-liberalization India, an increase in young people's pre-marital sexual activity has been a persistent concern (Subiaya 2008; Abraham 2001, 2002). There is

limited data on the levels and regional patterns of pre-marital sexual activity in India, but Jejeebhoy's (2000) review of literature on adolescent sexuality suggests that up to 10% and 20-30% of unmarried young women and men respectively are sexually active (in Subiaya 2008). Abraham (2002) argues that brother-sister relationships are sometimes used as a cover for romantic relationships, and also discusses the prevalence of 'timepass', casual sexual relationships among college students in Mumbai. Mehra, Savithri & Coutinho (2002) similarly note that unmarried young people from low-income families in Delhi frequently find opportunities for sexual relationships in spite of tight familial controls. These casual sexual relationships are characterized by gender asymmetry; while permissible and socially valued among young men, young women enter into such relationships at considerable risk to their social reputation (Gilbertson 2014; Mehra, Savithri & Coutinho 2002; Abraham 2001, 2002).

More recently, Twamley (2013) has suggested that non-sexual romantic relationships are more highly valued within Indian youth cultures. Comparing the experiences of young Gujaratis in India and the UK, Twamley (2013) found that among Indian participants, 'love based on physical attraction denotes a lesser kind of love' (2013: 327), in comparison to relationships founded on emotional bonds and in which sex is delayed until after marriage. Abraham (2001) has similarly described the greater prevalence of non-sexual, 'true love' relationships among college students in Mumbai, and argues that girls perceive such relationships as a means of protecting their social reputations, physical health and 'keeping' their boyfriends.

Although claims that 'sex outside marriage was treated as non-existent in the public arena' in pre-1990s India (Subiaya 2008: 54) should be treated with caution (see 2.3), it certainly seems that pre-marital romance and sexual relationships have become a more prominent feature of urban, middle-class youth cultures in over the past two decades. As Gilbertson (2014) notes, among middle-class young people in Hyderabad, heterosocial friendships and romances have become an important marker of desirable, modern consumer practices, with young women preferring to socialize with and be 'available' to young men rather than being identified as unfashionable, excessively traditional 'behenjis', or 'sisters' (Gilbertson 2014: 149).

#### *2.4.2 Arranged marriage, love marriage and caste*

While pre-marital romance provides young people with an opportunity to participate in global, 'modern' youth cultures, it seems that marriage remains a site of 'traditional' practices. Young people may have romantic or sexual liaisons in school or college, but these relationships are not always expected to lead to marriage (with the exception of some 'true love' relationships –

Twamley 2013; Chowdhry 2007; Abraham 2001). According to the latest Indian Human Development Survey (2011-12), only 5% of marriages in India are inter-caste, suggesting that the vast majority of unions are still arranged, intra-caste marriages (*The Hindu* 2014). Such marriages also continue to be the norm among middle-class families; typically involving parents finding a suitable spouse for their child, arranged marriages 'consolidate the community' through a union based on 'prescribed caste, class and marriage norms' (Mody 2006: 331-3; Donner 2008).

Love marriages, or those in which 'the couple fall in love and choose for themselves their own marriage partner' (Mody 2006: 331), remain rare among middle-class families in India (van Wessel 2011; Donner 2008; Mody 2006). Importantly, it is love marriages violating caste and community boundaries which are viewed as problematic; young people who fall in love with someone from the same caste and religious background and insist on marriage usually do not meet resistance, at least in middle-class families (Donner 2008). By contrast, couples who do cross these boundaries through love marriage face consequences ranging from social rejection to violent retribution. Although some have argued that caste has become decreasingly significant in post-liberalization India (as noted by Natrajan 2012), the dominance of arranged marriage practices across Indian society reflects its continued and pervasive importance. Anthropological material in India is 'unambiguous on one fact: that the most important defining feature of caste is the obligation to marry within this group' (Mody 2006: 333-4). Class as well as caste boundaries are preserved through endogamous marriage practices (Mody 2006; Donner 2008); class and caste should be seen as distinctive but broadly congruent ways of classifying social distinctions (Chakravarti 2003). Higher caste usually, but not necessarily, coincides with higher material wealth and socio-economic status (Chakravarti 2003; Dube 2001).

Endogamous marriage practices have also been implicated in the historical and continued control of female sexuality in India. With women seen as 'the repositories of family honour' (Chakravarti 2003: 144), caste identities have a high stake in arranged, endogamous marriages. The recent phenomenon of so-called 'honour killings', in which couples who seek inter-caste love marriages are murdered by their families, are extreme examples of the policing of caste and gender boundaries in India and among South Asian diaspora (Chakravarti 2003; Dube 2001). Chowdhry (2007) describes cases in the northern state of Haryana in which young women are forced by khap panchayats (village councils) to tie rakhi bracelets on their husband's wrists, thus annulling their marriage and reverting the couple to their pre-marital, 'brother-sister' relationship – an example of the more violent connotations of Raksha

Bandhan. After an enforced rakhi-tying ceremony, such couples and their families are often expelled from their villages and stripped of their material possessions as punishment for violating caste and community boundaries (Chowdhry 2007). These incidents indicate the pervasive, even violent, role of gender, caste and class in young people's lives in post-liberalization India.

For middle-class young people, a degree of marital compromise can be found in 'love-come-arranged' marriages (van Wessel 2011; Fuller & Narasimhan 2008; Chowdhry 2007; Mody 2006). Definitions of love-come-arranged marriages vary, but in their most common form, these are 'companionate marriages' in which parents and children select a marriage partner together (Fuller & Narasimhan 2008; Chowdhry 2007). Love-come-arranged marriages therefore involve a degree of compromise between family and community expectations of marriage, and young people's personal choice (Fuller & Narasimhan 2008). According to Chowdhry (2007), love-come-arranged marriages are a middle-class attempt to 'accommodate modernity' within traditional practices, which again reflects the idea that 'middleclassness' in India entails a constant negotiation of being 'modern' and adhering to certain forms of 'Indian culture' (Gilbertson 2014; Sancho 2012; Donner & De Neve 2011).

#### *2.4.3 Conceptualizing gender, sexuality and 'middleclassness' at school*

Education, along with the family, is often seen as one of the main institutions which enables the production of middle-class, 'modern' identities in contemporary India (Sancho 2012; Kumar 2011; De Neve 2011; Jeffrey, Jeffrey & Jeffery 2008). As apparent in the education policies discussed above (2.2), 'education is a key site for the production of the normative citizen-subject of modern India' (Lukose 2009: 165). This normative citizen-subject is understood as upper-caste, upper- or middle-class, Hindu, and English-speaking (Lukose 2009: 165), and is also ideally prepared for participation in India's globalized economy through education:

In the city, middle-class schooling and parental regimes attempt to orient [young people's] lives towards becoming competitive professionals, depicted as garnering maximum amounts of wealth and prestige in today's globalized economy of paid employment and migration.

(Sancho 2012: iii)

Education is therefore an important means of both affirming current middle-class status, and securing it for the future. The choice of an English-medium, private school reflects parents' financial capacity and 'modern' values (Gilbertson 2014; Sancho 2012; Donner 2008), while the

aim of professional employment offers future financial security and social mobility (Kumar 2011; Donner 2008). The highly competitive nature of schooling in contemporary India is also evident in 'aspirational regimes' created by parents and teachers, which aim to 'arouse in children a drive to succeed, self-discipline, ambition and competitiveness', but also lead to high levels of 'pressures, uncertainties and anxieties about the future' among children and young people (Sancho 2012: 223). Within the context of this high-stakes education, it is also common for parents to enrol their children in extra tuition or coaching centres (the 'definers of middleclassness' – Kumar 2011: 238), in order to prepare students for competitive entrance examinations to management, medical and engineering courses (Kumar 2011; Sancho 2012). While success is lauded, failure is dreaded, and news stories of student suicides after (feared or actual) poor examination results are not uncommon (e.g. Rao 2014).

Schools, and secondary schools in particular, are also widely seen as 'one of the most formative arenas' in which young people learn about gender and sexuality (Nayak & Kehily 2008: 110; Lukose 2009; Alldred & David 2007; Bhattacharjee 1999; Epstein & Johnson 1998). Following Connell (2000), schools can be seen as both institutional agents in gendering and sexualising practices, and as settings in which other forms of agency, including those of students, are deployed. According to Connell (2000), schools act as institutional agents in the making of gender identities through 'masculinizing practices' such as discipline and dress code; Nayak & Kehily (2008) have also described schools as public sites where young people are 'disciplined into becoming modern-gendered subjects' (2008: 98). When exploring both girls' and boys' experiences of gender and sexuality, schools can be understood as institutional agents in terms of various 'gendering' practices (Nayak & Kehily 2008: 4), including the multiple ways in which 'girls and boys learn to 'define themselves [...] through and against one another' in schools (Nayak & Kehily 2008: 4).

Schools also act as institutional agents in terms of disciplinary practices used to monitor and control young people's sexuality within school spaces. Since Foucault's (1976) exploration of children's bodies and sexualities being denied within the school system, desexualized regimes of schooling have been explored extensively in UK school contexts (e.g. Nayak & Kehily 2008; Alldred & David 2007; Epstein & Johnson 1998). Reflecting on such research in India, Bhattacharjee (1999) has argued that 'little beyond biographical and anecdotal material exists to help us understand how children "learn" gender in Indian schools' (1999: 336). However, some studies in India have examined processes of gender socialisation in schools. For example, based on a study in a co-educational primary school, Bhattacharjee (1999) has highlighted 'continuities between socialization into gender roles within the family/community, and gender

socialization through schooling' (1999: 353), while more recent studies have reported similar findings in primary and secondary schools. Based on research in a co-educational, private primary school in Delhi, Sharma (2014) notes that while Class 1 and Class 3 girls and boys are equally confident and outspoken in the classroom, a gendered 'silly/sensible' dichotomy reinforces stereotypes within peer groups (2014: 47). At secondary level, Rajagopal (2009) and Sancho (2012) both reveal (in Jaipur and Kerala respectively) that participation in lessons and sports are shaped by gender, with practices such as gender segregation 'reproduc[ing] accepted gender codes and norms of respectability' on a daily basis (Sancho 2012: 100).

In terms of young people's sexuality, existing studies in Indian schools have largely focused on knowledge, attitudes and practices relating to sexual and reproductive health (SRH), and have indicated low levels of knowledge relating to HIV prevention and safe sex practices among young people (e.g. Nath 2009; McManus & Dhar 2008; Pramanik, Chartiet & Koopman 2006). These studies have also revealed gender asymmetrical access to SRH information; unmarried young men tend to have more access to sexual knowledge (and experience of sexual activity) than unmarried young women, for whom such knowledge and activity is regarded as culturally unacceptable (Chakraborty 2010; Jaya & Michelle 2009). The largely biomedical focus of such studies in Indian schools is perhaps one of the reasons that Thapan (2014) has recently claimed that sociologists in India have 'paid scant attention to what goes on inside schools and classrooms in everyday life contexts', including in relation to gender and sexuality (2014: 1).

School-based studies in India have placed a limited emphasis on the role of young people as gendered and sexual agents. However, schools, and peer cultures in particular, provide an important space within which 'young people [are] active in producing their own identities' in terms of gender and sexuality (Alldred & David 2007: 5; Sharma 2014; Lukose 2009; Abraham 2002, 2001). Students can participate in institutionally-approved masculinities and femininities in numerous ways, whether by adjusting to these patterns, rebelling against them, or forming their own gendered and sexual identities (Connell 2000: 154). Connell's (2000) framework of institutional and student agency within schools provides a key means of examining these negotiations and tensions.

The 'heterosexual romance pattern of gender relations' is an important feature of school peer cultures (Connell 2000: 161), and the social value placed upon heterosexual romances is one of the ways in which the heterosexual matrix (Butler 1990) is reinforced within schools. Allen (2005) describes heterosexuality as a 'structuring institution and a set of practices which organizes the regulation of relations between men and women', which 'depends on gender divisions for its meaning' (Allen 2005: 11). The homosocial and heterosocial relationships

among young people in Indian schools discussed above (2.4.1) provide key examples of this (e.g. Gilbertson 2014; Sinha-Kerkoff 2003; Abraham 2002, 2001; Osella & Osella 1998). However, these studies often lack a critical perspective on the normalisation of heterosexuality within schools, and following Butler (1990), Alldred & David (2007) and Nayak & Kehily (2008), such a perspective is crucial in order to challenge the taken-for-granted nature of heterosexuality within co-educational spaces.

Within peer cultures, Epstein & Johnson (1998) have pointed to the importance of sexual stories in shaping young people's sexual learning. They note that the process of sexual learning 'takes place through the telling, to self and others, of 'sexual stories about oneself'; some of these stories may be dominant, others oppositional, both reacting against dominant discursive frameworks and drawing on emergent ones (1998: 170; Plummer 1995). As will be discussed in Chapter Three, the idea of gendered and sexual learning taking place through stories, which are themselves located within wider narratives of gender and sexuality, has been central to the development of the analytical framework within my doctoral research.

## **2.5 Conclusions**

As this chapter indicates, I am conceptualizing gender, sexuality and education in my doctoral thesis by drawing from both 'Indian' and 'Western' literature. This synthesis is partially the result of an unconscious process of drawing on theoretical and empirical work from both the UK and India in order to inform the study. However, over the course of my doctoral research, I became aware of tensions between 'Western' and 'Indian' feminisms; for example, in her controversial (2015) documentary, 'India's Daughter', Leslie Udwin denounced Indian men's 'brutal attitudes' and India's 'rape problem' (Roberts 2015). In response, Indian feminists such as Kavita Krishnan expressed unease at the 'white saviour' tone of the Daughters of India campaign accompanying the documentary, and critiqued the inherent 'patriarchal protectionism' in characterizing Indian women as 'daughters' (Krishnan 2015). In light of such tensions (which have deeper historical roots – Chaudhuri 2005; Gopal 2015), my use of both Indian and Western feminist scholarship and sociological work on gender and sexuality in schools has become an attempt to draw something productive from transnational interactions (on theoretical and personal levels) between the 'Western' and the 'Indian' in my doctoral study. In Chapter Three, I explore in more detail the implications of my own transnational, diasporic identity within the study, and the importance of a critical, reflexive approach in order to consider this throughout the research process.

Overall, this chapter has explored the numerous and often contradictory macro-narratives of gender, sexuality and education in post-independence India. Official policy narratives have viewed education as a means of securing gender equality, which in turn has been understood as essential to both economic development and social justice. However, while gender parity in primary and secondary enrolment has almost been achieved in India, numerous studies have pointed to the perpetuation of gender inequalities within schools.

Since the 1990s, the educated, professional young woman has been positioned as a symbol of Indian modernity within neoliberal narratives of progress. New consumer cultures and technologies have facilitated new freedoms, particularly in terms of urban, middle-class young women's work and leisure activities, and young men and women's opportunities for romance and sexual intimacy. At the same time, heightened fears about women's safety continue to place controls on female sexuality and movement, while the pervasive importance of caste shapes young people's marriage choices (or lack thereof), sometimes with violent consequences.

The chapter has also focused on the specificity of middle-class experience, drawing on research suggesting that negotiating tensions between tradition and modernity is central to middle-class experience in contemporary India. Finally, the chapter outlined the ways in which gender and sexuality are being conceptualized, particularly within educational contexts, in my doctoral study. As discussed above, several recent studies have explored middle- and working-class young people's heterosocial interactions and sexual experiences within post-liberalization India, with some studies also exploring gender socialization in schools. However, Bhattacharjee's (1999) claim that there has been limited research on how young people 'learn' gender and sexuality in Indian schools (and beyond) still seems to hold true, as evident from a similar, more recent claim from Thapan (2014). The following chapter outlines the ways in which I have attempted to address this gap in the literature through my doctoral research.



## Chapter Three: Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the methodological and related theoretical approaches adopted in order to address the research questions guiding my doctoral research:

**RQ1:** How are gender and sexuality understood, experienced and ‘learned’ in Delhi secondary schools?

**RQ2:** How do these understandings, experiences and processes of learning relate to national and international understandings of gender, sexuality and education?

Firstly, I discuss how feminist theory has guided the study, particularly in terms of my interest in issues of knowledge and power within research methodology. I then describe my narrative analytical framework, which draws upon Andrews’ (2014) work on political narratives and Plummer’s (1995) conceptualization of sexual stories in order to examine interrelations between micro- and macro- narratives of gender, sexuality and education in India (3.2).

After this, I consider my researcher positionality, and examine the ethical issues of researching the ‘taboo’ topic of sexuality with young people in India (3.3). The chapter then introduces the fieldwork context, starting with the selection of the study schools in fieldwork Phase One (January-March 2013). After this, I introduce the three study schools, including descriptions of the school systems to which they belong, and student demographics at each of the schools (3.4).

The chapter then focuses on data collection during fieldwork Phase Two (August-December 2013), data analysis, and data validation which took place during fieldwork Phase Three (November 2014) (3.5). I explain the multi-method research design adopted in the study, and reflect upon the quantitative, qualitative, and ethnographic methods used. Consistent with a feminist approach to research (following Allen 2005, Ramazanoğlu & Holland 2002, Stanley & Wise 2008), I adopt a critical, reflexive approach when discussing methodological issues throughout the chapter.

### 3.2 Conceptual framework

#### *3.2.1 Adopting a feminist approach to research*

In line with the ontological assumptions of social constructionism, ‘social phenomena and their meanings’ are understood as ‘continually being accomplished by social actors’ (Bryman 2001:

18) within my study. Viewing the social world in these terms entails rejecting the idea that 'there is only one way in which to describe it'; instead, the researcher and the research participant are seen as 'both producers of accounts', and 'their social location in the world influences how they come to experience and describe it' (Temple & Edwards 2002: 2). A constructionist approach therefore provides an alternative to the positivist paradigm, and challenges the notion that social research must 'fulfil the explanatory and predictive task' of the natural sciences (Delanty & Strydom 2003: 19). Critical approaches within the social constructionist paradigm including Marxism, feminism and post-colonialism have also challenged the idea that 'value-freedom' is a tenable (or desirable) aim for social research. Instead, these 'alternative' approaches highlight the centrality of power in research, and advocate an explicitly political approach to social science (Maguire 1987: 13).

As Allen (2008) has pointed out, any general definition of feminism would be controversial; numerous feminist approaches have sought to revise, appropriate or completely reject dominant theories from the 'male-stream' canon of philosophical thought. Some feminist research approaches emphasize the importance of focusing on 'issues of central concern to girls and women' (Reid & Frisby 2009: 97-98). However, Cornwall (2003) has cautioned that an exclusive focus on girls and women has the potential to result in slippage between 'gender' and 'women' in which gender often comes to mean 'ask the women too', particularly within the field of international development (Cornwall 2003: 1336-8). Mindful of this critique, I adopt a 'holistic approach' to critical gender research within this study, which 'integrat[es] work on masculinities and femininities' (Nayak & Kehily 2008: 4).

In terms of epistemology, my feminist approach entails paying attention to the role of the researcher within knowledge production, since 'all researchers are agents [...] who choose, wittingly or not, from a controversial and constraining set of political stances and epistemologies' (Fine 1994: 16). In line with feminist researchers' emphasis on issues of power within knowledge production (Ramazanoğlu & Holland 2002; Allen 2005), the process of knowledge production is viewed as inevitably value-laden and influenced by power relations, particularly during interactions between myself as the researcher and participants as the 'researched'. In these interactions, I understand power relations as 'inextricably intertwined', rather than exclusively held by the researcher over participants (Gaventa & Cornwall 2009: 173).

A central issue for feminist researchers is how to incorporate their values into their research, and a critical, reflexive approach is essential to this. Critical reflexivity allows feminist researchers to address the tensions between a political commitment to 'understand and

transform unjust gender relations’, and the epistemological position that ‘the realities of gendered lives cannot be accessed directly’ (Allen 2005: 17). Reflexivity therefore involves ‘mak[ing] explicit the power relations and the exercise of power in the research process’, including ‘varying attempts to unpack what knowledge is contingent upon, how the researcher is socially situated, and how the research agenda/process has been constituted’ (Ramazanoğlu & Holland 2002: 118).

By doing this, feminist researchers can highlight the ways in which the knowledge produced by their research ‘constitutes a partial and situated account’ (Allen 2005: 17). In my doctoral study, critical reflexivity includes an exploration of my researcher positionality, or my ‘unique mix of race, class, gender, nationality, sexuality and other identities’ (Mullings 1999: 337), the ways in which these identities may have intersected with those of my participants, and the implications for knowledge produced through our research encounters (P. Srivastava 2006: 213). Later in this chapter (3.3), I offer critical reflections on my researcher positionality and the ways in which I ‘managed’ my multiple identities during the research. As discussed in the following section, reflecting on researcher positionality is also essential when adopting a narrative analytical framework.

### *3.2.2 Narrative analytical framework*

Narratives approaches within social research have become increasingly popular, and increasingly diverse, over the past thirty years (Watson 2012; Squire, Andrews & Tamboukou 2013; Andrews 2014). Storytelling has been described as ‘a cultural practice deeply embedded in everyday life’ (Dawson 1994: 22), and as fundamentally important to ‘the organisation of human experience and understanding of how our lives are lived’ (Watson 2012: 460). My own interest in adopting a narrative analytical framework lies in the potential to ‘see different and sometimes contradictory layers of meaning, to bring them into useful dialogue with each other, and to understand more about individual and social change’ (Squire, Andrews & Tamboukou 2013: 2).

My narrative analytical framework can be located within the second-wave of narrative analysis – ‘narrative in context’, rather than the first-wave of ‘narrative as text’ (Phoenix 2013). Consistent with a constructionist ontological position, this narrative approach does not assume objectivity, but ‘privileges positionality and subjectivity’ (Reissman 2001: no page numbers). This entails an interest in multiple truths rather than ‘the truth’ of narratives; as Reissman (2001) notes, ‘verification of the “facts” of lives is less salient than understanding the changing

meaning of events for the individuals involved – and how these, in turn, are located in history and culture’ (2001: no page numbers).

When considering narrative in context, I am particularly interested in the ‘small stories’ told by research participants, or ‘how narrative is performed and accomplishes particular tasks, including identity’, rather than ‘big stories’, which use (auto)biographical stories to analyse identity using cognitive perspectives (Phoenix 2013: 72). A focus on small stories entails paying close textual and contextual attention to how people tell their stories, and the ‘doing’ of the narrative (Phoenix 2013). This involves considering the ‘performative work’ done by narratives in interview interactions (Boddy 2014: 22); as Bruner (1991) has noted, stories depend on ‘background knowledge’ of both the storyteller and the listener, and ‘how each interprets the background knowledge of the other’ (1991: 10). The stories told in interviews, then, are based ‘not only on what is *asked* in an interview, but on a judgement of what needs to be told or explained or justified’ (Boddy 2014: 22, original emphasis). Research participants, as storytellers, also ‘endeavour to manage the aspects of their selves and lives that are revealed within the context of the research encounter’ (Boddy 2014: 22).

These issues are particularly pertinent in the telling of ‘sexual stories’, or ‘narratives of the intimate life, focused especially around the erotic, the gendered and the relational’ which are ‘part of the wider discourses and ideologies abroad in society’ (Plummer 1995: 6). Inclusions and exclusions within sexual stories depend upon social interactions between producers and consumers of the stories (Plummer 1995: 21); it is therefore important to consider what the researcher perceives to be ‘askable’, what the participant perceives to be ‘tellable’, and how each is affected by their mutual ‘background knowledge’. In turn, the sayable and unsayable within sexual stories offer insights into ‘understandings of current consensus about what it is acceptable to say and do in [...] local and national cultures’ (Phoenix 2013: 73) in relation to gender and sexuality.

Storytelling is therefore a ‘collaborative practice’ (Reissman 2001: no page numbers) between tellers and listeners, but stories also exist in relation to ‘other stories, of individuals and communities, and they rely upon these bonds in order to be “tellable”’ (Andrews 2014: 87). Bruner (1991) has also emphasized the importance of considering ‘small stories’ within broader narrative contexts, or ‘canonical narratives’ which outline normative cultural expectations. Paying attention to the ways in which canonical or cultural narratives are represented within stories can ‘provide insights into the ways in which narrators use culture in doing narratives’ (Phoenix 2013: 75). This can also be considered in terms of Andrews’ (2014) ‘political narratives’, through which

individuals reveal how they position themselves within communities in which they live, to whom or what they see themselves belonging to/alienated from, how they construct notions of power, and the processes by which such power is negotiated.

(Andrews 2014: 86-87).

According to Andrews (2014), discussion of political narratives inevitably leads to an examination of 'the relationship between macro and micro narratives', or 'the relationship between the stories of individuals and the stories of the communities in which they live' (2014: 86). Andrews' (2014) definition of national narratives has also been influential when developing my own narrative analytical approach. Andrews (2014) argues that questions of national identity are invariably linked to national narratives, through which people 'develop a sense of what it means to be from this place [and] a sense of belonging and/or alienation' (Andrews 2014: 88). This is highly relevant within my research, for example, when considering how participants aligned themselves to various notions of 'Indian' or 'Western' culture through the stories they told.

Plummer's (1995) emphasis on the social processes of producing and consuming (sexual) stories is also crucial within my study, as it encourages attention to how stories are produced (i.e. within research interactions), how they are heard and interpreted (i.e. within research interactions and the analysis process), and 'the social role that stories play', or the functions that stories might serve in the lives of people and societies (Plummer 1995: 25). Through my narrative analytical approach, I therefore examine the 'small stories' told within research encounters, and the interrelations between these micro-narratives and macro-narratives of gender, sexuality and education in modern-day India. In the following section, I explore my researcher positionality, including the ways in which research participants responded to me (and vice versa), and reflect on the ways in which these interactions may have shaped the co-construction of micro-narratives within the research.

### **3.3 Researcher positionality and ethical issues**

#### *3.3.1 Researcher positionality*

As a British Asian woman in my mid-twenties, born to parents from the Indian diaspora of the 1980s, I anticipated that my researcher positionalities would be in flux while carrying out research in India (P. Srivastava 2006; Lukose 2009). For example, I was aware that participants might respond variously to my identities as British-born; of Bengali and Tamilian parentage;

from an upper-caste background (my 'Iyer' surname obscures my inter-caste heritage); as an unmarried woman; as a 'Western' researcher, and so on. While in Delhi, I found myself playing with my self-presentation in order to highlight and obscure these different identities in different contexts. For example, I acquired several churidar-kurta suits, in order to conform to the 'demure modern' of contemporary Indian middle-class femininity (Lukose 2009; Gilbertson 2014 – see Chapter Two). I wore these churidar-kurta suits when meeting education officials and seeking research permissions in the city, and during all my visits to the schools<sup>11</sup>.

In addition to this strategic 'Indian' self-presentation, students' initial perceptions of me were also shaped by the introduction I offered at the beginning of questionnaire sessions (see Table 1). I explained that I was a PhD researcher from the UK, that I was doing a PhD in International Education, and that I was interested in learning about young people's experiences of going to school in Delhi. However, this led to some confusion; during the first questionnaire session at CGS, several boys put their hands up to ask my research assistant if I was 'really a foreigner'. I then explained (and subsequently mentioned in all my introductions) that while I was born in the UK, my parents were Indian and had moved to the UK after they got married – as discussed below, this introduction still provoked extensive questioning.

Prior to fieldwork, I had assumed that my age would encourage students to feel comfortable with me during research interactions. To my surprise, however, students addressed me as 'ma'am' whenever they spoke to me, the same way in which they addressed their female teachers. On reflection, I realized that at 26, I was in fact a decade older than my participants, and indeed several years older than some of their newly qualified teachers. However, I found that my liminal status (as someone who looked Indian but was not-quite Indian, and who seemed like an authority figure but did not quite act like one) meant that I was not only an object of curiosity, but also encouraged students to interact more informally with me than the formal term of address would suggest.

My diasporic identity was particularly of interest to students; in terms of my 'Indianness', many students assumed that since I had Indian parents, I naturally 'understood' about certain things – for example, an emphasis on academic success above all else. By contrast, my upbringing in the West was a topic of assumed difference. Many students wanted to know whether I had a boyfriend; the fact that I did, and that my parents knew about him, often confirmed students' beliefs about essential differences between 'Indian' and 'Western' upbringings. My identity as a 'Westerner' was also highlighted by my basic Hindi language

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<sup>11</sup> My outfits were similar to those worn by female teachers, and to female students' salwar kameez-style uniforms (loose trousers and a loose, knee-length, full-sleeved top).

skills, which were often a source of amusement for students (see 3.5.2 for a more detailed discussion of language issues).

My own responses to students were inevitably shaped by my research interests, but also by my lack of previous experience of working in schools or with young people. I was excited about getting to know the students, particularly since I had spent the previous two years writing and talking about the importance of ‘hearing their voices’. However, I was initially extremely intimidated when interacting with students en masse, and when attempting classroom control for the first time during questionnaire sessions. This meant that I welcomed students who chose to ‘adopt’ me while I was in the school (usually girls, and some of the boys, who were participating in the research) by acting as guides and protectors from curious crowds of students. Over the course of fieldwork, I established good relationships with these students, which undoubtedly contributed to my increasing confidence in the schools, and my eventual ability to ‘deal’ with large groups of students.

While I also felt that many students became more comfortable with me over time, as discussed above (3.2.2), participants’ responses were inevitably still shaped by the ways in which I framed the research, their impressions of me and of what I wanted to hear, and so on. For example, throughout the research I was struck by participants’ emphasis on ‘Western’ and ‘Indian’ cultures; however, participants may have spoken in these terms specifically in response to my diasporic identity – perhaps as a form of ‘explanation’ for an outsider, or due to an assumption that I was seeking to establish points of difference between India and the UK through my research. After briefly introducing my research assistant below, I offer further reflections on the ways in which students responded to me during research interactions, particularly within individual interviews (3.3.3).

### *3.3.2 Introducing my research assistant*

Prior to fieldwork, I felt that gatekeepers were likely perceive my interest in talking to young men about sexuality as inappropriate, particularly in a context where heterosocial interactions, let alone intergenerational discussions about sexuality, are commonly described as taboo (see Chapter Two). Moreover, I doubted whether boys would feel comfortable enough to talk freely to me about gender and sexuality-related issues, and so I recruited a male research assistant. At the end of fieldwork Phase One (see Table 1), contacts at a Delhi-based youth NGO introduced me to Neeraj, a 20-year-old who was particularly well placed to be involved in my study, since he had worked as a peer educator and facilitated sexuality education

workshops with young people through the NGO. Based on his experience, I sought Neeraj's feedback when developing research tools via email between fieldwork Phases One and Two. For example, Neeraj advised against a questionnaire item on students' caste backgrounds; as this is not information usually requested on official forms, he suggested that students may feel uncomfortable responding to such an item.

During fieldwork Phase Two, Neeraj's age and his fluency in Hindi meant that most students felt relaxed and able to interact with him immediately, while it took some a little longer to feel similarly comfortable with me. Occasionally, Neeraj carried out ad-hoc translation – for example, if students did not understand me when I was explaining the research. As well as assisting during questionnaire sessions, Neeraj co-facilitated mixed student FGDs with me, and carried out single-sex FGDs and individual interviews with boys at all the schools.

### *3.3.3 Ethical issues*

The research received ethical approval from the University of Sussex Social Sciences and Arts Cross-School Research Ethics Committee (SSA C-REC) in March 2013 (see Appendix 1). In order to respect young people's right to participate in the research (Morrow 2008), I did not seek parental consent on their behalf. At 15-17 years old, I believed that students were capable of giving fully informed consent for participation; principals and senior staff also confirmed that informed consent from schools and the students themselves was sufficient. At the same time, I emphasized students' 'right of withdrawal' when explaining the research to them, to ensure that they did not participate in the study against their will (Morrow 2008). Following the ESRC's *Research Ethics Guidebook* (2011), information sheets emphasized that students were not obliged to participate in the study, and that they were free to withdraw from the research any time before, during or after the research process. I reiterated confidentiality, anonymity and right of withdrawal before all research activities, and gave participants opportunities to ask questions before signing consent forms, and before each research encounter (see Appendix 2 for information sheets and consent forms).

Neeraj, my research assistant, and Alok, who translated Hindi data from audio recordings (see 3.5.2), both signed contracts to indicate that they would respect confidentiality and anonymity within the research, and that they would only disclose information shared by research participants with me (unless participants specified that they did not want this information to be shared at all). At the start of all FGDs and interviews that he conducted alone, Neeraj emphasized confidentiality, anonymity and right of withdrawal; he also informed participants



that I would be listening to the audio recordings later on. I shared audio recordings for translation with Alok via a shared, password protected Dropbox folder, and once translation was complete, these audio recordings were deleted.

The names of the study schools have been changed, while pseudonyms are used for all teachers and students throughout the thesis. In the schools, students addressed teachers by their first name followed by 'ma'am' or 'sir'; to reflect this manner of address while maintaining anonymity, in the thesis I refer to teachers using their subject and 'ma'am' or 'sir' (e.g. 'Biology ma'am', 'English sir'). At the start of each individual interview, students were asked if they wanted to choose their own pseudonyms, and the majority of students did this. I assigned pseudonyms for those who did not want to choose their own pseudonyms, and for students who were not interviewed individually. Some students chose existing nicknames for pseudonyms, while several boys chose pseudonyms that reflected their musical tastes (e.g. Rapper, Rocker, Honey Singh – the latter being the name of a popular Indian rapper) or sporting interests (e.g. Lionel, after Lionel Messi). 'Tornado' was another interesting choice of pseudonym, but by way of explanation, this student simply said that he had 'always liked the word'.

In addition to formal procedures, it is important to consider the ethical implications of my researcher positionality in shaping research interactions. For example, students' 'reading' of my diasporic identity may have encouraged them to talk frankly about their romantic experiences; several girls confided in me about their 'boy troubles' during interviews, which they may have felt more comfortable doing in light of my 'Western' (and therefore more 'liberal') identity. Additionally, girls' and boys' openness with myself and Neeraj may have developed due to the methodological time that we spent in the schools, but also simply because we provided a sympathetic ear to their experiences. Several students commented that adults (i.e., their parents and their teachers) never usually talked or listened to them in the way we did.

In light of the ways participants opened up to us, I was keen to establish a 'reciprocal exchange' during the research. I felt this was important not only to develop and maintain trusting, open relationships with participants, but Oakley (1981) has also described such an approach as an important feature of feminist research practice. At the end of FGDs and interviews, I therefore asked participants if they had any questions for me, and assured them that they could ask me anything; this led to questions about my own opinions on the topics we had been discussing, perceived cultural differences between India and the UK, or about my

personal experiences and family life. During classroom observation days, students sometimes asked to see pictures of my family and/or my boyfriend, which I showed them on my phone. In all cases, I answered and behaved as openly as I could; since I was asking participants to reveal so much of themselves during the research, I was keen to offer at least something of myself.

### **3.4 The fieldwork context: negotiating access, and introducing the schools**

#### *3.4.1 Negotiating access and selecting the schools*

Fieldwork Phase One in Delhi (January-March 2013, see Table 1) was largely a ‘scoping’ visit; the main objectives were to refine the research focus, seek advice on potential study schools, negotiate access to these schools, and gain necessary research permissions. In order to do this, I worked with academics at NUEPA (National University of Educational Planning and Administration) and JNU (Jawaharlal Nehru University), and stakeholders at gender and sexuality-focused organisations such as UNFPA, TARSHI, the National Foundation of India, and Pravah. I was advised by these contacts that in order to include young people from a range of socio-economic backgrounds, I should include a private school (for students from elite and upper-middle class backgrounds), a Central Government School (for middle-class students), and a State Government School (for students from ‘economically weaker sections’, EWS).

The schools eventually included in my study were not exactly ‘selected’; their inclusion was contingent on the contacts I was able to make during fieldwork Phase One, as well as the permissions that I was able to negotiate. Nevertheless, the three schools in the study do reflect my original research design, as they represent three different schooling systems attended by students from a range of socio-economic backgrounds (see 3.4.5). The inclusion of co-educational schools reflected my methodological interest in exploring both girls’ and boys’ experiences, while selecting English-medium schools was more a reflection of my own linguistic shortcomings and reluctance to involve a translator in the research (although the former eventually led to a compromise on the latter – see 3.5.2). These criteria meant that a fairly atypical State Government School was included in the study; the vast majority of State Government Schools in Delhi are not only single-sex, but also Hindi-medium. As discussed below (3.4.3; 3.4.5), this inevitably had implications for the socio-economic backgrounds of the students who participated in my study.

Table 1: Fieldwork timeline

<b>Fieldwork phase</b>	<b>Time period</b>	<b>Research activities in Delhi</b>		
<b>Phase One: Scoping</b>	January-March 2013	Scoping: collaborating with academics, NGO actors, education stakeholders to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Develop research focus</li> <li>○ Seek advice on potential schools for the study</li> <li>○ Negotiate access to schools</li> <li>○ Gain research permissions</li> </ul> Document collection: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Curriculum documents</li> <li>○ Education policy documents</li> </ul> Hindi language training Recruiting a research assistant		
<b>Phase Two: Data collection</b>	August 2013	<i>Rosebud International School</i>  Pilot questionnaires	<b>CGS</b> Research permissions Student questionnaires Principal interview Teacher FGD	<b>RIS</b> Research permissions Student questionnaires
	September 2013	<b>CGS</b> Teacher interviews x7 Student FGDs (mixed, single-sex)	<b>RIS</b> Student FGDs (mixed) Teacher interviews x7	<b>SGS</b> Research permissions Principal interview
	October 2013	<b>CGS</b> Student interviews x12	<b>RIS</b> Student FGDs (single-sex) Student interviews x2	<b>SGS</b> Student questionnaires Student FGDs (mixed, single-sex)
	November 2013	<b>CGS</b> Classroom observations x3	<b>RIS</b> Teacher interviews x3 Student interviews x6 Classroom observations x1	<b>SGS</b> Teacher interviews x6 Student interviews x11 Classroom observations x2
	December 2013	<b>CGS</b> End-of-research session	<b>RIS</b> Classroom observations x2 End-of-research session	<b>SGS</b> Classroom observations x1 End-of-research session
<b>Phase Three: Data validation, sharing findings</b>	November 2014	Sharing preliminary findings and gaining feedback from student and teacher participants at CGS, RIS and SGS Meetings with academics, NGO and education stakeholders to present, discuss and gain feedback on preliminary findings and recommendations		

### 3.4.2 A brief introduction to senior secondary education in India

As discussed in Chapter One, primary education (Classes 1-8) and secondary education (Classes 9-10) are free and compulsory for children aged 6-14 in India, and this is followed by two years of senior secondary education (Classes 11-12). Until 2011, students sat national board examinations at the end of Class 10 and Class 12. However, following *National Curriculum*

*Framework* recommendations (NCERT 2005), the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) made Class 10 board examinations optional as a means of reducing stress among secondary school students (CBSE 2012).

CBSE is one of the main national examining boards in India, and all three schools included in this study are CBSE-affiliated, which means that they follow the same curriculum and assessment patterns. Across national education boards, senior secondary education is divided into three academic streams: Science<sup>12</sup>, Commerce and Humanities. Students choose their preferred stream for Classes 11 and 12, but admission is conditional on Class 10 cumulative grade point average (CGPA); CGPA boundaries for admission into academic streams reflect and reinforce the hierarchy of disciplines within the secondary education system.

At the study schools, a CGPA of 8 out of 10 or higher is required for admission into the Science streams, a CGPA between 6 and 8 for admission into the Commerce stream, and CGPA below 6 for the Humanities stream (Vice Principal ma'am, CGS – follow-up interview; Senior Co-ordinator ma'am, RIS – follow-up interview; Principal ma'am, SGS – follow-up interview)<sup>13</sup>. As a result of these criteria, admission into the Humanities stream is often regarded as a last resort for less academically able students, rather than an active choice (CGS Teacher Focus Group; Senior Co-ordinator ma'am, RIS – interview).

### *3.4.3 Introducing the schools*

#### Central Government School

Established in 1963, the Central Government School (CGS) Organisation now oversees the running of 1,074 co-educational secondary and senior secondary schools across India. The CGS system provides education for the children of central government employees, and Central Government Schools pride themselves on 'promoting national integration and a sense of "Indianness"' (CGS website 2014). The Principal of the CGS in which I worked explained that examples of Indian culture in the school include the celebration of Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and other religious festivals at the school, which reflect an 'integrated cultural system', and 'unity in diversity' (Principal sir, CGS – interview).

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<sup>12</sup> Science streams are sub-divided into 'Non-medical' and 'Medical', with Computer Science included in the former and Biology in the latter.

<sup>13</sup> Criteria for admission to Class 11 are comparable at CGS and RIS, but at SGS, there are slightly lower CGPA boundaries overall, and specifically lower CGPA boundaries for students from SC/ST backgrounds (see 3.4.3).

The CGS included in this study is located in a sub-city of West Delhi. Established in 2003, it is a dual-medium (i.e. English and Hindi), co-educational, double-shift school; the first shift runs from 6.45am-12.30pm, and the second from 12.15pm-5.30pm, Monday to Saturday. In the first shift, two Science streams and one Humanities stream are offered for Classes 11-12, and in the second, two Commerce streams are offered for these classes. The two shifts function as completely separate schools, and only share their principal and school buildings; I worked exclusively with the first shift. In the 2013-14 academic year, there were 1,261 students enrolled in the CGS first shift, with 148 students in Class 11 (see Table 2 below). There were 13 first-shift senior secondary teachers (7 female, 6 male), all with postgraduate teaching (PGT) qualifications (Vice Principal ma'am, CGS – follow-up interview).

CGS school fees vary depending on students' age and, and at senior secondary level, academic stream, but CGS teachers described the fee structure as 'nominal' for the majority of parents at the school (CGS Teacher Focus Group). Tuition fees for boys at senior secondary level at the CGS range from ₹3,600 (£35.17, Humanities & Commerce streams) to ₹4,800 (£46.90, Science stream) per year<sup>14</sup>; there are no tuition fees for girls at any level in the CGS system, reflecting the CGS Organisation's aim to encourage girls' education. With an additional ₹3,200 (£31.26) per year charged to all students (e.g. for admission fees, computer fund, school development fund contribution), CGS therefore charges between ₹3,200 (£31.26) and ₹8,000 (£78.16) per year at upper secondary level.

#### Ramani International School

Ramani International School is a private school, which was founded in 2004 by Mr R.S. Roshan. Mr Roshan was the founder of the Suman Education Group, which runs several private secondary schools, playschools, and a higher education college in Delhi. After R.S. Roshan's death a few years ago, his son M.S. Roshan took over as Chairman and Principal of Ramani International; M.S. Roshan's son acts as Vice-Chairman of the school, and his daughter-in-law as its Academic Co-ordinator. According to the school's mission statement, RIS aims to 'produce successful, responsible, creative, global citizens striving for excellence and committed to our great nation and progress of society' (RIS website 2015).

The school is located in a sub-city of Delhi, not far from the CGS in which I worked. RIS is an English-medium, co-educational, single-shift school, running from 8.15am-2pm, Monday to Saturday. In the 2013-14 academic year, there were at total of 2,300 students enrolled in RIS,

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<sup>14</sup> All conversions according to 1 INR = 0.00977 GBP, [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com) (Accessed 7 March 2014).

with 230 students in Class 11 (see Table 2 below). There were 30 senior secondary teachers (18 female, 12 male), all with postgraduate teaching (PGT) qualifications (Senior Co-ordinator ma'am, RIS – follow-up interview). RIS was described to me as a 'mid-range' private school, evident when comparing RIS fee structures with more elite Delhi private schools. RIS charges ₹42,000 (£410.34) per year for senior secondary students, while Delhi Public Schools (a network of elite private schools in India) typically charge ₹191,000 per year (£1,866.07) for Classes 11-12 (DPS Mathura Road website 2014). Vasant Valley, one of the top private schools in Delhi, charges a total of ₹215,932 per year (£2,109.66) for senior secondary students (Vasant Valley website 2014).

#### State Government School

The State Government School in which I worked is one of 11 Pratibha Schools in the NDMC (New Delhi Municipal Corporation) area. The first Pratibha School was established in 1973, with the aim of providing free, high quality education to 'the gifted children of the weaker sections' of central Delhi (Pratibha Education Society website). Pratibha Schools are governed by the Pratibha Education Society (PES), but as funding is provided by the Delhi State Government, they are still considered to be Delhi State Government Schools.

Pratibha Schools were originally selective schools, with children sitting competitive entrance exams in order to secure admission, and with reservations in place for children from SC/ST (scheduled caste/scheduled tribe) backgrounds. However, following the Government of India's Education for All (SSA) programme (2000 onwards) and the RTE Act (2009), the admission criteria for Pratibha Schools has changed. The schools still cater for children from low-income families, with 70% of places at Pratibha Schools reserved for students with a parental annual income below ₹75,000 per annum (£759.16), and reservations in place for children from SC/ST families, OBC (other backward caste) families, and children with special educational needs. However, competitive entrance exams are no longer set; any student living in the NDMC area can apply to a Pratibha School, and admission is determined via a lottery which allocates places according to the reservation system.

There are several features of Pratibha Schools which distinguish them from other Delhi State Government Schools. Pratibha Schools aim to limit admission to a maximum class size of 35, while the schools are all co-educational and dual-medium (i.e. Hindi and English), unlike the majority of Delhi State Government Schools which are single-sex, operating with a girls' shift in the morning and a boys' shift in the afternoon, and Hindi-medium (Diwan 2002). There are

also higher qualification requirements for teachers at Pratibha Schools; while other Delhi State Government Schools recruit graduates with teacher training qualifications (TGT) for Classes 11 and 12, Pratibha Schools only consider candidates with first-class postgraduate teacher (PGT) qualifications. Accordingly, teachers at Pratibha Schools are also on a higher pay grade than teachers in other State Government Schools.

The Pratibha School in which I worked (SGS) was founded in 1981, and is a dual-medium (i.e. English and Hindi), co-educational, single-shift school, which runs from 8am-2.30pm, Monday to Saturday. In the 2013-14 academic year, there were 1,075 students enrolled at the school, with 109 Class 11 students (see Table 2 below). There were 13 permanent senior secondary teachers (all female), all with PGT qualifications. The SGS does not charge tuition fees, although students pay a small amount (₹20, £0.19) per month for 'miscellaneous charges' (Principal ma'am, SGS – interview). Students whose parental income is less than ₹185,000 (£1,807.45) are provided with free textbooks and money for stationery, while students from SC/ST/OBC and minority groups are provided with financial support of ₹1,000 (£9.77) per year (Principal ma'am, SGS – interview). Students who use the school buses (provided by the Delhi Transport Corporation) pay an additional ₹150 (£1.46) per month for the service; overall, the SGS therefore charges between ₹240 (£2.34) and ₹2,040 (£19.93) per year at upper secondary level.

*Table 2: Class 11 enrolment – CGS, RIS, SGS*

School	Academic stream		Number of students	
		Class	Girls	Boys
CGS (First shift)	Science Non-medical	11A*	13	30
	Science Medical	11B*	26	28
	Humanities	11C*	27	24
	<b>Total</b>		<b>66</b>	<b>82</b>
RIS	Science Medical	11B*	18	10
	Science Non-medical	11A	2	33
		11C	5	31
	Commerce	11D*	11	28
		11E	11	19
	Humanities	11F*	10	26
		11G	12	14
	<b>Total</b>		<b>69</b>	<b>161</b>
SGS	Science (Medical and Non-medical)	11A*	10	26
	Commerce	11B*	11	17
	Humanities	11C*	12	33
	<b>Total</b>		<b>33</b>	<b>76</b>

*\*Indicates academic streams included in the study*

As shown in Table 2, there is a considerable gender imbalance at RIS and SGS, with only 30.0% and 30.2% of the Class 11 population made up of girls at these schools respectively. The CGS figures are less imbalanced, with girls making up 44.6% of the Class 11 population, and the proportion of girls and boys in the Science Medical and Humanities streams almost equivalent; this could be due to the school's policy of providing free education to girls. However, there are imbalances in the Science Non-medical streams at all the schools; senior CGS and RIS staff attributed this to an overall lack of interest in Science subjects among girls (Vice Principal ma'am, CGS – interview; Senior Co-ordinator ma'am, RIS – interview).

#### *3.4.4 A note on the schools' geographical locations*

RIS and CGS are located in the same sub-city of West Delhi, an area that has seen rapid development over the past 25 years. In the post-liberalization period, small towns in West Delhi have become small cities, which have 'fuse[d] with the metropolis of Delhi itself'; the Delhi Metro has played a significant role in expanding the city's urban landscape (Burke 2013b: no page numbers). Accelerated economic development in the area has led to the presence of newly monied middle classes (Burke 2013b) in West Delhi, and the establishment of CGS and RIS in the area in the early 2000s reflects the growing demand for education among this newly located middle class.

The SGS in which I worked is located in a part of the city with a much longer history. The NDMC area, also known as Lutyens' Delhi, was established as a 'symbol of British power' during the 1920s and 1930s (Dalrymple 1994). It remains the administrative centre of the city, with government buildings, courts and embassies all located within the NDMC area (Dasgupta 2014). This means that, although the SGS in this study still largely caters for students from lower socio-economic status backgrounds, the school was also attended by children of high-ranking government officials who live and work in the NDMC area.





*Assembly at the Central Government School*



*Main school building, Ramani International School*



*State Government school, from the school grounds*

### 3.4.5 Student demographics

#### Socio-economic status

I initially gained an insight into student demographics at each of the schools from senior management staff. At RIS, I was told that students are mostly from upper-middle class backgrounds, 'business class' or 'service class' families – i.e. with parents who were businessmen and women, or professionals such as doctors, engineers and government officials (Senior Co-ordinator ma'am, RIS – interview). At CGS, I was informed that students range from low to middle-income backgrounds, reflecting the broad spectrum of occupations covered by the term 'central government employees'. These range from 'sub-staff' employed at the school to high-ranking members of the police force, defence services and the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) (Principal sir, CGS– interview). At SGS, I was told that students are mainly from lower and middle-income backgrounds, with parents' occupations ranging from vegetable sellers, rickshaw drivers, and shopkeepers, to mid- to high-level government employees (reflecting the school's location in the NDMC area; Principal ma'am, SGS – interview)

Student questionnaire data largely confirm these accounts of students' socio-economic profiles at the schools. As a stratified random sampling approach was adopted for student questionnaires (see 3.5.1), demographic data collected via student questionnaires can be seen as representative of the school populations. Questionnaire items Q38 and Q40 asked students whether their father and mother currently had a job, and if so, to indicate what this job was. Responses were coded using the National Classification of Occupations (2004), developed by the Directorate General of Employment & Training in India and comparable to the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) from the UK Office of National Statistics. This meant that parents' occupations could be ranked according to a standardized measure; the information provided by students was cross-referenced with the NCO directory of occupations (see Appendix 4a).

Overall, the majority of students' fathers were in jobs classified from Division 1 (Legislators, Senior Officials and Managers) to Division 5 (Service Workers, Shop and Market Sales Workers) (93.7%, n = 89). There was a significant difference between fathers' occupations at the schools; the vast majority of RIS fathers were in Divisions 1-3 (84.6%, n = 22); just over half of CGS fathers were in Divisions 1-3 (51.2%, n = 21), with a high proportion in Division 5 (39.0%, n = 16 – reflecting the high number of fathers in the police force); and there was a greater range of

occupations among SGS fathers, with 50.0% (n = 14) in Divisions 1-3, 21.4% (n = 6) in Division 4 and 17.9% (n = 5) in Division 5 occupations (see Appendix 4a).

Far fewer mothers were employed than students' fathers (n = 21, compared to 95 employed fathers – see Appendix 4a). I have therefore used fathers' occupations to broadly reflect students' socio-economic status. There are limitations of using the NCO (2004) as an indicator of socio-economic status; for example, occupations described as 'businessman' would be classified under Division 2 ('Professionals') or Division 3 ('Legislators, Senior Officials and Managers'), which means that Delhi's super-rich business moguls would misleadingly be classified alongside professionals such as doctors and lawyers of the city's 'old' middle class. However, based on teachers' accounts and questionnaire data, it seems safe to conclude that the majority of students came from either old middle-class backgrounds, comprised of 'salaried bureaucrats and professionals', or the 'new' middle classes of urban white-collar workers (Donner & De Neve 2011: 3-4; see Chapter Two), with some students at all the schools (but mainly SGS) from working-class backgrounds.

#### Age and religion

Data on students' ages and religion were also collected in Section 5 of the questionnaire (Q36 and Q37). Students in Class 11 were mostly aged 15-17, with 30.4% (n = 49) aged 15, 8.7% (n = 14) aged 17, and the majority aged 16 (59.0%, n = 95). All questionnaire respondents at CGS and RIS were 15-17 years old, the expected age group for Class 11 students. By contrast, there was a wider age range at SGS, with students ranging from age 13 (1 student) to age 19 (1 student) (see Appendix 4b). The number of older students at SGS reflects the fact that there were several 'repeaters' in Class 11, who had failed their Class 11 exams and so were repeating Class 11 before being allowed to progress to Class 12.

Responses to Q37 revealed that the overwhelming majority of students (91.9%, n = 147) at the schools were Hindu. Only one of the CGS respondents and one of the RIS respondents were Muslim, while at SGS, four students stated that they were Muslim and one stated they were Sikh. While evidently still low numbers, the comparative religious diversity at SGS can be attributed to the quota system operating at the school, in which spaces are reserved for students from disadvantaged communities, including 'minority' religions (see Appendix 4b).

#### *3.4.6 Stage 2 and 3 participant demographics*

Since participation in Stages 2 and 3 of data collection was voluntary (see 3.5.1), the 30 'main' students who participated in all research stages (questionnaires, mixed and single-sex FGDs, interviews) were not representative of the individual schools' populations. As with wider student populations at the schools, the majority of these 30 students came from single income families ( $n = 23$ ), with all but one of the students from families with fathers as the sole earners. However, unlike the wider school populations, the majority of the main student participants were from higher income backgrounds; 18 out of 23 students from single-income families were classified in Division 1-3 occupations, while for three out of five students from dual-income families (four at SGS, one at CGS), the primary earners were also classified in Divisions 1-3<sup>15</sup> (see Appendix 4c).

In terms of students' ages, the majority of the main participants were 16 at the time of the study ( $n = 18$ ), with nine 15 year olds (one at CGS, four at RIS and five at SGS) and one 17 year old (CGS) in the group. This is largely consistent with findings from the questionnaire sample, in which the majority of students were aged 16. The group of main participants also seem to be largely representative in terms of religion; 27 out of the 30 main participants are Hindu, with one Muslim student (CGS), and two students with 'no religion' (CGS, SGS).

As mentioned above (3.3.2), information on students' caste was not collected via questionnaires due to the potential sensitivity of including such an item. However, 20 out of the 30 main participants referred to their caste status during individual interviews, usually when marriage was discussed. The majority of these students ( $n = 17$ ) indicated that they were from General Caste families (5 CGS students, 7 RIS students, 5 SGS students); 2 students (1 RIS student, 1 SGS student) indicated that they were from OBC families; 1 SGS student mentioned he was from an inter-caste family.

Overall, the characteristics of the 30 'main' student participants reflect their wider school populations to some extent, particularly in terms of age, religion, and single/dual income families. However, the majority of students who volunteered to participate in the later research stages are largely from higher income backgrounds, with all the student participants at SGS, and the majority of student participants at CGS and RIS, from families in which their main parent's occupation is classified as Division 1-3. It is possible that this is because students from higher income families are more confident in their English language skills, and therefore more likely to volunteer to participate in a study which they knew would primarily be in

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<sup>15</sup> Responses from two students from single-income families and two students from dual-income families were not valid for classification according to NCO (2004) divisions.

English. However, two students from lower income families did volunteer to participate in the study, and one of these students (Harsha, 11C – CGS) spoke exclusively in Hindi during FGDs and her interview, suggesting that language was not necessarily a barrier against participation for all students. While the ‘mix’ of students’ class backgrounds provides a crucial context within each school, in light of the differences between school demographics and the main participants’ demographics, it is important to note that the study has largely captured the specific experiences of young people from urban, middle-class, general caste, Hindu backgrounds.

### **3.5 Research methods**

I adopted a multi-method approach to the research, in order to capture some of the ‘complexity, multiplicity and contradictions’ (Allen 2005: 24) of young people’s experiences of gender and sexuality within schools. My multi-method approach is broadly aligned with a ‘qualitatively driven’ approach (Mason 2006: 10); I adopted a reflexive approach during data collection and analysis, and was also interested in the more nuanced understandings that a multi-method approach might offer. Rather than using multiple research methods as a form of triangulation, I was aware that data from different methods were unlikely to be ‘internally consensual and neatly consistent’ (Mason 2006: 20). As Mason (2006) has noted, ‘if the social world is multi-dimensional, then surely our explanations need to be likewise’ (2006: 20). In line with a reflexive approach to multi-method design, I offer reflections on how findings from different research methods relate to each other throughout the analysis chapters.

#### *3.5.1 Data collection*

Data collection took place during fieldwork Phase Two (August-December 2013), and I adopted a ‘building block’ approach (Allen 2005: 24) so that emerging findings from each research method informed the design of the next. Responses to questionnaires shaped the design of mixed FGD guides, topics discussed in mixed FGDs informed the design of single-sex FGDs, and semi-structured interviews drew upon emerging themes from questionnaires and FGDs. Classroom observation days provided an opportunity to explore emerging themes from quantitative and qualitative methods through participant observation and informal conversations with students.

## Students

Data collection started with student questionnaires in each school. I included questionnaires in the research design in line with the UK *Youth Values* study, in which young people were more willing to discuss sensitive or controversial topics in writing (Thomson & Holland 2004). Given the reported taboo of talking about sexuality in India, I felt that such an approach would prove useful; however, while refining the questionnaire in the field, I reflected that I would not be able to gauge students' level of comfort when responding to items about sexuality through questionnaires, and so this might not be the most appropriate way of introducing sensitive topics. Questionnaires therefore included broad areas which would be explored in more detail through qualitative methods. The questionnaire was divided into five sections ('At School', 'Learning about your Health', 'Life outside school', 'Your future', 'About you'), and included: multiple-choice closed questions designed to gain more information about students (e.g. academic stream, religion, parents' level of education); Likert-type scale items aimed at gauging students' gendered attitudes (e.g. gender and academic ability; gender and personal safety); and open-ended questions encouraging students to elaborate on Likert-type scale responses (e.g. 'Please explain your answer to Q25'), and also provided space for responses detailing topics not included in questionnaire items (e.g. Q28, 'Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your life outside school?') (see Appendix 3 for student questionnaire).

The questionnaires were piloted with eight Class 11 students in Rosebud International School, a private school in South Delhi. After piloting, I removed several 'ice-breaker' questions which generated a lot of qualitative data not particularly relevant to the research. For example, 'What is your favourite subject at school?' on the pilot questionnaire was replaced with 'Which stream are you in?' (Q1). After refining the questionnaire based on the pilot, I administered the questionnaires to students in CGS, RIS and SGS. At CGS and SGS, I was granted access to students in all three academic streams (11A, 11B, 11C), while at RIS, I was granted access to three out of seven academic streams (11B, 11D, 11F). Using class lists, I carried out stratified random sampling so that within the sample of 60 in each school, the number of girls and boys included from each stream was proportionally representative of each school's Class 11 population. The intended proportions of girls to boys in the school samples were as follows: CGS – 45:55; RIS – 39:61; SGS – 30:70 (see Table 2), and at all three schools, the final questionnaire samples largely reflected these ratios (CGS – 44:56, RIS – 44:56, SGS – 35:65). In

total, questionnaires were completed by 60 students at CGS, 54 students at RIS, and 62 students at SGS.

Questionnaires were completed anonymously, but the last page of the questionnaire provided students with the opportunity to include their name and class if they wished to participate in the next stages of the research. If they did, space was also provided for students to list up to six friends from Class 11 with whom they would like to participate in FGDs. Including participants according to friendship groups within FGDs, particularly when working on sensitive topics with young people, can help participants feel more at ease (Thomson & Holland 2004). As far as possible, when putting together groups of participants for the FGDs, I therefore included students with at least one friend they had mentioned (and who had also volunteered for the next stages of the research). Although FGDs can be an opportunity to study the ways in which individuals ‘collectively make sense of various phenomena’ (Bryman 2001: 338), I also recognized FGDs as artificial, constructed contexts, in which participants (and the researcher) perform particular identities through group interactions (see 3.2.2).

All FGDs started by establishing several ground rules – confidentiality, respect and creating a non-judgemental ‘safe space’ – which were written on cards and stuck on desks or on walls so they remained clearly visible throughout the sessions. FGDs took place in various spaces which were available during lesson time (e.g. empty classrooms, school libraries); to maintain confidentiality, Neeraj and I ensured that each space was private and our discussions would not be overheard. Four FGDs were carried out at each school, with five or six students in each: two mixed FGDs, followed by two single-sex FGDs made up respectively of the girls and boys who participated in the mixed FGDs. In some cases, students who participated in mixed FGDs did not participate in single-sex FGDs either because they were unavailable, or in a few cases, because they no longer wanted to participate in the research. In these cases, the FGDs either went ahead in smaller groups, or other students volunteered to participate instead. 41 students participated in FGDs in total: 13 students at CGS (6 girls, 7 boys), 17 students at RIS (8 girls, 9 boys) and 11 students at SGS (5 girls, 6 boys) (see Appendix 5).

Mixed FGDs aimed to explore students’ attitudes towards issues of gender-based violence, particularly in light of ongoing debates about violence against women in 2013, and their attitudes towards and potential assumptions about gender stereotypes (see Appendix 6a for mixed student FGD guide). These topics were explored by showing students three images depicting ‘eve-teasing’, asking students to describe what was happening in the pictures, and what their reactions were; this led onto discussions of whether eve-teasing took place in their

schools. Students were then asked to brainstorm any ideas they had in relation to the phrase ‘act like a man’ and ‘be ladylike’ (in all FGDs, students separated themselves into single-sex groups for this activity – see Appendix 7 for examples of brainstorms). Students were then asked to explain their brainstorm to the group, and could also ask questions about the other group’s brainstorm. These creative methods were used during FGDs in order to stimulate discussion around sensitive topics; for example, the eve-teasing images gave students something to respond to, rather than having to start a discussion in the abstract. Meanwhile, the brainstorming activity gave students the opportunity to reflect and discuss the topics among themselves before explaining their ideas to the group, which I hoped would help to encourage a more lively discussion, and also make the research process more engaging and enjoyable for the students.

Single-sex FGDs focused on sexuality-related issues, and particularly sexual learning at school. This started with an activity asking students to arrange cards with various sexual health-related topics (e.g. contraception, menstruation, HIV & AIDS – see Appendix 6b for single-sex student FGD guide) into ‘yes’ and ‘no’ piles to indicate which of these topics, if any, they had learned about at school. This activity was followed by a discussion of what students had been taught about these topics, how they learned about these topics if not at school, and so on. The second activity involved showing the students the quotation from the sex education debates which inspired my research (‘Sex education is against Indian culture...’ – see Chapter One), and asking students what they thought about the statement. Follow-up discussions centred around what ‘Indian culture’ was, how young people learned about it, and how they defined ‘sex education’. The last activity was developed based on a recurring theme from the mixed FGDs; many students referred to ‘Indian mentality’ as the cause of sexual harassment, and so the activity aimed to explore students’ definitions of ‘Indian mentality’. This involved students brainstorming their ideas, and follow-up discussions in which students were encouraged to expand upon why they thought the mentality they described was particularly ‘Indian’, whether they thought it was found in other countries, and how they thought this mentality might be changed.

I carried out mixed as well as single-sex FGDs as I was keen to observe how girls and boys interacted within focus group contexts, particularly when discussing gender-related issues. In all but two of the mixed focus group discussions, there were lively debates among students (often with girls and boys on opposing sides), and most of the students seemed to enjoy debating the topics introduced. Of the two mixed focus group discussions that were less lively, the students in CGS Mixed Focus Group 2 simply seemed to be less outgoing (they continued



to be the quieter participants in single-sex FGDs); however, in RIS Mixed Focus Group 1, the girls and boys were clearly uncomfortable discussing the FGD topics in front of each other. Since discussions in this focus group had been so stilted, the following day Neeraj and I spoke individually to some of the girls and boys who had participated, in an attempt to find out what had gone wrong. It transpired that the girls and boys we had put together did not get on at all; the girls feared the boys would tease them if they spoke up in the group, while the boys did not trust the girls to respect confidentiality. Based on this experience, we made sure that in subsequent mixed FGDs (at RIS and SGS), we checked the proposed list of FGD participants with students beforehand, and altered the groups according to students' preferences.

Based on my understanding that sexuality is rarely discussed in heterosocial groups in India, I decided that single-sex FGDs would be best in order to discuss sexuality-related topics. In light of students' accounts of their experiences of sexual learning in mixed classrooms in these FGDs (see Chapter Four), this division of topics between mixed and single-sex FGDs seemed well advised. Several girls commented that they preferred the single-sex focus groups, as they felt they could speak more freely than in mixed groups. Overall, single-sex FGDs were less confrontational than mixed FGDs, and the girls' FGDs more relaxed than the boys'; in the RIS and SGS boys' focus groups, Neeraj had to intervene to break up occasionally heated disputes between opposing friendship groups.

I included individual interviews in the research design as an opportunity to learn about students' personal experiences in more depth; as Phoenix, Frosh & Pattman (2003) have noted, individual interviews also provide participants with the opportunity to talk about experiences which they may not feel comfortable revealing in group settings. Students did use individual interviews as an opportunity to talk about topics they had not in FGDs. For example, many girls and boys spoke about their personal experiences of romantic relationships during individual interviews, while these had only been spoken about in general terms in FGDs; some students took the opportunity to speak disparagingly of their peers who had participated in FGDs, as a means of distancing themselves from (what they perceived as) less desirable peer behaviour; others took the opportunity to ask Neeraj and myself for clarification or more information on some of the sexuality-related topics discussed in FGDs.

I followed a semi-structured design for interviews, which enabled a focus on key research areas, but also meant that areas I had not anticipated could be discussed and explored. Interviews focused on three main areas: life at home, life at school, and sexuality and relationships (see Appendix 8a for semi-structured student interview guide). We drew upon

students' questionnaire responses to start discussions about life at home, and also sought to gain insights into what 'Indian mentality' might mean within students' family lives. When talking about school, topics included interpersonal relationships with teachers, and any gender differentiation in teachers' behaviour.

Sexuality-related topics discussed during individual interviews included 'girlfriend-boyfriend' relationships at school, what students thought about 'intimate' (i.e. sexual) relationships<sup>16</sup>, and students' attitudes towards marriage, same-sex relationships and sex education. Talking about marriage presented an opportunity to bring up the topic of caste identity, particularly in the context of intra-caste arranged or inter-caste love marriages, and to explore whether students (and/or their families) perceived caste to be an important part of their identity. Of the 41 students who participated in FGDs, 30 were interviewed individually: 11 students at CGS (6 girls, 5 boys); 8 students at RIS (4 girls, 4 boys); and 11 students at SGS (5 girls, 6 boys).

### Teachers

I used purposive sampling (Patton 2002) to include Class 11 teachers in the study. I was keen to include Biology teachers at all the schools, as well as teachers and members of staff with pastoral responsibilities (e.g. class teachers; the RIS School Counsellor). In light of their involvement in disciplinary practices in the schools, I also sought to include sports teachers, although eventually it was only possible to interview the RIS sports teacher. Where possible, I included a mixture of female and male teachers in the study; however, the majority of senior teachers at the schools were female (see 3.4.3), and so it was not possible to form a 'balanced' sample.

I was able to interview both the CGS and SGS Principals, but the RIS Principal did not respond to several requests for an interview; eventually, I was informed he was not interested in participating in the study. The acting Vice Principal and the Senior Co-ordinator (i.e., in charge of the senior secondary classes) were the most senior members of the RIS management who participated in the research. In total, 25 teachers and members of staff were interviewed: 8 teachers at CGS (6 female, 2 male), 10 teachers at RIS (6 female, 4 male), and 7 teachers at SGS (6 female, 1 male) (see Appendix 5).

I had intended to carry out FGDs and individual interviews with teachers at all three schools. However, it was only possible to conduct a focus group with CGS teachers, which was largely

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<sup>16</sup> 'Girlfriend-boyfriend' and 'intimate' are examples of terminology used by students during FGDs, which we subsequently adopted in FGDs and interviews.

due to the structure of the school day at CGS; first shift teachers remained in the school after lessons from 12.30pm-2.30pm every day, and it was during this period that I arranged the CGS Teacher Focus Group. Without this allocated non-teaching time at RIS and SGS, it proved difficult to find 30-45 minutes when 5-7 senior teachers were available to participate in a focus group. After several failed attempts to arrange teacher FGDs at RIS and SGS, I decided to move on to individual interviews. At CGS, five teachers participated in the Teacher Focus Group. Following a semi-structured guide, topics explored included the role of the teacher in the life of adolescents; the influence of media in students' lives; student romances at school; academic pressures on students; the role of parents in the life of adolescents; 'gender sensitisation' and sex education in schools (see Appendix 6c for Teacher Focus Group guide).

Since it was not possible to arrange FGDs with RIS and SGS teachers, semi-structured interviews at these schools (and CGS) focused on similar topics, but in more depth, including: whether adolescent girls and boys face any particular issues at school; the role of teachers in the life of Class 11 students; the role of parents and families in students' lives; and how students learn about adolescent health at school (see Appendix 8b for semi-structured teacher interview guide). Particular areas were explored in more detail depending on the teacher or member of staff being interviewed; I asked Biology teachers to describe their experiences of teaching the CBSE 'Reproduction chapter', while my interview with the RIS Counsellor focused on her experience of providing sex education workshops to Class 8 students. Interviews with senior management provided an opportunity to learn about specific disciplinary structures, student demographics, and so on. I also conducted follow-up interviews with senior management in each school to gather basic school information, which covered school fees, admission procedures and school rules and regulations (see Appendix 9a).

#### Classroom observation days

Towards the end of fieldwork Phase Two, I carried out classroom observations; my aim was to spend a day with each of the Class 11 academic streams in each of the schools. This was possible in both CGS and SGS, but not in RIS due to exams, holidays, and preparations for the end of year Annual Day. Carrying out classroom observations towards the end of term (end of November/beginning of December 2013) in both RIS and SGS meant that I did not observe 'normal' school days on two occasions. On my classroom observation day with RIS 11D, most of the students were involved in Annual Day rehearsals, while all but five students in SGS 11B were away from school participating in an inter-school debate and/or sports day on my day

with them. In total, I carried out classroom observations on three days with CGS (11A, 11B and 11C), three days with SGS (11A, 11B and 11C), and two days with RIS (11B and 11D).

On classroom observation days, I spent the whole day with Class 11 students in my chosen academic stream. During lessons, I structured my notes using school and classroom observation schedules adapted from Dunne et al (2013) (see Appendix 9). While I had plenty of time to scribble observation notes during lesson time, I made sure to balance 'observing' with 'participating' at other times of the school day (e.g. in between lessons, at recess). As well as observing day-to-day gendered dynamics within formal classroom settings, I was therefore also able to interact more informally with students, and found myself participating and being incorporated into the gendered and sexualized dynamics of students' peer cultures.

Although I spent a relatively brief amount of time participating in and observing the students' school days, adopting an ethnographic approach still meant that I 'directly and forcibly experience[d] for [my]self both the ordinary routines and conditions' of their school lives, and the 'constraints and pressures' to which they were subject (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw 2011). In terms of the students who 'adopted' me and those who seemed most comfortable approaching me, I spent most of my classroom observation days with girls, and so gained a more in-depth perspective into their daily school experiences and routine. However, classroom observation days also allowed me to spend more time with the boys participating in my study, which had previously been limited since I had not carried out boys' FGDs and interviews. In the schoolyard or outside the school gates, it seemed more acceptable for me to interact with groups of boys than within more intimate research contexts – although it is also possible that both the boys and myself felt more comfortable with each other by this point due to the methodological time I had spent in the schools.

While classroom observation days provided the most extended opportunities for participant observation in the schools, I also used ethnographic methods throughout the research, jotting down notes while waiting for meetings and research encounters during the day, and typing these up into more structured, coherent field notes in the evenings. These field notes provided me with an opportunity to critically reflect on my observations and interactions in schools throughout the fieldwork, as well as my general experiences of 'being there' as a young woman living and working in Delhi.

### *3.5.2 Translation issues*

Although I undertook a month's Hindi-language training during Phase One of the fieldwork, my Hindi language skills were far too basic for effective use during research interactions. Moreover, as I was conducting research in English-medium schools, I had not given serious thought to translation issues before fieldwork started. The vast majority of student participants were fluent in English, although many students were more comfortable speaking in Hindi (or 'Hinglish', a hybrid of the two). At the beginning of questionnaire sessions, we told students that they could respond in Hindi if they preferred; similarly, during FGDs or interviews, if students seemed to be struggling to express themselves, we suggested that they could speak in Hindi if they wanted to. During FGDs, students often switched to Hindi when speaking among themselves, and perhaps unsurprisingly (since Hindi was a less 'formal' register for them), these were sometimes the most lively and animated interactions of the FGDs. While I was keen to encourage students to use the language in which they were most comfortable, and my rudimentary Hindi meant that I was able to follow these exchanges during FGDs, I had not developed a clear plan as to how to handle this data in Hindi.

While transcribing FGDs, I soon realized I was unable to transcribe or translate (let alone analyse) exchanges in Hindi, and so I decided to recruit a translator. Through a contact at the language school at which I had studied, I recruited Alok, a translator who had prior experience of working on research projects with young people in Delhi. I shared audio recordings of FGDs and interviews with Hindi data with Alok, who transcribed data into Hindi using Roman script, and provided accompanying English translations. As Temple & Edwards (2002) have noted, language is not just a 'tool or technical label for conveying concepts', but is 'an important part of conceptualization, incorporating values and beliefs' which carries 'particular cultural, social and political meanings that cannot simply be read off through the process of translation' (2002: 3). I therefore maintained an ongoing dialogue with Alok during fieldwork and later on during the analysis period, to ensure that I could engage with the English translations and original Hindi data as fully as possible, and to gain an insight into Alok's translation choices and his personal reflections on the data he worked with. Overall, Alok transcribed and translated Hindi extracts from 12 interviews and 8 FGDs, and transcribed and translated 6 interviews which had taken place entirely in Hindi (see Appendix 10 for an example of translation).

Analysing data translated from Hindi proved eye-opening on several occasions. For example, one of the CGS girls (Harsha, 11C) had spoken exclusively in rapid Hindi during FGDs, and I had been frustrated at my inability to understand (and therefore respond to) her often passionate

contributions. Reading translations of Harsha's contributions later on revealed eloquent expressions of her anger at the limitations placed upon girls in India. Working with a translator post-data collection was therefore invaluable so that I could understand and analyse contributions from students like Harsha, but my inability to communicate directly with such students during research encounters, and to explore their perspectives in more depth, is a particular regret from fieldwork.

### *3.5.3 Data analysis*

Data from student questionnaires were entered into SPSS within a few days of each of the questionnaire sessions; while quantitative analysis took place later, data entry allowed me to reflect upon emerging themes, particularly from qualitative questionnaire data, and to identify volunteers for the next research stages. I digitally audio recorded and transcribed all FGDs and interviews; as with questionnaire data, I transcribed audio recordings within a few days of data collection, so that I could identify emerging themes for further exploration in subsequent research encounters. Audio recordings of FGDs and interviews with Hindi extracts or which had taken place entirely in Hindi were transcribed and translated by my translator (see 3.5.2).

In-depth data analysis of quantitative and qualitative data took place once I had returned to the UK. Quantitative data from questionnaires were coded and analysed in SPSS. Likert-type items were analysed using Mann-Whitney *U* tests to determine differences according to gender, as the most suitable non-parametric test to analyse ordinal data in two independent samples (Hinton et al 2004). When analysing Likert-type responses to determine differences according to school and academic stream, Kruskal-Wallis tests (non-parametric and suitable for analysis of ordinal data – Hinton et al 2004) were used in order to examine the three independent samples categorized under 'school' and the four independent samples under 'stream'. Data from multiple-choice closed questions were analysed according to gender, school and stream, using the chi-square test as the most appropriate non-parametric test for these nominal data (Hinton et al 2004; Siegel 1956).

Descriptive analysis of demographic data from Section 5 of the questionnaires was also conducted to provide an overview of the student participant sample, using cross-tabulation analyses with chi-square tests to establish, for example, if there were significant differences according to gender, school or academic stream and parental occupation. As discussed in

3.4.5, data on parents' occupations (Q38b, Q40b) were coded using NCO (2004) divisions in order to rank occupations according to a standardized measure (see Appendix 4).

Qualitative data from open-ended questionnaire items were coded and analysed using NVivo, while qualitative data from FGDs, interviews, classroom observations and field notes were analysed manually. When analysing non-questionnaire qualitative data, I treated each school as an individual case, and analysed data from each school in the order I first encountered them (CGS, followed by RIS and SGS). For each school, I began with data from student FGDs and interviews, and analysed teacher interviews afterwards; this was so that I could place my analytical focus on students' stories and experiences, and then consider teachers' accounts in light of students' perspectives.

I analysed all qualitative data using an inductive and deductive approach to analysis, in which 'patterns, themes, and categories [...] emerge[d] out of the data', but emergent themes were also influenced by my 'theoretical frameworks, subjective perspectives, ontological and epistemological positions, and intuitive field understandings' (Srivastava & Hopwood 2009: 77). This enabled 'a repeated interaction among existing ideas, former findings and observations, and new ideas' (Coffey & Atkinson 1996: 156), which was particularly suited to the iterative thematic approach to analysis I initially adopted. This involved 'discerning, examining, comparing and contrasting, and interpreting meaningful patterns of themes' (Berkowitz 1997: 1) by 'visiting and revisiting [qualitative] data and connecting them with emerging insights' (Srivastava & Hopwood 2009: 77), which was useful when analysing data across each school 'case'. As new themes emerged from SGS data, for example, I re-read transcripts and summaries of emerging themes from CGS and RIS data. This analytical approach also involved close textual analysis of transcripts, with attention to participants' choice of language (e.g. Hindi or English, and choices of particular words within each language), notable repetitions, euphemisms and so on, and considering how these linguistic features highlighted particular emerging themes.

However, as analysis progressed, I reflected further on how participants were communicating their experiences, and it became apparent that this was taking place through storytelling – students' and teachers' stories of their own experiences, about other students and teachers, and about their families. This led me to combine an iterative thematic approach with a narrative analytical approach (see 3.2.2). While still paying attention to linguistic and structural features of responses, a narrative in context approach helped me to move 'beyond the text' (Plummer 1995: 19) during analysis. Emphasizing the social nature of storytelling, Plummer

(1995) argues that it is ‘not simply *what* people say’ that should be of concern, but ‘*the complex social processes involved in the tellings*’ (Plummer 1995: 13, original emphasis). During analysis, I therefore paid attention to ‘how the narrators position[ed] audiences and, reciprocally, how the audience position[ed] the narrator’ (Reissman 2001: no page numbers) within research encounters, and how (and why) participants may have performed certain identities through the stories they told. This included considering how participants’ interactions with each other, Neeraj and myself shaped the tellings of particular stories in FGDs, and within interviews, the ways in which our ‘coaxing’ interacted with participants’ ‘tellings’ to construct particular accounts.

After considering the co-construction of these micro-narratives within the ‘texts and contexts’ of research interactions, following Andrews (2014) and Plummer (1995), the next stage of analysis involved considering the interrelations between these micro-narratives and macro-narratives of gender and sexuality in India (see Chapter Two), which was particularly important when structuring the analysis chapters (see 3.6). Overall, this approach to analysis meant that I was able to ‘inspect the social role of stories’, or ‘the ways they are produced, the ways they are read, the work they perform in the wider social order, how they change, and their role in the political process’ (Plummer 1995: 19) (see Appendix 10 for an example of an analysed transcript).

#### *3.5.4 Data validation and sharing preliminary findings*

Once the main period of data analysis was over, I returned to Delhi for four weeks in November 2014 (Phase Three) to present preliminary findings and recommendations to student and teacher participants, academics and NGO colleagues in Delhi. This process of sharing preliminary findings and seeking participants’ feedback not only acted as a means of validating data analysis, but was also another form of reciprocal exchange with participants (see 3.3.3) rather than a one-way process of ‘extraction’. Providing young people with feedback on research is also regarded as ethical research practice, and seen as highly important by young people who participate in research themselves (Boddy & Oliver 2010).

As students were in Class 12 by the time I returned to Delhi, I had limited time and access to work with them. Fortunately, RIS and SGS senior management were willing to grant me access to their students and teachers again; less fortunately, CGS students were in the midst of mock exams during the fieldwork Phase Three. While I was able to discuss preliminary findings with some CGS teachers, I was therefore only able to do this with one of the CGS students – and



this was only because she was willing to miss a revision class to talk to me. Overall, I carried out feedback sessions with 1 girl and 3 teachers at CGS; 10 students (6 girls, 4 boys) and 4 teachers at RIS; and 7 students (2 girls, 5 boys) and 4 teachers at SGS.

During fieldwork Phase Three, I conducted one-to-one feedback sessions with teachers, and with single-sex groups of 2-4 students. Since there was limited time to work with students and teachers, I wrote statements reflecting key preliminary findings on flash cards, which related to gendered experiences of schooling, sex education, and potential recommendations (see Appendix 11a). During feedback sessions, I showed participants these cards, asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statements, and asked them to explain their responses. Although there was a risk of confirmation bias in this approach, participants did challenge several of the findings, which suggested they were not necessarily agreeing with the statements by default. At the end of these feedback sessions, as during the main fieldwork period, I asked participants if there was anything else they wanted to discuss or ask me. I also provided participants with more detailed summaries of preliminary research findings, which included my email address in case they had any further queries or wanted to get in touch again (see Appendix 11b).

### **3.6 Structure of following analysis chapters**

The structure of the following analysis chapters was shaped by the conceptual framework adopted in my study, particularly Connell's (2000) framework of institutional and student agency within schools, Thomson & Scott's (2001) conceptualization of 'sexual learning' (see Chapter Two), and a narrative analytical framework based on Andrews' (2014) political narratives and Plummer's (1995) sexual stories (3.2.2). Additionally, when drawing the 'key findings' of my doctoral study from the micro- and macro-narratives identified during analysis, I was influenced by the particular 'moment' in which fieldwork was conducted, and by discussions with research participants, academics and NGO colleagues during data validation (see 3.5.4).

For example, in Chapter Four, I explore institutional anxieties relating to young people's sexuality in co-educational contexts. My focus on institutional perspectives in this chapter, including disciplinary practices and curriculum content, is shaped by Connell's (2000) framework, as is the discussion of 'gender similarity' within the schools. Meanwhile, my exploration of gender segregation in Chapter Four is based upon the apparent pervasiveness of such arrangements within the schools' co-educational spaces, but also the justifications for

maintaining gender segregation offered by principals and teachers during the data validation process, and the ways in which these justifications were linked to teachers' problematization of adolescent sexuality during the main fieldwork period.

In Chapter Five, I explore further ways in which gender was made to 'matter' in the schools, particularly in terms of narratives of girlhood and masculinities which shaped young people's lives. The development of this chapter was influenced by students' and teachers' matter-of-fact responses to findings on violence within boys' peer cultures and gendered corporal punishment practices during data validation, which confirmed the taken-for-granted nature of certain gender narratives within the school. However, this chapter was also shaped by the particular 'moment' during which fieldwork took place. Although violence was not originally a 'lens' through which I intended to explore gender and sexuality, in the wake of the December 2012 gang rape case, discussions of gender and sexuality were strongly influenced by ubiquitous stories of sexual violence during fieldwork in 2013. In this chapter, I therefore locate girls' and boys' responses to cases of sexual violence within existing narratives of girlhood and masculinities, in order to characterize the ways in which the post-December 2012 debates both contradicted and reinforced young people's understandings of gender and sexuality.

Given my original interest in 'sex education', I had anticipated that one of my chapters would focus on how young people learned about sexuality in school. In light of the limitations of formal sex education (as explored in Chapter Four), in Chapter Six I discuss the alternative sources of sexual learning accessed by young people, including cautionary tales from popular TV shows and films. Following Connell's (2000) framework, Chapter Six also acts as a counterpoint to the institutional perspectives in Chapter Four, with a focus on students as agents in gendering and sexualising processes at school. This includes an exploration of the heterosocial dynamics within peer cultures at school as an important source of sexual learning. The focus on heterosocial dynamics arose both from my own interest in this material within the data, and also the considerable interest that these findings generated among academics and NGO stakeholders during the data validation period, which suggested their potentially 'key' nature within the study. In particular, the chapter explores the ways in which students proved adept at negotiating assumptions about 'appropriate' interactions such as idealized brother-sister relationships, and formed less restrictive heterosocial friendships as well as romantic, girlfriend-boyfriend relationships. Finally, the chapter examines stories about peer romances, which importantly undermined dominant, risk-based narratives of young people's sexuality.

## **Chapter Four: Institutional anxieties – young people’s sexuality in co-educational spaces**

### **4.1 Introduction**

When learning about the ‘sex education debates’ in India during the early stages of my doctoral research, I was particularly intrigued by the controversies surrounding sex education, and the reportedly ‘taboo’ nature of discussing sexuality with young people in India (see Chapter One). However, perhaps inevitably, while this context proved fascinating on paper, it presented considerable challenges in the field. The folly of attempting to research sex education in schools following a ban on school-based sex education dawned on me as I noticed the absence of anything resembling ‘sex education’ in the school curricula, or even the more sanctioned ‘adolescence education’. As fieldwork progressed, the term ‘sexual learning’ (Thomson & Scott 1991) therefore helped me to consider more broadly the ways in which young people learned about sexuality, both within the classroom and beyond.

This chapter focuses on the schools as ‘institutional agents’ in gendering and sexualising processes (Connell 2000), exploring some of the ways in which schools did construct young people’s sexuality as ‘taboo’, from formal sources of sexual learning within the curriculum to disciplinary practices which maintained gender segregation within co-educational spaces. Firstly, however, the chapter examines teachers’ ‘official’ characterisations of co-educational contexts; namely, as gender-neutral, non-sexual spaces (4.2). As Connell (2000) has noted, it is important to be conscious of ‘gender similarity’ in schools as well as gender difference, and girls’ and boys’ shared investment in career-oriented narratives of education provide an important example of this at all three schools.

However, anxieties about young people’s sexuality within the schools somewhat undermined official commitments to gender neutrality, and these anxieties were particularly fuelled by many teachers’ investment in ‘storm and stress’ narratives of adolescence (4.3). A close textual analysis of the ‘Reproduction’ chapter in the Class 10 Science syllabus (a common source of formal sexual learning across the three schools) (4.4), as well as biological, risk-based narratives of sexuality within other sources of formal sexual learning (4.5), provide further examples of the problematization of adolescent sexuality within ‘official knowledge’ sources in the schools (Bhog et al 2009: 3).

Beyond the classroom, I argue that disciplinary practices which maintained gender segregation at the schools reflect further attempts to control young people’s sexuality within co-educational spaces (4.6). Contrary to official positions on gender neutrality within the schools,

many teachers argued that gender segregation in the classroom and the wider school environment was in fact essential for students' education. While gender may not have explicitly 'mattered' in terms of students' educational aspirations, teachers' attitudes suggested that young people's sexuality certainly did, particularly as a potential threat to academic achievement. Additionally, teachers' anxieties about heterosocial interactions, and their assumptions that homosocial relationships were 'safely' non-sexual, reflect the institutionalized heteronormativity of all the schools. Discussions of young people's sexuality in this chapter therefore refer to heterosexuality, and this heteronormativity is explored in more detail in Chapter Six.

#### 4.2 Co-education and gender neutrality?

Actually, in our school system, this is co-education. And, in our co-education system, the boys and girls, can better understand each other. And ah, due to that, we are having the harmony, nah? Harmony. And ah, they can understand, better understand and can live life, ah, in the future, in a very practical way [...] They play together, live together, eat together.

(Principal sir, CGS – interview)

During this interview, the first carried out during fieldwork, I was offered an early insight into the nature of co-educational schooling. According to the CGS Principal, 'harmonious' co-educational spaces at his school are characterized by girls and boys carrying out all their day-to-day activities together. Co-education at CGS therefore seemed to provide a 'practical' part of girls' and boys' wider education by preparing them for harmonious heterosocial relationships in their future lives.

However, it was not the 'togetherness' of the girls and boys that I immediately noticed at the schools. Although students were certainly playing, living and eating alongside each other in the schools, girls and boys seemed to pursue these activities separately. For example, during my first interactions with students at the schools – in all three cases, these occurred in the questionnaire sessions – I was immediately struck by students' seating arrangements. In almost all of the classrooms, students sat segregated largely or entirely by gender, with the girls neatly arranged on one side of the classroom and the boys in more haphazard configurations on the other.

As gender segregation in co-educational spaces was a prominent theme during fieldwork and analysis, I revisited this topic with students and teachers when I returned to the schools in

November 2014. The SGS Geography teacher offered his perspective on gendered seating arrangements:

There is no restriction of boys and girls that they have to sit, ah – in that, different areas of the class. This is also true [that they sit in this way], but – my logic is this. That in co-education, every girl and boy can sit in the class, wherever he or she want to sit [...] Doesn't matter where the boy and girl is sitting. But whatever the things we are teaching to the student – they must understand and listen carefully all the aspects of the teaching [...] Most important thing is that.

(Geography sir, SGS – feedback session)

While acknowledging that girls and boys may sit separately during lessons, Geography sir asserts that seating arrangements are not relevant to the most important activities in the classroom: teaching and learning. The Senior Co-ordinator at RIS also noted that regardless of gendered dynamics within her school, girls and boys were treated 'equally' by all members of staff.

I don't think so, that any kind of discrimination is there in this school [...] Because *like* all are working, like, for each and every – whether it is male or female. Like, girl or boy, we all are working hard.

(Senior Co-ordinator ma'am, RIS – interview)

The Senior Co-ordinator defines equal treatment as an absence of discrimination here; students are not treated differently because of their gender. This assertion seemed to be confirmed by the majority of student questionnaire respondents. Across the three schools, 87.4% of respondents (n = 125) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'during lessons, teachers give the same amount of attention to girls and boys' (Q3b), with no significant differences found in responses according to gender, academic stream or school (see Table 3). The RIS Senior Co-ordinator's disavowal of gender discriminatory practices is perhaps unsurprising; as a senior member of school management, she could be expected to describe officially required, non-discriminatory practices. Similarly, the item about teachers' classroom practices was the third item on the questionnaire, and the first explicitly asking about gender; students may have responded as they felt they were 'expected' to (or with concerns that, in spite of my assertions to the contrary, their responses would be shown to teachers).

*Table 3: Student questionnaire responses, Q3b – ‘Teachers usually give the same amount of attention to girls and boys’*

		Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
Female	Count	16	35	3	0	54
	% within gender	29.6%	64.8%	5.6%	0.0%	100.0%
Male	Count	24	50	12	3	89
	% within gender	27.0%	56.2%	13.5%	3.4%	100.0%
Total	Count	40	85	15	3	143
	% within gender	28.0%	59.4%	10.5%	2.1%	100.0%
<p><i>Statistical test results</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Mann-Whitney U: No significant differences according to <b>gender</b> (<math>z = -1.217, p = 0.224</math>)</li> <li>– Kruskal-Wallis: No significant differences according to <b>academic stream</b> (<math>\chi^2 = 5.274, p = 0.153</math>)</li> <li>– Kruskal-Wallis: No significant difference according to <b>school</b> (<math>\chi^2 = 2.704, p = 0.259</math>)</li> </ul>						

However, during individual interviews (by which point they were, for the most part, much more comfortable with Neeraj and myself), several students also described their teachers’ behaviour as largely gender equitable. One of the girls at CGS explained what teachers ‘giving the same amount of attention’ to girls and boys could mean in the classroom:

Mostly [teachers] don’t differentiate. They say, “The girls and boys are equal, you have got the rights”. And even, even it’s not like that, they give marks on the gender basis – what you have done in the paper, it’s like, you will get marks on what you have done. [...] My maths teacher, she gives equal chance. We have got holiday homework to finish up [an] exercise, and there were many doubts actually. And one by one the doubts got taken up [by the teacher] [...] Girl or boy, she solved on board or let others to explain.

(Khyati, 11A, CGS – interview)

Khyati characterizes teachers at CGS as not only giving equal attention to girls and boys in the classroom, but also explicitly saying that students have a ‘right’ to be treated in this way. The direct speech that Khyati attributes to teachers at her school (“you have got the rights”) may reflect her own awareness of women’s rights (see Chapter Five), but she supports this assertion by providing salient examples of teachers generally giving marks according to merit, not gender, and her maths teacher in particular attending to girls’ and boys’ uncertainties in the classroom.

The idea that teachers did not discriminate between girls and boys was an important way in which the schools were characterized as gender-neutral spaces; according to these accounts, students’ gender did not have any implications for the education they received at school. Questionnaire data on students’ motivations for choosing their academic stream and

descriptions of their imagined lives after school provide another compelling example of gender similarities at the schools.

Questionnaire items Q2 and Q29 were open-ended questions that aimed to capture students' motivations for choosing their academic stream, and their aspirations for life after school; Q2 was a follow-up question to multiple-choice Q1 ('Which stream are you in?'), and asked 'Why did you choose this stream?'<sup>17</sup>. 56.8% of students (n = 83) cited career aspirations when explaining their motivation for choosing their academic stream, while 34.9% of students (n = 51) cited a personal interest in their subject (see Table 4). There were no statistically significant differences found in students' responses according to gender or school, although significant differences were found according to academic stream; Commerce students (92.6%, n = 25) were more likely than Science Medical (59.5%, n = 25), Science Non-medical (33.3%, n = 9) and Humanities students (46.2%, n = 24) to cite career motivations for their choice of academic stream.

*Table 4: Student questionnaire responses, Q2 – 'Why did you choose this academic stream?'*

		Career aspirations	Personal interest	Parental pressure	Finds subject easy	Total
Female	Count	38	19	4	0	61
	% within gender	62.3%	31.1%	6.6%	0.0%	100.0%
Male	Count	45	32	3	5	85
	% within gender	52.9%	37.6%	3.6%	5.9%	100.0%
Total	Count	83	51	7	5	146
	% within gender	56.8%	34.9%	4.9%	3.4%	100.0%
<p><i>Statistical test results – career aspirations</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Chi-square: no significant difference according to <b>gender</b> (<math>\chi^2 = 6.686</math>, <math>p = 0.153</math>)</li> <li>– One-way ANOVA: no significant difference according to <b>school</b> (<math>F(2) = 1.695</math>; <math>p = 0.187</math>)</li> <li>– One-way ANOVA: significant difference according to <b>academic stream</b> (<math>F(3) = 4.006</math>, <math>p = 0.009</math>) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Post-hoc Tukey test: significant differences in responses from students in Commerce and Science Medical streams (<math>p = 0.044</math>), Commerce and Science Non-medical streams (<math>p = 0.042</math>), and Commerce and Humanities streams (<math>p = 0.007</math>).</li> </ul> </li> </ul>						

Responses to Q29, which asked 'What would you like to do after you finish Class 12?', indicated similar findings. 86.0% of students (n = 80) gave responses describing the career they would like to pursue, 9.7% (n = 9) described courses of further study, while only four students (4.3%), three girls and one boy, mentioned getting married or being in a relationship<sup>18</sup>. Across

<sup>17</sup> Responses to Q2 were coded using NVIVO; statistical analysis on these coded data was then carried out in SPSS.

<sup>18</sup> Responses to Q29 were coded using NVIVO; statistical analysis on these coded data was then carried out in SPSS. Responses mentioning a qualification and a subsequent career were coded as 'career-

the schools, the majority of girls (89.5%,  $n = 34$ ) and boys (83.6%,  $n = 46$ ) gave career-related responses, with no statistically significant differences emerging according to gender, school or academic stream (see Table 5).

*Table 5: Student questionnaire responses, Q29 – ‘What would you like to do after you finish Class 12?’*

		Career-related response	Pursue further study	Get married / be in a relationship	Total
Female	Count	34	1	3	38
	% within gender	89.5%	2.6%	7.9%	100.0%
Male	Count	46	8	1	55
	% within gender	83.6%	14.5%	1.8%	100.0%
Total	Count	80	9	4	93
	% within gender	86.0%	9.7%	4.3%	100.0%
<i>Statistical test results:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Chi-square: no significant difference according to <b>gender</b> (<math>\chi^2 = 3.022</math>, <math>p = 0.388</math>)</li> <li>– One-way ANOVA: no significant difference according to <b>school</b> (<math>F(2) = 1.1266</math>, <math>p = 0.287</math>)</li> <li>– One-way ANOVA: no significant difference according to <b>academic stream</b> (<math>F(3) = 1.235</math>, <math>p = 0.301</math>)</li> </ul>					

These findings suggest that students’ perceptions of their education were firmly career-oriented, apparent in their motivations for choosing an academic stream or when imagining their life immediately after school. The significant differences according to academic stream in responses to Q2 indicate that students chose particular academic streams with a specific career in mind more often than, for example, due to a personal interest in the subject. Links between students’ choice of academic stream and expected professional careers are consistent with findings from existing studies on urban, middle-class expectations of education in India. As Sancho (2012) and Donner (2008) have noted, education is valued among middle-class families in India as a means of securing the necessary qualifications to ensure future financial security and social status through ‘good’ (i.e. professional) employment. In response to Q2, of the 83 students who cited career motivations for their choice of academic stream: 16 out of 25 Science Medical students (64.0%) mentioned becoming a doctor; 7 out of 10 Science Non-medical students (70.0%) mentioned becoming an engineer; and 18 out of 32 Commerce students (56.2%) mentioned becoming chartered accountants. Importantly, these findings indicate that girls and boys alike were invested in this career-oriented narrative, suggesting that students’ conceptualizations of education, and particularly their career aspirations, were indeed gender-neutral.

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related’; those only mentioning a qualification were coded as ‘further study’. Responses coded as ‘mentioning a relationship’ were coded as such even if a career was also mentioned, as these were exceptional cases among Q29 responses.



The career-oriented narrative of education provides an important example of gender similarities within these co-educational schools; girls and boys alike described educational and career trajectories that drew upon this narrative (see Chapter Five for a further discussion of these shared aspirations). When compared to previous studies, these findings also point to intersections of gender and class in educational aspirations. For example, among poorer students in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, the Young Lives study has found that gender differences in educational aspirations widen with the onset of adolescence, with girls exhibiting lower educational aspirations and decreased family support for their education from the age of 12 onwards (Feeny & Crivello 2015). By contrast, based on findings from this study, it would seem that gender equality in terms of educational and career expectations may be an important feature of middle-class narratives of education. As Phadke, Khan & Ranade (2011) and Gilbertson (2014) have noted, a girl's education and employment have come to be valued among the Indian middle classes (and those aspiring to middle-class status) as a measure of family, community and national advancement. Such attitudes may have had a positive effect on urban middle-class girls' own perceptions of their capabilities, at least among the participants in my doctoral study. However, as discussed in the following section, a significant concern among teachers was that Class 11 girls and boys did not always remember to behave as young professionals-in-waiting.

### 4.3 Adolescence as a 'storm age'

Teachers at all the schools gave examples of having to remind students that they must not be distracted from the main 'aim' of their schooling.

I just ask them "What is your career? What do you want to become? When you want to become?" [...] Then give the challenge that "You have to do – you have to do it for your parents, you have to do it for yourself, this is the only two crucial years for your life – it is a competitive world, you have to work hard – [otherwise] no job is there, government job isn't there, private sector – you have to have good [grade] combinations, good behaviour is there, it is required to take the job. Where you will get admission?" So if, ah, it is an engineering child, or it is a non-medical child, and he has to – you can say that, "Pass the 12th Class, and after 12th only give exams for engineering [...] Only then you can earn something good value, career is there". So then – we say like that.

(Chemistry (11B) ma'am, CGS – interview)

Chemistry ma'am introduces her advice with the idea that students are in a process of 'becoming', before going on to outline the various steps required to 'earn something [of] good

value'. These include getting good marks in their Class 12 exams; gaining admission to a 'good' college; and then getting a well-paying job. Classes 11 and 12 are therefore framed as the 'only two crucial years' of students' education that will determine their career success (cf. Sancho 2012). Students' compulsion to work hard and behave well is further underlined through the Chemistry teacher's use of imperatives ('you have to' is repeated five times), as well as her assertion that it is a 'competitive world'. Moreover, Chemistry ma'am and other teachers reported using such catalogues of educational and career obligations to emphasize that students' failure to invest in their education now – by becoming distracted by romantic entanglements with their peers – would have severe consequences.

Teachers' understandings of adolescence as a period of physical and emotional turmoil provide an insight into why they felt such advice was necessary. Across the schools, teachers described adolescence as a 'storm age' (Principal sir, CGS – interview; English sir, CGS – interview) during which hormone-fuelled Class 11 students became more interested in romantic 'infatuations' with the opposite sex than their education (Biology ma'am, SGS – interview; English ma'am, RIS – interview). The framing of heterosocial relationships in firmly platonic, 'brother-sister' terms was one way in which teachers sought to prevent teenage sexuality from disrupting the career-oriented narrative of education.

If ah – ah, just like before, there are different changes in adolescence, for example ah – boys and girls [...] they start ah, talk together as a friend, and ah [...] suppose they want to do something in the – as physically, and whatever. I think they should not start ah – from this age. Because ah, if you are not mature, our physical and ah, different organs are not allowed to do like this, because you are not physically mature for this work. So that's why, these are the things which we should not do. We can talk, and each and everything – we are brothers, sisters, everything is here. So definitely, we should make our relation, not in different way.

(Physics sir, RIS – interview)

In this quotation, the RIS Physics teacher echoes other teachers' concerns with the 'different changes in adolescence' potentially leading to students wanting to 'do something...physically'. The quotation is striking for the Physics teacher's use of periphrastic language to refer to, but never explicitly mention, anything relating to the sexuality. 'Different organs' and 'different way' are particularly notable, as teachers often substituted 'sexual' for 'different' to obliquely describe the behaviour students should avoid. 'Do something in the – as physically, and whatever' and 'these are the things which we should not do' are further examples of phrases that reflect the Physics teacher's apparent discomfort in talking about students' sexuality. Whether this reflects a general discomfort with the topic, or within the specific context of an

interview with me, this use of indirect language effectively mirrors the silences created around students' sexuality within school contexts.

By contrast, Physics sir's language becomes more confident (and his speech becomes less hesitant) as he reaches his conclusion. He makes it clear that brother-sister relationships are entirely sufficient in terms of heterosocial interactions ('we can talk, and each and everything'; 'everything is here'). The essential contrast between desired platonic and undesired sexual relationships is succinctly drawn in the final sentence: 'So definitely, we should make our relation, not in different way'. It is unclear to whom the second person plural refers here (students? The Physics teacher and myself? Everyone?), but the Physics teacher is in no doubt that members of the opposite sex should be treated as if they are family members ('make our relation'), and that this will exclude any sexual ('different') undertones.

'Brother-sister' relationships, their idealisation within the Hindu festival of Raksha Bandhan, and the ways in which students incorporated and adapted these relationships within peer cultures are explored in detail in Chapter Six. Overall, teachers' desire to encourage firmly platonic heterosocial relationships reflects a pervasive anxiety that adolescent sexuality could disrupt the desired school-college-career path. Even if investment in a career-oriented narrative of education could be gender neutral, teachers' anxieties concerning teenage sexuality revealed that the processes of co-educational schooling were not. The following section explores these implicit and explicit anxieties about young people's sexuality within the school curriculum through a close textual analysis of the 'Reproduction' chapter in the Class 10 Science syllabus.

#### **4.4 The 'Reproduction' chapter: textual silences and absences**

When asked about where they had received sex education in school, students at all three schools referred to the 'reproduction chapter' in their Class 10 Science syllabus. While the Biology syllabus for Science (Medical) students in Classes 11 and 12 includes a more detailed chapter on reproduction, I decided to focus on this Class 10 chapter, 'How do organisms reproduce' (Chapter 8, NCERT 2010), since it was the only shared source of formal sexual learning accessed by my participants across academic streams, and across the three schools. Moreover, in the case of the majority of students – those in the Science (Non-medical), Commerce and Humanities streams – this was also the last source of formal sexual learning that they accessed in school. Close textual analysis of this chapter was informed by a narrative

approach (see Chapter Three), and was guided by the research question, ‘what does the chapter “teach” young people about sexuality?’.

The chapter’s focus on biological reproduction is immediately apparent from its title (‘How do organisms reproduce?’). This is unsurprising given the location of the chapter within a Science textbook, but it also signals a scientific approach to teaching young people about sexuality, rather than more social approaches (see Chapter One). The structure of the chapter also reinforces a biological understanding of sexuality, locating human sexual reproduction within wider processes of asexual and non-human sexual reproduction (see Figure 1 below). Human reproduction occupies the last five pages of this 15-page chapter (in section 8.3.3), and so this analysis focuses on these five pages. However, it is worth noting that the preceding sections introduce and explain the technical terms (e.g. ‘DNA’, ‘germ-cells’, ‘ovary’) which are then used during the explanation of human reproduction. This not only reflects the pedagogic function of the text (encouraging learning through the gradual introduction of new information, and repetition of new technical terms), but also further reinforces the discussion of human sexual reproduction as a biological phenomenon.

*Figure 1: Chapter structure - ‘How do organisms reproduce?’ (NCERT 2010)*

<b>8.1</b>	<b>Do organisms create exact copies of themselves?</b> [p.127-128]
8.1.1	The Importance of Variation [p.128]
<b>8.2</b>	<b>Modes of reproduction used by single organisms</b> [p.129-132]
<b>8.3</b>	<b>Sexual reproduction</b> [p.133-139]
8.3.1	Why the Sexual Mode of Reproduction? [p.133-134]
8.3.2	Sexual Reproduction in Flowering Plants [p.134]
8.3.3	Reproduction in Human Beings [p.135-138]
8.3.3 (a)	Male reproductive system [p.137]
8.3.3 (b)	Female reproductive system [p.137-138]
8.3.3 (c)	What happens when the Egg is not Fertilized? [p.138]
8.3.3 (d)	Reproductive health [p.138-139]

The explanation of the ‘sexual mode of reproduction’ in humans (p.135) begins in section 8.3.3 with a discussion of how ‘human beings develop [...] special tissues’ for the ‘creation of germ-cells to participate in sexual reproduction’ (p.136) – or the changes that occur during puberty. This starts with a description of the changes that are ‘common to both boys and girls’:

We begin to notice thick hair growing in new parts of the body such as armpits and the genital area between the thighs, which can also become darker in colour. Thinner hair can also appear on legs and arms, as well as on the face. The skin frequently becomes oily and we might begin to develop pimples. We

begin to be conscious and aware both of our own bodies and those of others in new ways.

(NCERT 2010: 136)

The use of the second person plural here creates an inclusive, reassuring tone, although it also signals an interesting contrast between conditional and definite phrases in the passage. Hair growth on the arms, legs and face, as well as developing pimples, are presented as possibilities ('can also appear', 'might begin to develop'). By contrast, hair growth under the armpits and 'in the genital area' and self-consciousness about one's body are presented as definitive: 'we begin to notice', 'we begin to be conscious and aware of our own bodies'. The final sentence almost dictates self-consciousness as an inevitable feature of adolescence, but at the same time hints at the discovery of sexual attraction ('we begin to be conscious and aware both of our own bodies and those of others in new ways').

This is one of several examples of the text alluding to, but never directly discussing, sexual desire and pleasure. For example, when summarizing young people's experiences during puberty, the chapter explains that 'proportions change, new features appear, and so do new sensations' (p.136, emphasis added). Meanwhile, when explaining the different changes in girls' and boys' bodies in puberty, the text states that 'the penis occasionally begins to become enlarged and erect, either in daydreams or at night' (p.136). These brief references to 'new sensations' and 'daydreams' hint at sexual arousal and fantasy, although the latter is notably linked to male sexual development – there is no equivalent allusion to female sexual arousal or fantasy in the chapter.

Overall, the silences around sex and the invisibilization of young people's bodies in the text are much more prominent than these brief suggestions of sexual arousal. When menstruation is described, the subjects within the paragraph are 'the egg', 'the ovary', 'the uterus', 'the lining', 'this cycle' (p.138) – this technically focused description obscures the female body within which menstruation occurs, and also excludes any information on the human aspects of the experience (reminiscent of the 'medical grammar' discussed by Martin (2001), through which women's experiences of menstruation are obscured). The single mention of erections, within the context of wet dreams, similarly describes 'the penis' in a manner suggesting complete isolation from a body, or any emotional responses (whether pleasurable or anxious) which may accompany the experience.

Perhaps the most striking feature of this text on human reproduction is the exclusion of any explanation of sexual intercourse; the 'sexual act' is referred to only in the most euphemistic

terms. When describing the production of sperm in the male reproductive section (p.137), the text states that ‘the sperms are now in a fluid which makes their transport easier’, and that ‘the sperms are tiny bodies that consist of mainly genetic material and a long tail that helps them to move towards the female germ-cell’ (p.137). In spite of these references to ‘transport’ and ‘moving’, it is not immediately made clear how the sperm is to reach their destination (‘the female germ cell’). The following section, on the female reproductive system, offers little clarification.

The sperms enter through the vaginal passage during sexual intercourse. They travel upwards and reach the oviduct where they may encounter the egg. The fertilised egg, the zygote, gets implanted in the lining of the uterus, and starts dividing.

(NCERT 2010: 138)

The swift, disembodied transfer of ‘sperms through the vaginal passage’ here is mirrored by the text’s rapid shift to describe the micro-level of human reproduction, returning to the safe ground of cellular reproduction discussed in non-human contexts earlier in the chapter. The ostensible focus of the chapter is on reproduction, but these euphemistic discussions clearly suggest an unwillingness to discuss the sexual intercourse that facilitates human reproduction. By invisibilizing human bodies, let alone the mechanics of sexual intercourse, the text reinforces the idea that sexuality is a ‘taboo’, unspeakable topic; according to both existing literature and students who participated in the research, this idea forms a defining feature of conservative attitudes in India (see Chapters One, Two and Six).

This conservatism is also apparent in the Reproductive Health section of the chapter (8.3.3 (d)), where the seemingly objective tone gives way to a more explicitly didactic approach. The section begins by stating:

[...] some degree of sexual maturation does not necessarily mean that the body or the mind is ready for sexual acts or for having and bringing up children.

(NCERT 2010: 138)

This statement clearly distinguishes the ‘sexual maturation’ described in the preceding sections, which students may have experienced, from physical and mental ‘readiness’ for sexually activity. Although the text has not offered any specific detail on the ‘sexual acts’ mentioned here, it has exclusively linked sexual activity with reproduction –reinforced by the latter part of this sentence, in which ‘sexual acts’ are immediately juxtaposed with ‘having and bringing up children’. In case the implications of having children are not enough to dissuade

the student reader from becoming sexually active, the text goes on to emphasize the responsibilities and pressures inherent in sexual decision-making.

How do we decide if the body or the mind is ready for this major responsibility? All of us are under many different kinds of pressures about these issues. There can be pressure from our friends for participating in many activities, whether we really want to or not. There can be pressure from families to get married and start having children. There can be pressure from government agencies to avoid having children. In this situation, making choices can become very difficult.

(NCERT 2010: 138-139)

The association between sexual activity and childbearing continues with the reference to 'this major responsibility', while also implying the physical and emotional dimensions of the process ('the body or the mind'). The text then details the various pressures that may influence sexual decision making: becoming sexually active (suggested by the euphemistic 'participating in many activities') due to peer pressure, having children due to familial pressure, and, interestingly, *not* having children due to governmental pressure (a reference to family planning and population control initiatives in India). The text implicitly suggests that the reader does not want to become sexually active, with 'whether we really want to or not' suggesting a complicit reluctance between text and reader. Instead, the text directly discourages the reader from becoming sexually active by characterizing sexual decision-making as located within a pressured social environment and as inherently problematic ('making choices can become very difficult').

This tone of discouragement continues with the discussion of STI prevention and contraception in the subsequent section. The most graphic description of sexual intercourse in the whole chapter is swiftly qualified with a reference to disease: 'since the sexual act is a very intimate connection of bodies it is not surprising that diseases can be sexually transmitted' (p.138, emphasis added). The subsequent catalogue of STIs ('gonorrhoea and syphilis, and viral infections such as warts and HIV-AIDS', p.138) also seems to encourage a sense of disgust at the potential consequences of physical intimacy, undermining any potential excitement or the possibility that such encounters could be pleasurable.

The significance of the subsequent discussion on condoms and various forms of contraception (both mechanical and hormonal) in this section should be acknowledged; more conservative, abstinence-only approaches exclude such information on the basis that it encourages young people to become sexually active (Miedema, Maxwell & Aggleton 2011). By contrast, this

chapter explains that condoms are a means of STI prevention, and that contraception can prevent early pregnancies; however, this information is not presented in an entirely objective manner. The text states that the use of condoms ‘helps to prevent the transmission of many of these infections to some extent’; after describing the workings of hormonal contraceptives, the text warns that they can ‘cause side effects’, while copper-Ts are similarly said to potentially ‘cause side effects due to irritation of the uterus’ (p.139, emphasis added). Surgical methods of male and female contraception are conceded to be ‘safe in the long run’, but ‘surgery itself can cause infections and other problems if not performed properly’ (p.139). These persistent qualifications and vague allusions to partial effectiveness, ‘side-effects’ and ‘other problems’ arguably undermine the information on condoms and contraception even as it is presented. It is significant that the text offers information on how to engage in sexual intercourse without contracting STIs and without becoming pregnant, but the presentation of these options as unreliable means that sexual activity is still framed as inherently risky for its target audience.

Overall, it could be argued that the chapter does not explicitly aim to teach young people anything about sexuality; after all, the stated focus of the chapter is on reproduction, and human sexual reproduction is just one of the forms of reproduction on which it provides information. However, the conspicuous absence of even a technical description of sexual intercourse, and only the briefest of references to sexual arousal or desire (with no discussion at all of masturbation) points to what the chapter does *not* aim to teach young people. The chapter not only avoids teaching young people about sexual pleasure or desire, but these exclusions also reflect conservative anxieties equating ‘too much information’ on sex with encouraging young people to become sexually active (see Chapter One).

The chapter’s approach to teaching young people about sexuality becomes more apparent in its final ‘Reproductive Health’ section. Sexual decision-making is presented as inherently problematic and laden with social pressures; while contraception and STI prevention are explained, contraceptive methods in particular are systematically undermined as potentially unreliable. The chapter ultimately aims to teach students about sexuality within familiar conservative reproduction-and-risk narratives. Consequently, there is no room for discussion of sexuality beyond a heteronormative framing, sexual intercourse is emphatically linked to reproduction, and any non-procreative sexual activity is associated with risks including sexually transmitted infections, early pregnancy, and social stigma. As discussed in the following section, these risk-based narratives of sexuality were further emphasized in the classroom



when the 'Reproduction' chapter was taught, as well as in other formal sources of sexual learning in the schools.

#### 4.5 Sexual learning in the classroom

When describing lessons in which the 'Reproduction' chapter was taught, RIS and SGS students in particular suggested that the textual silences were often amplified by teachers in the classroom.

Neeraj: *Okay, tell me when all this information [was] given to you, can you just tell me the atmosphere of your class – how was your teacher behaving, you know? [...] Was the atmosphere comfortable, were you able to ask whatever?*

Lionel: *No sir*

Lego: *No*

Jonny: *The teacher was like – that, "I'll tell you later"*

Abby: *And all the students were listening silently and laughing at her  
[laughter]*

Rocco: *Some students*

Neeraj: *And you have the freedom to ask everything, whatever?*

Lego: *No [...] I mean, it felt a bit awkward to ask  
[...]*

Lionel: *Teacher mostly just wanted to finish off the chapter fast  
[...]*

Jonny: *That teacher – she wasn't comfortable.*

(SGS Boys' Focus Group)

In this quotation, the SGS boys characterize their teacher's discomfort when teaching the 'reproduction chapter' in their Class 10 Science lesson. They particularly mention that she avoided students' questions ("I'll tell you later"), rushed through the chapter content ('just wanted to finish off the chapter fast'), and generally felt uncomfortable during the lesson ('that teacher [...] wasn't comfortable'). The boys also describe students intermittently listening to and laughing at their teacher as she struggled to teach the chapter, while they mention that it felt too 'awkward' to ask the teacher any questions in this atmosphere.

This account describes a familiar scenario of an embarrassed teacher, giggling students and a general air of awkwardness within a sex education lesson, which was similarly described by RIS students (Leela, 11D, RIS – interview). In both SGS and RIS, the teachers' approach is reminiscent of what Trudell (1992, in Kehily 2002b) describes as 'defensive teaching', or 'an attempt to seek safety and avoid controversy' in light of the personal and professional risks associated with talking about sexuality (Kehily 2002b: 217). In spite of the exclusion of any

potentially ‘provocative’ material from the reproduction chapter, even the most euphemistic discussion of sexuality became problematic within these classroom contexts. As Kehily (2002b) has noted, through their use of ‘particular language registers and vocabulary’, teachers establish the ‘terrain of comfort/discomfort [and] acceptability/unacceptability [...] upon which sexual issues can be broached’ (2002b: 229). The SGS teacher’s attempt to dismiss the topic (‘I’ll tell you later’), the generally uneasy atmosphere between teachers and students in the classroom, and the particular silences within the text reflect the ways in which taboos around sexuality are enacted and recreated in schools.

However, students’ accounts of being taught the reproduction chapter in CGS provided a contrast to the more familiar scenarios described at RIS and SGS.

- Rapper: There was a teacher – [Biology] ma’am, she taught *[sic]* us very well
- Neeraj: Okay, so she was like more comfortable talking about it?
- Rapper: Yes
- Honey Singh: Yes
- Rapper: She is comfortable
- Honey Singh: And she is also an old lady, so she did not –
- Rocker: She did not shy, she told everything like she was talking to only boys, and frankly
- Honey Singh: Frankly, yeah [...] She just frankly discussed about the organs, how that hormonal change happens, how, ah, it takes places, and what all other things.
- Rocker: And the best thing about that, was the chapter continued for three months.

(CGS Boys’ Focus Group)

The CGS boys are in agreement here that Biology ma’am taught the reproduction chapter well; she was ‘comfortable’ with the material, she talked ‘frankly’ about the topics, and moreover, spent an extensive amount of time (‘three months’) going through the chapter. During her interview, the CGS Biology teacher did seem motivated and enthusiastic about teaching sex education, and this motivation may have been encouraged (or at least enhanced) by Adolescence Education Programme (AEP) training she had received a few years earlier (see Chapters One and Two). However, the CGS boys’ understandings of their Biology teacher’s ability to teach this chapter should also be noted. The RIS and SGS students did not comment on their female Science teachers’ ages, but Honey Singh and Rocker’s perception of Biology ma’am as ‘old’ is a key reason that they believe she was able to discuss the chapter content ‘frankly’ and without embarrassment.

Rocker also mentions that Biology ma'am taught the chapter 'like she was only talking to boys', suggesting that there is not a gender neutral way in which to discuss sex. This brief comment was the only reference to being taught sex education in a co-educational context at CGS, but girls and boys at RIS and SGS described gendered behaviour during the reproduction lessons.

- Leela: [Girls] simply focus on the lecture! *[laughter]* They didn't even make any eye contact with the boys, they just look at the books and at the teacher
- Jyoti: They feel shy *[laughter]* [...] because boys are also there with us
- Leela: And [boys] started behaving weirdly whenever reproduction –
- Jyoti: Reproduction chapters are starting
- Archana: They start laughing
- Jyoti: Whenever they hear the word sexuality
- Leela: [...] They started behaving weirdly, um - they started acting like a foolish person – seriously! They act like a – it's not a common thing. I mean, it's common, everyone knows about it, and even the smaller children also now get into that. I don't know why they behave like such stupids. No seriously, I mean they should – actually, in 10th standard also when we are having the reproduction chapter [...] teachers are saying *[laughs]* "I'm not going to further – ah, telling you this chapter, you do it yourself".  
*[laughter]*

(RIS Girls' Focus Group)

In this exchange, the RIS girls draw clear distinctions between girls' and boys' behaviour during the reproduction lesson. Jyoti and Leela characterize the girls as 'shy', with this shyness linked to the fact that 'boys are also there' in the classroom. As a result, the girls' performance of studiousness becomes even more exaggerated, with their exclusive 'focus on the lecture' emphasized by their avoidance of eye contact with boys, instead looking firmly at their books and the teacher. In contrast to girls' embarrassment, the boys reportedly 'behav[ed] weirdly' when the reproduction chapter was taught, which is only explained by Archana and Jyoti's comments that they were laughing 'whenever they hear[d] the word sexuality'. Leela's lengthy denouncement of the boys for 'acting like foolish [people]' and 'like such stupids' underlines the contrast drawn between girls' and boys' behaviour, and also suggests that the girls' response is considerably superior. Her assertion 'everyone knows about' sexuality, even 'smaller children', suggests that girls responded in a more mature and appropriate way than boys, and that an undue interest in sexuality is juvenile and abnormal.

During the RIS boys' FGD, Tornado confirmed that their Class 10 Science teacher threatened to stop the lesson unless the boys were more attentive ("if you'll not listen carefully, I will leave

this chapter''' – Tornado, RIS Boys' Focus Group). He also asserted that the boys did change their behaviour after this threat ('it was a nice topic, that's why we were listening carefully'), seemingly confirming the girls' assertion that the boys were openly interested in the chapter. SGS Students gave similar accounts of girls' embarrassment and boys' participation as the reproduction chapter was taught; in the girls' FGD, Mala and Naina noted that 'boys were laughing' and 'girls were embarrassed' (SGS Girls' Focus Group), while in the boys' FGD, Lionel asserted that the girls 'were not expressing their views, they were separate' (SGS Boys' Focus Group). While the girls and boys framed the boys' participation in the lesson differently (i.e., as disruptive or engaged, respectively), they agreed that girls were embarrassed and less vocal while the reproduction chapter was taught.

Students' accounts are consistent with the narratives of girlhood and masculinity discussed in more detail in Chapter Five, in which girls were portrayed as more studious in the classroom, and boys as loud and disruptive. However, gendered patterns of behaviour have specific implications within the reproduction lesson. Particularly at RIS, girls' embarrassment and boys' excessive interest in the reproduction chapter were framed as inevitable, and these understandings are consistent with conservative, gendered narratives of sexuality in which 'good' femininity entails a lack of interest in sexual knowledge or activity, while an active desire for sexual knowledge and experience is framed as a 'natural' manifestation of the male sex drive.

As well as these gendered experiences within the reproduction lesson, questionnaire data suggested distinctions between girls' and boys' overall experiences of learning about health and sexuality in the schools. Section 2 of the questionnaire focused on 'Learning about your Health' and Q11 asked students to tick boxes next to any number of ten health issues about which they had learned at school. Three of these items related to sexuality ('puberty and growing up', 'relationships' and 'HIV and AIDS'), while others were topics often included in adolescence education programmes. At CGS, significantly more boys than girls reported learning about drinking alcohol and keeping fit; at RIS, boys were more likely to have learned about smoking cigarettes; and at SGS, significantly more boys than girls reported learning about both smoking and drinking (see Table 6). Meanwhile, RIS girls were more likely to have learned about healthy eating than boys. While no significant differences according to gender emerged at CGS or RIS in terms of learning about sexuality-related topics, significantly more boys than girls at SGS reported learning about HIV and AIDS at school (see Table 6).

Table 6: Student questionnaire responses, Q11 – ‘At your school, have you ever been given information on the following issues?’

		CGS (Valid N = 56)		RIS (Valid N = 41)		SGS (Valid N = 62)		Total (Valid N = 159)	
(% = within gender)		Girls (N = 25)	Boys (N = 31)	Girls (N = 19)	Boys (N = 22)	Girls (N = 22)	Boys (N = 40)	Girls (N = 66)	Boys (N = 93)
a. Smoking cigarettes	Count	8	16	6	14	2	23	16	53
	%	32.0%	51.6%	31.6%	63.6%	9.1%	57.5%	24.2%	57.0%
b. Healthy eating	Count	18	27	18	22	18	33	54	74
	%	72.0%	87.1%	94.7%	63.6%	81.8%	82.5%	81.8%	79.6%
c. Drinking alcohol	Count	5	14	7	11	2	16	14	42
	%	20.0%	48.4%	36.8%	50.0%	9.1%	40.0%	21.2%	45.2%
d. Dealing with stress	Count	7	8	8	11	9	14	24	33
	%	28.0%	25.8%	42.1%	50.0%	40.9%	35.0%	36.4%	35.5%
e. Taking drugs	Count	5	7	7	11	2	11	14	29
	%	20.0%	22.6%	36.8%	50.0%	9.1%	27.5%	21.2%	31.2%
f. Keeping fit	Count	13	24	14	18	12	31	39	73
	%	52.0%	77.4%	73.7%	81.8%	54.5%	77.5%	59.1%	78.5%
g. Puberty and growing up	Count	7	10	12	11	9	15	28	36
	%	28.0%	32.3%	63.2%	50.0%	40.0%	37.5%	42.4%	38.7%
h. Relationships	Count	5	9	6	12	4	17	15	38
	%	25.0%	29.0%	31.6%	54.5%	18.2%	42.5%	22.7%	40.9%
i. Malaria	Count	7	14	5	6	14	23	26	43
	%	28.0%	45.2%	26.3%	27.3%	63.6%	57.5%	39.4%	46.2%
j. HIV/AIDS	Count	10	12	9	7	2	14	21	33
	%	40.0%	38.7%	47.4%	31.8%	9.1%	35.0%	31.8%	35.5%

*Statistical test results (highlighted in table):*

- **CGS:** significantly more boys than girls reported learning about drinking alcohol and keeping fit
  - Chi square (drinking):  $\chi^2 = 4.857$ ,  $p = 0.028$
  - Chi square (keeping fit):  $\chi^2 = 3.989$ ,  $p = 0.046$
- **RIS:** significantly more boys than girls reported learning about smoking cigarettes; significantly more girls than boys reported learning about healthy eating
  - Chi square (smoking):  $\chi^2 = 4.193$ ,  $p = 0.041$
  - Chi square (healthy eating):  $\chi^2 = 5.756$ ,  $p = 0.016$
- **SGS:** significantly more boys than girls reported learning about smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, and HIV and AIDS
  - Chi square (smoking):  $\chi^2 = 13.822$ ,  $p = 0.001$
  - Chi square (drinking):  $\chi^2 = 6.581$ ,  $p = 0.01$
  - Chi square (HIV and AIDS):  $\chi^2 = 4.976$ ,  $p = 0.026$

These findings suggest that young people’s experiences of learning about certain health topics are gendered; boys seem to have been targeted in terms of learning about smoking, drinking alcohol and keeping fit across the schools, while girls at RIS seem to have received more information on healthy eating. This arguably reflects gendered assumptions about certain ‘risk’ behaviours among boys, as well as different assumptions about how to maintain healthy female and male bodies (i.e. by diet control, rather than keeping fit). While the proportions of girls and boys receiving information on sexuality-related topics at all the schools are low, the

finding that only two SGS girls (compared to 14 SGS boys) among the questionnaire respondents had received information about HIV and AIDS may further suggest gendered assumptions about sexual risk behaviours and vulnerability to HIV infection. These findings on gendered access to learning about health and sexuality in school, as well as the gender narratives which shaped students' experiences in the reproduction lesson, provide important examples of the ways in which gender was made to 'matter' in the schools, in spite of official claims of gender neutrality (see 4.2).

Questionnaire data indicated that health issues were also discussed beyond the classroom. Responses to the open-ended Q12 ('Where were these health issues discussed?', valid N = 126) indicated that the majority of students learned about health issues either in assembly (29.4%, n = 37), in the classroom (19.0%, n = 24), or in both assembly and the classroom (39.6%, n = 50). Assembly was the most popular location in SGS (42.0%, n = 21), the combination of assembly and the classroom in CGS (54.8%, n = 23), and the classroom in RIS (38.2%, n = 13). However, a limitation of Section 2 items was that they did not provide information on where or from whom students learned about *specific* health-related issues, including those relating to sexuality; it is possible that boys learned about issues such as smoking, drinking, keeping fit and HIV prevention in single-sex physical education classes, for example, but this cannot be confirmed by questionnaire data.

However, single-sex focus group discussions and interviews provided an opportunity to explore some sources of sexual learning beyond the classroom in greater depth. Qualitative data revealed that while students' stories of their experiences in the classroom were framed by gendered narratives of sexuality, other formal sex education sources at the schools directly invoked these narratives. In the girls' group discussion at SGS, students talked about a Class 10 assembly in which the Hindu organisation 'Art of Living' provided a lecture on teenage relationships:

Mala: Ma'am, a group of people discussed with us [...] the boyfriend-girlfriend relationship and ah, how teenage, this - how teenage[rs] can get distracted from studies, and get in all this [...]

Padmini: Okay cool. So can you tell me what that was like?

Rani: Ma'am they asked us if we have a boyfriend or a girlfriend. So, some girls stood up and said they had a boyfriend. They told their whole stories. So, like because of that they were distracted from studies and all, they taught us that we should not have any relationship at this point of time, because ah, usually boys just use girls and throw them like napkins –

Padmini Okay, wow! *[laughs]*  
 Rani: – that’s what they said.  
 Naina: *[laughs]*  
 Rani: So, so they taught us that, *that* you should not have any relationship at this point, we’re so young  
 Mala: We’re not mature  
 Rani: We’re not emotionally mature or even physically.

(SGS Girls’ Focus Group)

According to Rani and Mala, the Art of Living lecture sought to deter students from forming romantic or sexual relationships using two arguments: young people are not emotionally or physically ‘mature’ enough to engage in such relationships, and these relationships present a potential ‘distraction from studies’. These arguments are familiar both from the reproduction chapter, and from advice reported by teachers in the schools, in which romantic relationships are seen as a risk to the career-oriented narrative of education. This lecture therefore reinforced the risk-based narratives of other school sources of sexual learning, emphasizing the health and social risks of teenage sexuality.

The advice reportedly offered by the Art of Living speakers was also accompanied by a warning that girls should not get involved in relationships because ‘usually boys just use girls and throw them like napkins’. As reflected in the quotation above, I was unable to contain my surprise at this starkly gendered warning, which seems to draw upon narratives of sexual violence (in which men and women are characterized according to a predator/victim binary) in order to dramatize otherwise familiar exhortations against forming relationships.

Sessions run by sanitary pad companies Stayfree and Whisper provided another formal, gendered source of sexual learning at RIS and SGS:

When we are in 7th or 8th standard the workshops are being arranged by the Stay Frees and the Whispers and all. They are coming in the schools and ah, they are having a separate room or the library, they took, or the audi[torium]. They simply call the girls and [...] ah, boys are – boys stay in the class, and they were not aware of it, and simply they were giving the knowledge and basic needs, and girls come out and get aware. I mean they got the knowledge. And the things that they could not ask their mothers or their parents, they’re getting it in the school.

(Leela, 11D, RIS – interview)

Leela went on to observe that she and her classmates found these workshops useful, particularly since they were told about ‘the things’ (i.e. menstruation) that they ‘could not ask [...] their parents’. This is arguably positive example of providing young people with

information about their bodies, but it is notable that Leela emphasizes the separation of girls and boys ('they simply call the girls [...] the boys stay in the class') for these workshops. The Stayfree and Whisper sessions not only provide information exclusively for and about girls, but also provide a further example of young people learning about sexuality within a biological, implicitly problematized context.

Although the CGS girls did not mention similar workshops on menstruation, one of the girls, Khyati, did mention learning about HIV and AIDS ('how it is caused, what are the preventive measures' – CGS Girls' Focus Group) at a school assembly. Although this assembly was not discussed in detail, it provides a further example of the way in which formal sources of sexual learning at school, from the 'Reproduction' chapter to lectures on relationships and workshops on menstruation, emphasized the health and social risks of sexual activity. These risk-based narratives of sexuality implicitly or explicitly discouraged young people from becoming sexually active, reflecting the problematization of adolescent sexuality at the schools. Additionally, both the text and the transaction of the 'How do organisms reproduce?' chapter confirmed for students the 'unsayable' nature of much relating to sexuality, and only offered limited biological information in which sexuality was exclusively considered within the context of reproduction.

Accounts of sexual learning at CGS were less gendered than at RIS and SGS, and CGS students did not discuss any awkwardness from receiving sex education within a co-educational context. This seemed largely a result of the CGS Biology teacher's confidence, training and enthusiasm for teaching young people about sexuality. It could also be argued that her own confidence in teaching the chapter meant that she did not construct sexuality as 'taboo' in her classroom, unlike less confident teachers at the other schools in this study, and teachers described in other studies in India (Chowkhani 2015). At RIS and SGS, gendered narratives of sexuality did shape both students' experiences and understandings of sexual learning, with male interest in sexual knowledge framed as inevitable, and female interest as either non-existent or inappropriate. At all schools, questionnaire data revealed that boys were more likely to have received information on certain topics relating to adolescent health, further reflecting gendered conceptualizations of risk behaviour. Young people's gendered experiences of sexual learning beyond school are explored in Chapter Six; in the following section, gender dynamics within wider school environments are discussed. In particular, I focus on the disciplinary practices which maintained gender segregation within two of the schools, and the ways in which these practices reflected attempts to control young people's sexuality beyond formal sources of sexual learning.



#### 4.6 Institutionalized gender segregation

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, I was struck by the separation of girls and boys in classrooms during my first visits to all the schools. However, over the course of the fieldwork period, I came to realize that the extent of gender segregation was subtly different across the schools. Particularly at CGS and RIS, institutional practices maintaining gender segregation suggested that ‘brother-sister’ relationships were not seen as a sufficient means of containing young people’s sexuality in co-educational spaces. After considering patterns of gender segregation and the disciplinary practices through which these were maintained at CGS and RIS, I will then discuss how less rigid disciplinary practices at SGS seemed linked to more relaxed heterosocial interactions within school spaces.

Following the classroom observation schedule adapted from Dunne et al (2013), I noted the ‘student grouping’ in each classroom (see Appendix 9b). On my classroom observation day with CGS 11A, I not only observed rigidly gendered seating arrangements (with boys occupying three rows, and girls occupying a fourth – Classroom observations, 11A, CGS), but also noted that the 11A girls and boys hardly interacted with each other, whether during or in between lessons, or during recess. Similar seating arrangements were apparent during classroom observation days with CGS 11B, CGS 11C, RIS 11B and RIS 11D, although, as discussed later, I observed slightly more interaction between girls and boys in the other CGS classes, and much more between girls and boys at RIS (see Chapter Six).

During the CGS girls’ focus group discussion, two of the girls offered explanations for the gender segregation in their classrooms.

- Khyati: Actually in our school, we are allowed to talk but, us sitting together is a little awkward to them
- Padmini: Okay, really? So boys and girls don’t sit together?
- Khyati: Yeah
- Deepika: That’s quite - like in our classes we have separate rows for girls and separate rows for boys
- Padmini: And is that like, formal, has it been set up by the teacher or –
- Deepika: No, that’s just how people just arrange themselves like, if they see the girls there they’ll all go that way and the boys all just go the other way. And just in general the interaction between girls and boys is not that much, and each they, they each try to avoid each other as much as they can.
- [...]
- Khyati: Actually our teachers do not say “You don’t sit with boys”, but actually they – we only do not sit with them, or like, if some boy’s

sitting there, we would be just a little away – we would sit behind them but not with them, it's like that. A boy would sit with a boy, a girl would sit with a girl. If a girl was left alone she'll sit alone only!  
*[laughs]*

Deepika: It's like thinking about what other people will think about you if you are sitting with the boys, like –

Khyati: Yeah

Deepika: – because like if the majority of the girls are sitting separately and you alone go and sit with the boys, they won't think the right thing. They will find it strange that you're sitting with the boys. It's like, yeah – I guess that's what I, last time we were talking about the Indian mentality, just all that thing comes again, why were girls sitting with the boys [...] So we do interact but, it's a little – we think it's a little awkward.

(CGS Girls' Focus Group)

Contrary to my assumption ('has it been set up by the teacher or –'), both Khyati and Deepika explain that it is not teachers who prevent girls and boys from sitting together ('Actually, our teachers do not say, "You don't sit with boys"'). Both girls initially suggest girls and boys simply prefer to sit separately ('that's just how people just arrange themselves', 'we only [i.e. we ourselves] do not sit with them'). However, Deepika then introduces the idea that these seating preferences are in fact governed by concerns about 'what other people will think of you if you are sitting with the boys'. She describes the potential consequences of going against the norm, with an imagined protagonist 'go[ing] alone and sit[ting] with the boys', and the 'majority of girls' then judging her for this action. She expresses her concern that these girls 'won't think the right thing', using another phrase that alludes to the sexual and the 'inappropriate'. Her indirect language reflects both the kind of innuendo that could be spread by other girls, and the 'unsayable' nature of the sexual for Deepika herself as she describes this imagined scenario. She finally glosses this scenario as an example of 'Indian mentality' that students had discussed in the previous, mixed FGD. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapters Five and Six, but Deepika's use of the phrase here reflects many participants' understanding of certain conservative norms, such as those prohibiting physical proximity between girls and boys, as particularly 'Indian'.

Deepika and Khyati therefore suggest that gendered seating arrangements in the classroom are influenced by a form of peer pressure, through which girls and boys maintain an 'appropriate' distance for fear of being judged by their peers. However, another CGS girl (who was absent for the girls' FGD) spoke at length about teachers' active role in gender segregation during her individual interview.

Teachers are irritating! Only some are good. And – and you know, we are given the duty in the school, you know for minding the students and all. So – in every floor, ah, two persons are allotted, okay? Once what happened, my duty was here, and I don't know what misunderstanding, a boy got, he was also here. So we were standing here. I thought, "My duty's here, so why should I move?" – you know? [...] And that – PT [Physical Training] instructor came. *[Adopts a loud, high-pitched voice]* "What are you doing both?! What are you doing?!" – she was shouting, I don't know what! I don't know what, whenever she's seeing a boy and girl she's shouting. [...] I can't really understand that mentality, you know? She is – horrible. Seriously.

(Akira, 11A, CGS – interview)

As she narrates this story, Akira conveys her outrage at being scolded for standing alone with a boy in school, and also uses this example to explain her poor opinion of teachers ('Teachers are irritating!', 'She is – horrible. Seriously'). There is considerable irony that it was while performing her 'duty' as hall monitor that Akira was left alone in the corridor with a boy. 'Minding the students' as hall monitor at CGS largely involved ensuring that couples were not taking advantage of empty classrooms during assembly and recess (although they still managed to do this – see Chapter Six), which perhaps explains the sports teacher's own outrage at finding Akira and the unnamed boy alone together. In her unflattering imitation of the sports teacher, Akira portrays her reaction as hysterical and irrational; moreover, Akira suggests that this is not an isolated reaction, but recurrent behaviour ('whenever she's seeing a boy and girl she's shouting'). Akira's sense of incredulity ('I don't know what! I don't know what [...] I can't really understand that mentality, you know?') both underlines her sense of injustice at such treatment, and also distances herself from the sports teacher's conservative 'mentality'.

During a group feedback session, one of the RIS boys also gave an account of teachers actively intervening to separate girls and boys at the school:

It happens most of the time in the school [...] Ma'am, some teachers really don't allow girls and boys to sit, like – because they think, ah – they're a source of distraction, kind of. And – they'll distract them in their studies, and – like [...] Some teachers interrupt while girls and boys are talking, some of them. [...] They should not behave like this, because we're sitting in a co-curricular *[sic]* school. They can be friends, or – they could be discussing about something regarding their studies, or something else. But the teachers should change their mentality.

(Aditya, 11D, RIS – boys' feedback session)

Aditya's interpretation of teachers' interventions provides another example of gender segregation being justified in the pursuit of academic achievement ('they think, ah [...] they'll

distract them in their studies'). Like Akira, Aditya criticizes teachers for behaving in this way, and while he argues that girls' and boys' conversations could be occurring within a legitimate, academic context ('they could be discussing something regarding their studies'), his assertion that girls and boys can also be friends talking about non-academic topics suggests an overall rejection of the 'mentality' that girls and boys should be kept apart. Also like Akira, Aditya does not identify these conservative attitudes as specifically 'Indian', but he does offer an alternative conceptualization of a co-educational (presumably what he meant by 'co-curricular') school, one in which girls and boys should be able to study and socialize together without restriction.

When discussing heterosocial interactions among students at school, teachers at CGS and RIS expressed views that seemed to confirm the conservative mentality described by students. In the following exchange from the CGS teachers' FGD, several teachers made it clear that they disapproved of a girl who spent time talking to the boys in her class:

- |                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| Biology ma'am:         | Yeah, there is one girl, there is one girl in Class 12<br>– I will not name the girl, I will not name the class section, and ah, she is ah –                               |
| English sir:           | <i>[gestures towards one of the classrooms on the opposite side of the corridor, mouthing "That one?"]</i>   |
| Biology ma'am:         | Hmm <i>[nods in confirmation]</i> . And most of the time she is busy with boys in the class. Even you are teaching on the blackboard, you are writing something –<br>[...] |
| English sir:           | She hasn't maintained the notebook and she is not coming to the school, it is because of that pressure only, that the teacher will –                                       |
| Chemistry (11A) ma'am: | Otherwise she is intelligent girl, she is not duffer. She is intelligent   |
| English sir:           | She is, she is okay  |
| Biology ma'am:         | – but she is always with the boys and things, and when I am asking, "Why are you always talking with the boys, why – what is the reason behind it?"                        |
| Computer ma'am:        | There is no object   |
| Biology ma'am:         | "They are my friends", she tells it like – yah!  |

(CGS Teacher Focus Group)

The English teacher's quick confirmation of the student to whom Biology ma'am is referring suggests the girl under discussion may have something of a reputation among the teachers. This is also suggested by the fact that all the teachers have a ready opinion on her; Biology

ma'am's main story, explaining that the girl in question spends too much time talking to the boys in her class, is interrupted by the other teachers' own thoughts on the implications of the girl's behaviour. Together, the teachers create a narrative in which the girl's interest in talking to boys is directly linked to neglect of her academic work; English sir interjects that the girl 'hasn't maintained [her] notebook and she is not coming to the school', while Biology ma'am is incredulous that the girl talks to boys 'even' when the teacher is writing on the blackboard. The Chemistry teacher seems to interpret the story as one of wasted potential ('Otherwise she is an intelligent girl, she is not [a] duffer'), although English sir appears unconvinced by this interpretation, suggesting instead that the girl is just 'okay'.

Echoing Akira and Aditya's accounts of teachers' interventions, Biology ma'am recalls the questions she has posed to the girl: "Why are you always talking with the boys, why – what is the reason behind it?". However, as in the students' examples of similar lines of questioning, the assumption seems to be that girls who speak to boys can only be driven by 'inappropriate' motives; Biology ma'am seems incredulous at the girl's suggestion that these boys are her friends.

RIS Teachers did not report similar interventions to enforce gender segregation among students, but described a more indirect approach.

We should keep an eye on them [...] If one of the student or the girls or boys they are talking [to each other], we have an eye on them. How they are behaving, how they are talking. If we find any kind of problem, we immediately point them out. So that they should aware that they should be in their limits, in their behaviour, in their manner, *okay?* [...] They should think before they speak, that they are speaking with [...] a classmate of opposite sex.

(Biology ma'am, RIS – interview)

The RIS Biology teacher twice expresses the idea that teachers should and do constantly 'keep an eye' on girls and boys when they interact, to ensure that their behaviour remains within appropriate 'limits'. This suggests a slightly different approach from the CGS teachers; rather than immediately intervening to stop girls and boys from talking or sitting together, Biology ma'am apparently watched, waited and only intervened when she observed 'any kind of problem' in the students' interactions. Other teachers at RIS also reported doing this, with Commerce sir stating that he always 'watch[es] and see[s]' how girls and boys interact in his classroom (Commerce sir, RIS – interview).

In addition to teachers keeping a close eye on girls and boys and directly intervening to separate them, sports teachers at both schools were key enforcers of discipline in general, and

gender segregation in particular. Akira's story provides an example of the way in which the CGS sports teacher scolded and separated girls and boys whenever she saw them, and the RIS sports teacher fulfilled a similar role. He told me that he 'maintain[ed] all the discipline for the girls and boys', specifically the 'teenagers [...] the 13-19 year olds' (PT sir, RIS – interview); his emphasis on the need to maintain discipline among 'teenagers' underlines the importance of closely monitoring students as they become sexually mature.

Overall, students' and teachers' accounts suggest that gender segregation at CGS and RIS was maintained through a combination of tacit disapproval from students and teachers, as well as more direct interventions from teachers. Specific disciplinary mechanisms, such as patrolling sports teachers, student hall monitors, and general surveillance by teachers, maintained gender-segregated spaces in both schools. These findings echo studies which report the use of disciplinary practices to monitor and control young people's sexuality within UK school contexts (e.g. Nayak & Kehily 2008; Alldred & David 2007; Epstein & Johnson 1998). As in those studies, teachers' anxieties at CGS and RIS were based in an assumption that young people's discovery of their sexuality (specifically around the age of 16) would almost inevitably disrupt academic focus and achievement. Attempts to control young people's sexuality through gender segregation also reflect the familiar mind/body dichotomy within secondary education, as well as Gandhian narratives of sexuality (see Chapter One) in which the body is suppressed and controlled in pursuit of loftier, intellectual purposes. However, as discussed in the following section, an absence of strict disciplinary mechanisms led to considerable changes to the gender dynamics within the schools.

#### **4.7 Less rigid gender boundaries**

The absence of rigid disciplinary structures at SGS was particularly apparent in comparison to their presence at the other two schools. As discussed above, while CGS and RIS both had mechanisms in place through which students and teachers maintained discipline, the SGS Principal told me that she had recently abolished the school prefect system, while a new staff transfer policy<sup>19</sup> meant that, 'with teachers coming and going', it was difficult to assign disciplinary tasks to them (Principal ma'am, SGS – follow-up interview). Another important staff-related issue was the lack of a sports teacher at the school; the SGS sports teacher had been away on sick leave for three years at the time of the study (Principal ma'am, SGS –

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<sup>19</sup> After five years at one Pratibha School, teachers can be transferred to another Pratibha School. During the fieldwork period, the Class 11 Chemistry, Physics, Biology and English teachers were all transferred to other Pratibha Schools (Field notes, 30.09.14; 24.10.13).

interview). As I observed at CGS and RIS, the sports teacher played a central role in maintaining discipline in general, and specifically minimizing or preventing heterosocial interactions. The often chaotic atmosphere that I observed at SGS was a marked contrast to the more ordered environments of CGS and RIS. The Principal and students' accounts, combined with my own observations, suggested that the absence of a sports teacher and other teachers' lack of involvement in disciplinary activities at SGS were key contributing factors to this atmosphere.

In addition to a lack of disciplinary mechanisms at SGS, some teachers at the school also seemed more relaxed about heterosocial interactions within co-educational spaces:

- English ma'am: [...] If a girl want [*sic*] to sit with a boy, I don't mind! Why should I mind? We are working in such a way – my [male] colleague is sitting in such a way, why does it matter to me. That's what my approach is.
- Padmini: Um – do you, do girls and boys generally they mix quite a lot, quite freely, or are they quite separate in class?
- English ma'am: Freely, freely. In my class I don't do like that - if they want to mix up together then they can.

(English (11C) ma'am, SGS – interview)

English (11C) ma'am's initial emphasis that she has no objection to mixed seating arrangements perhaps seems a little defensive ('I don't mind! Why should I mind [...] why does it matter to me'), which could suggest an 'official' response of denying any discriminatory practices within her classroom. However, one of the SGS girls confirmed that while some teachers were strict about girls and boys interacting at school, others could indeed be more laidback:

- Naina: Some are nice. Some are not. Some – yeah, there are some teachers who have a conservative mentality – I don't like them, that's why! [*laughs*] And some are really nice – they don't say such things. Some teachers are there, that say, "Don't talk to boys", and all that things – I don't think it's that – you're just talking, you're not doing anything like that.  
[...]
- Padmini: And so like, the good teachers or the nice teachers – tell me about them?
- Naina: Yes – they're like, "Talk to boys, be friends with them, it's not a big deal".

(Naina, 11B, SGS – interview)

Naina's critique of teachers who discourage girls from talking to boys is comparable to Akira's and Aditya's accounts of teachers at CGS and RIS. She similarly characterizes teachers with a 'conservative mentality' as those who try to keep girls and boys apart, while she protests at the assumption that heterosocial interactions might have sexual undertones ('you're just talking, you're not doing anything like that'). Importantly, however, Naina also gives voice to teachers who encourage heterosocial interactions – “Talk to boys, be friends with them, it's not a big deal” – which suggests that the SGS English (11C) teacher may not have simply been giving an official answer when expressing her relaxed attitudes.

While SGS teachers did not necessarily view adolescent sexuality as less problematic than their counterparts at CGS and RIS, it seemed that more relaxed personal attitudes, combined with a lack of obligation to enforce discipline within the school, contributed to more relaxed heterosocial dynamics among students. This was apparent, for example, during classroom observation days with 11A and 11C<sup>20</sup>, when I observed girls and boys studying, sitting and talking to one another both within and beyond the classroom (Classroom observations, 11A, SGS). The implications of these less rigid gender boundaries at SGS, and the ways in which CGS and RIS students negotiated the boundaries enforced at their schools, will be explored in more detail in Chapter Six.

#### 4.8 Conclusions

This chapter began by exploring the idea that gender did not 'matter' to young people's experiences of co-education. In terms of students' educational and career aspirations, it seemed that this was the case; girls and boys alike were invested in a career-oriented narrative of education, with expectations of professional employment in future. This importantly suggests that gender equality in terms of educational and career aspirations may be a specific feature of urban, middle-class narratives of education in contemporary India. However, it should also be noted that the female Class 11 research participants were, to some extent, a self-selecting sample in terms of career aspirations. Girls who have been enrolled in senior secondary classes (and their families) are arguably more likely to have expectations of higher education and professional employment; girls for whom this is not expected are less likely to continue their education after compulsory schooling ends in Class 10.

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<sup>20</sup> I did not observe a normal teaching day with 11B at SGS – see 3.5.1.



While Class 11 girls' aspirations and expectations of equal treatment remains an important finding, it was also apparent that gender and sexuality were made to matter in numerous ways in students' day-to-day experiences of co-education. This chapter has explored the extensive gender work required to maintain 'gender neutrality' in the schools (Thomson 2000), which was particularly apparent in the disciplinary practices used to maintain gender segregation. Paradoxically, while it was based on fears of adolescent sexuality, this segregation proved sexualising in itself; any transgression of gender segregation was viewed by teachers as a potentially sexualized encounter, even as students protested the typically non-sexual nature of heterosocial interactions. Along with teachers' attitudes and gender segregated spaces, the risk-based narratives of sexuality within formal sources of sexual learning further revealed anxieties about the close proximity of adolescent girls and boys within co-educational spaces. In terms of sexual learning, the silences and absences around sexuality in the school curriculum seem to reflect assumptions that providing young people with information on sexuality equates to encouraging sexual activity, while the euphemistic discussion of sexual intercourse itself may point to the lasting influence of conservative opposition to sex education in India (see Chapter One).

As will be discussed in Chapter Six, heterosocial dynamics within peer cultures suggested that students were adept at negotiating norms of gender segregation at all three schools. Before this, Chapter Five explores further ways in which gender and sexuality were made to 'matter' at school. In particular, the chapter examines the often contradictory narratives of girlhood and masculinities which shaped young people's experiences at school and beyond, in the wake of high-profile cases of sexual violence and fears for women's safety in late 2012 and throughout 2013.

## Chapter Five: Gender narratives in the shadow of sexual violence

### 5.1 Introduction

I carried out my PhD fieldwork in Delhi during a very particular ‘moment’ in relation to gender and sexuality in India; high profile cases of sexual violence between December 2012 and December 2014 framed my fieldwork period. In my study schools, in addition to norms of gender segregation (Chapter Four), the gender narratives that shaped young people’s everyday lives revealed further ways in which gender and sexuality were made to ‘matter’. In the wake of the December 2012 gang rape case, these narratives of girlhood and masculinity were both contradicted and reinforced by seemingly ubiquitous stories of sexual violence.

This chapter explores competing narratives of girlhood (5.2) and masculinities (5.4) that already shaped young people’s experiences of schooling, and then seeks to locate girls’ (5.3) and boys’ (5.5) responses to cases of sexual violence within these often contradictory gender narratives. In this chapter, schools are considered both as institutional agents and as sites for other kinds of agents, particularly students (Connell 2000); I explore the interactions between gender narratives on an institutional level and within peer cultures at the schools. The work of Connell (2005), Holland et al (1998) and Cornwall & Lindisfarne (1994) has also proved invaluable in order to conceptualize multiple masculinities and femininities in this chapter. Going beyond Connell’s (2000) framework, I begin to consider the role of sexual stories (Plummer 1995; Epstein & Johnson 1998), particularly stories of sexual violence, in shaping young people’s gendered and sexual learning; these stories provided another, perhaps more immediate dimension to the risk-based sources of sexual learning examined in Chapter Four.

Findings presented in this chapter are consistent with Gilbertson (2014), Dasgupta (2014), Phadke, Khan & Ranade (2011) and others who discuss the conflict in post-liberalization India between new expectations and opportunities in young women’s lives, and old restrictions on female sexuality and freedom of movement in the name of women’s ‘safety’. I also go beyond interpretations of recent sexual violence in India in terms of a ‘crisis’ of masculinity (Dasgupta 2014; Kapur 2012) by examining boys’ own anxieties and concerns, and by exploring the complex ways in which violence was embedded in their everyday experiences of schooling.

Firstly, however, it seems important to consider how the focus of the research, and my analysis of students’ stories, was shaped by my own experiences and responses to ongoing cases of sexual violence in India during the fieldwork period. The December 2012 case occurred two weeks before the start of my first fieldwork trip to Delhi (see Chapter One); as well as sharing the widespread, horrified reaction at the brutality of the attack, I admitted in

my early field notes that the case had made me feel ‘scared and anxious’ about going to Delhi (Field notes, 05.01.13). I was not alone in this fear; my parents repeatedly told me to ‘be careful, ‘keep safe’ and ‘be sensible’ while I was in Delhi. I was indeed careful while in Delhi, planning my days to avoid travelling after dark, travelling in the ladies’ carriage when using the Delhi Metro, and constantly worrying about whether my choice of clothing was appropriate (although this was as much to do with a desire to ‘fit in’ as with concerns about personal safety – see Chapter Three). I later heard similar stories from girls and women in Delhi, both the girls who participated in my research and older female colleagues, who shared their strategies for ‘keeping safe’ and responding to their families’ anxieties for their safety in the city.

Narratives of female vulnerability, then, were at the forefront of my mind when in Delhi at the beginning of 2013, and again when I returned to the city in August 2013. However, given the feminist framing of the research, as well as my own feminist politics, I began to resent these forms of self-restriction and the apparently unquestionable logic of my vulnerability as a lone woman in public spaces. I particularly struggled to deal with the persistent staring with which seemingly all women in India have to contend while alone in public<sup>21</sup>. At best, this just involved men blankly and unapologetically staring (something I have always struggled with during visits to India, perhaps a result of the ‘it’s-rude-to-stare’ mantra I grew up with in the UK), but more offensive forms involved a suggestive leer accompanied by kissing sounds and/or ‘comment-passing’. In an atmosphere of heightened fears about violence against women, even the blankest of stares from individual or groups of men in broad daylight took on a sinister edge, which unnerved and angered me during the first few weeks of the main fieldwork period.

While previous family visits to India had to some extent prepared me for such experiences in public spaces, I had not anticipated similarly unwelcome scrutiny from boys in the schools. Assumptions relating to the ‘power of the researcher’ were completely subverted during CGS and RIS questionnaire sessions, where I was already struggling to appear authoritative in front of a classroom of 15-17 year olds. When attempting to introduce myself and the research, I became aware of groups of boys whispering, pointing, and smiling suggestively at me – which left me feeling both powerless and unnerved. I found this attention even more unexpected since I had taken great care (or so I thought) to ‘fit in’ during my school visits, wearing a modest churidar-kurta suit complete with dupatta (see Chapter Three).

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<sup>21</sup> According to Phadke, Khan & Ranade (2011), this is linked to the relative invisibility of women in urban spaces; while men are frequently seen ‘loitering’ all over India’s metro cities, public spaces are transitory spaces for women, used to travel from one private space to another.

I did not articulate this general sense of uneasiness in the early weeks of fieldwork, either to my research assistant or when writing my field notes. However, reading a particularly powerful article on the December 2012 case by Jason Burke (2013b) finally led me to express the anger I felt at this persistent sense of vulnerability, albeit not particularly coherently.

[...] Walking back to the hostel after reading this [the Burke article], I realized how in the midst of all this I am – suddenly I felt both startled and angry when I noticed a man staring at me as I walked past the Metro station, which is something I had become used to over these past weeks. Or at least I'd become used to ignoring it [...] And then I thought about the 'eve-teasing' I've been getting myself in the schools [...] Pankaj saying loudly to me in the corridor in front of his friends: "Ma'am you're looking gorgeous in Indian dress!", and then one of the boys in 11B shouting "Ma'am you're looking gorgeous!" across the classroom.

[...] Thinking back on my varying reactions to their behaviour, I want my next reaction to be more along the lines of pointing out in the most eloquent and convincing manner possible that they are part of the problem, that they are implicated when they behave like this and think it's okay to behave like this, as if girls and women are just a joke, or just cardboard cut-outs which they can use to exert power and feel so fucking dominant.

(Field notes, 12.09.13)

This experience of being 'in the midst' of key aspects of my research – gendered, sexualized interactions in schools and beyond – encouraged an ongoing process of reflexivity during and after fieldwork, and made me particularly aware of the embodied nature of my research (as discussed by Unnithan-Kumar 2006). Additionally, my responses to boys' attentions in the schools did change over time. While I initially felt exposed and vulnerable during informal interactions at CGS and RIS, over the fieldwork period I became more comfortable within the school environments, and felt more equipped to deal with and respond to boys' attentions. In particular, this had an impact on my interactions with SGS boys, where I started research with students after five weeks' experience in CGS and RIS. I initially felt that the SGS boys were more friendly and less intimidating than the CGS and RIS boys, but further reflection suggested that this may have had more to do with my own changing positionality than with the students themselves.

These experiences and personal reactions also directly influenced my research focus. My decision to include an activity on 'eve-teasing' in the mixed FGDs (see Chapters Two and Three), for example, was undeniably linked to my personal experiences in Delhi, combined with the daily media reports on the December 2012 trial, which took place from August until mid-September 2013. In this chapter, I explore students' own experiences and responses in

light of ongoing cases of sexual violence, and locate these stories within particular gender narratives that shaped their school lives. The chapter explores the ways in which, within the context of broader narratives of sexual violence, narratives of girlhood and masculinities both reinforced and contradicted each other. Throughout the chapter, reflections on my own embodied experiences as a woman living in Delhi, and as a female researcher working within the schools, inform the discussion of students' stories and experiences.

## 5.2 Narratives of girlhood at school

Jyoti Singh, the young woman who was raped and killed on December 16<sup>th</sup> 2012, was characterized by the media as having lived the life of a typical urban Indian woman. The only daughter of a middle-class family, her education enabled her to aspire to a well-respected career (she was training to be a physiotherapist), and she was financially independent enough to enjoy one of the city's relatively exclusive consumer spaces in her leisure time. According to Leslie Udwin's controversial 2015 documentary, *India's Daughter*, Jyoti Singh used to say, "A girl can do anything," (in Roberts 2015: no page numbers). Prior to the attack, Jyoti's experiences could be described as consistent with a 'can-do' narrative of femininity, which

suggests to young women that they can get what they want and do what they want. In this respect, girl power exists as a seemingly new version of femininity that can be seen as an assertive and individualised expression of power.

(Aapola et al 2005, in Kehily 2012: 258)

However, in Jyoti's story, this 'seemingly new version of femininity' was brutally contradicted. The Indian government's belated promises of improved safety for women in public spaces implicitly confirmed a narrative of vulnerable femininity, in which women are always potential victims and therefore in need of protection. By contrast, in the wake of the December 2012 case, Indian feminists called not for improved safety, but greater freedoms for women in all aspects of their lives (see Chapter One). It became apparent that similar tensions between narratives of vulnerable and can-do girlhood shaped the lives of the middle-class girls who participated in the study.

In the previous chapter, I explored the importance of a career-oriented narrative of education for students at all the schools. I discussed girls' and boys' shared expectations and aspirations as an illustration of the 'gender similarity' that was possible within the context of English medium, co-educational schools, particularly for students from middle-class backgrounds.

However, there were also important gender differences in girls' and boys' perceived ability to achieve academic success.

The time has changed, and the girls are coming to the forefront. Girls want to come forward. And ah, one thing is there – it is, you can say that it is in the genes of the girls that they are hard-working, right? In boys they are carefree, casual attitude, free to move here and there [...] Some boys are serious, hardworking, but – if you compare boys and girls, the girls [do] more hard work. Now I think time has changed, the girls are coming more forward. Time has changed.

(Chemistry (11A) ma'am, CGS – interview)

The CGS Chemistry teacher suggests here that girls are genetically pre-determined to be more studious than boys ('it is in the genes of the girls that they are hard-working'), but she also suggests that there is also something temporally specific about 'girls coming to the forefront'. She repeats the phrase 'time has changed' three times, and several teachers offered similar explanations of how times had changed. Teachers usually attributed changes among students, whether their fondness for junk food or their online social lives, to the role of 'the media' over the past 10-20 years (i.e. post-liberalization India – see Chapter Two). Teachers at all the schools suggested that increased access to 'Western' media had led to different behavioural patterns and expectations among young people during this period. Girls' changed aspirations and success could therefore be attributed to these 'Westernized' influences, along with the policy emphasis on girls' education during this period, and the emergence of the educated, professional young woman as the 'icon of the new India' in popular culture and middle-class narratives (Dasgupta 2014: 135; Gilbertson 2014; Phadke, Khan & Ranade 2011 – see Chapter Two). According to these teachers, the combination of girls' natural tendencies and this specific moment in time has not just led to gender equality at school, but in fact the realisation of girls' superior academic ability and achievement.

The idea that girls are better students than boys can be linked to traditional notions of compliant femininity and wayward masculinity (the latter is discussed in 5.4), as well as the 'silly/sensible' dichotomy reported in schools across the world (Sharma 2014). However, girls' superiority in the classroom can also be linked to narratives of can-do girlhood. The idea that girls are more academically able than boys supports the idea that modern girls can 'get what they want and be what they want', at school and beyond. Girls' investment in this can-do narrative of girlhood, and its implications for their future aspirations, became particularly apparent during mixed FGDs.

Violet: A woman can take a decision by herself, she don't have to ask anyone if she feel like. And so, [in] her situation, she doesn't want that anyone feel pity on her.

(RIS Mixed Focus Group – 2)

Mala: I think being self-dependent is the most important thing as a girl. I – if I get married, I don't want to get married without working in any office or – because I'm, completely don't want to depend on my husband, and on my family.

(SGS Mixed Focus Group – 1)

Violet and Mala made these comments during 'Be Ladylike' brainstorming activities (see Chapter Three and Appendix 7). I was struck by the girls' emphasis on the importance of women's independence, with Violet asserting women's independence of thought ('a woman can take a decision by herself') and Mala valuing 'self-dependence' above all else for girls. Mala defines this independence in monetary terms, particularly in relation to marriage, stating that she would want a job in order to avoid financial dependence on her husband or parents. The self-sufficient, working women imagined by the girls clearly reflect the 'assertive and individualised expression of power' of a can-do narrative of femininity. It seemed that an investment in such narratives enabled girls to have particular, 'modern' expectations of their future, and to share career aspirations with the boys in their class (see Chapter Four).

However, these were not the only narratives of girlhood available to students. The influence of narratives of vulnerable femininity were most apparent in girls' stories about their experiences at home, and the restrictions that their parents placed upon them.

Khyati: Yeah, like [my parents say], "You should be home by 8 – you should come straight to the home, without talking to or looking at anyone". It's like, these all, the limits we face everyday. [...] One day I said to my mom, "I need to get to the photocopy shop". [...] My mother said, "You will not be going alone, your brother will accompany you". My brother would accompany me! So [...] parents don't feel secure to send us to, ah, send us outside alone at night, due to these cases [that] have happened. They say the same thing – "Delhi's not safe, come straight, [...] come immediately after school is over, don't take too much time after school" – all that stuff.

(CGS Girls' Focus Group)

This story is dominated by a series of reported imperatives from Khyati's parents, and Khyati suggests that she hears these instructions frequently ('the limits we face everyday', 'they say the same thing'). Echoing my own parents' concerns while I was in Delhi, Khyati reports her parents urging her to go straight home after school, and not allowing her to go out alone at

night. In the specific incident narrated by Khyati here, her mother draws upon assumptions relating to girls' vulnerability by only allowing Khyati to go out with the 'protection' of her (younger) brother. Khyati's incredulous repetition of her mother's instruction ("My brother would accompany me!") suggests she is less than impressed by this requirement. However, she explains that her parents' concerns are specifically linked to recent cases of sexual violence ('due to these cases [that] have happened'), and since these cases confirmed apparently irrefutable truths ('Delhi's not safe'), it seems that Khyati could not challenge her parents' reasoning. In her use of the first person plural to describe the 'limits we face every day' and to state that 'parents don't feel secure to send us [...] outside alone at night', Khyati seemed to be speaking on behalf of the rest of the girls in the FGD; as fieldwork progressed, it became clear that experiences of such restrictions at home were in fact shared by almost all the girls who participated in the research.

While these narratives of vulnerable girlhood were largely confirmed by girls' experiences at home, they were also apparent in the advice that teachers reportedly gave to girls at school.

I always tell to the girls that, "See, you always have to be alert. Alertness always has to be there. See, many times [...] we are walking, we are not seeing that somebody is following us, or somebody is, you know, coming with a speed[ing] car [...] Moreover there are things which you can – see if you are in a public place, you can raise an alarm, but if you are alone you immediately try to escape that lonely place, or immediately call on your mobile. So you have to use this alertness. [...] You also have to see where you are going, you have to plan it out, whether it's day and night. And you have to inform everyone, so you will be safe".

(Counsellor ma'am, RIS – interview)

In her reported advice to RIS girls, Counsellor ma'am heavily emphasizes the importance of being alert in public spaces. She does this through oblique descriptions of potential threats ('somebody is following us', 'somebody is [...] coming with a speeding car'), and a list of context-specific actions for girls to take in order to get help. Notably, these all involve seeking help from others ('you can raise an alarm', 'immediately call on your mobile') or running away ('try to escape that lonely place'); these are not assertive girls who can do anything, but vulnerable girls who are in danger simply by being alone in public, and who need to take appropriate precautions to ensure they are protected at all times, 'whether it's day [or] night'.

These narratives of vulnerable girlhood arguably became more compelling in the wake of the December 2012 case (although, as one teacher pointed out, 'before [parents] were also worried, but now they're more worried'; English ma'am, RIS – interview). Although many



Indian feminists have been deeply critical of international media coverage since December 2012 suggesting that sexual violence is an 'Indian' problem (e.g. Krishnan 2015), the idea that India is particularly unsafe for women was frequently expressed by students and teachers.

See in Indian society normally the girls are restricted right from the beginning. And their limitations are – the limitations are told, “See this is your limitations and you must not cross your limit, you must not go out of the house [...]” – so that is the problem. These kind of teachings only are given. You know – right from the beginning, to the girl in India. Whether it is higher society or lower society or middle class – everywhere.

(Vice Principal sir, RIS – interview)

In this quotation, the RIS Vice Principal contextualizes girls' vulnerability within a wider narrative of female disadvantage in Indian society. In particular, he emphasizes that girls are restricted 'right from the beginning' of their life in India, and that concerns about keeping girls safe lead to continued restraints (“you must not go out of the house”). Importantly, he also stresses that such attitudes towards girls and women transcend class boundaries, stating that people have 'negative' thoughts about women in 'higher society', 'lower society', and the 'middle class' alike. In this claim, the Vice Principal seems to refute the implicit idea that only uneducated people might hold such views about women, an idea which students also debated.

- Tornado: Ma'am I live in a village, there are so many cases like this, that ah, womens [*sic*] are discriminated. In many ways. This thing is true
- Padmini: Like, how are they discriminated?  
[...]
- Tornado: They are not allowed to leave the house without their husbands' permission, or without their fathers' permission. In these cases
- Violet: But not only in villages, in cities also this is the condition. Like, conservativeness
- Leela: Yes, conservativeness
- Violet: Females are not allowed to go out.

(RIS Mixed Focus Group – 2)

In this extract, Tornado initially uses first-hand knowledge of his village to validate his claim that he has witnessed 'so many cases' of women being confined to the private sphere, and kept under the control of their fathers or husbands. Interestingly, Violet and Leela intervene to argue that such experiences are not confined to rural areas; the girls describe such practices as 'conservative' which, unlike the 'traditional' or 'rural' practices suggested by Tornado's account, can more easily be imagined within an urban setting. Violet and Leela later told stories that suggested they experienced similar restrictions from their parents as Khyati at

CGS; moreover, along with many other girls who participated in the research, these girls also located their experiences within a wider narrative of female disadvantage in India.

While girls and teachers alike were invested in can-do narratives of high-achieving, independent femininity, which supported the idea that education promoted gender equality in society, narratives of vulnerable girlhood had a persistent influence at home and at school. The timescale of the research meant it was not possible to determine the extent to which these narratives of vulnerable girlhood had become more pervasive after December 2012; as Phadke, Khan & Ranade (2011) and Banerjee et al (2012) have noted, conditional access to public spaces has been a sustained feature of women's experience in post-liberalization India. However, students' and teachers' accounts suggested that recent cases of sexual violence, which seemingly confirmed wider cultural narratives about female disadvantage in patriarchal Indian society, made fears relating to female vulnerability all the more compelling.

### **5.3 Fear and anger: girls' responses to cases of sexual violence**

In light of my own concerns about personal safety while in Delhi, and ongoing discussions about the lack of safety for women in Delhi in the media, I included several questionnaire items that addressed the issue of students' safety outside school. In response to Q23, 60.9% of girls (n = 39) indicated that they did not feel safe travelling outside school, while 80.2% of boys (n = 69) indicated that they did feel safe while doing this (see Table 7). This difference between girls' and boys' responses was statistically significant, suggesting that overall, girls were more likely than boys to feel unsafe in public spaces. Just over half of the girls (n = 14) who responded to the open-ended Q24 ('Please explain your answer to Q23') explained that they did not feel safe due to the threat of sexual harassment or sexual violence, while just under half of the girls cited a general lack of safety for women in the city (n = 12)<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> 116 valid responses to Q24 were coded using NVivo. 62.0% of girls (n = 31) gave responses explaining why they did not feel safe travelling around outside school, while 77.0% of boys (n = 51) gave responses explaining why they did feel safe while travelling outside school.

*Table 7: Student questionnaire responses, Q23 – ‘Do you feel safe when you are walking or travelling around outside school?’*

		No	Yes	Total
Female	Count	39	25	64
	% within gender	60.9%	39.1%	100.0%
Male	Count	17	69	86
	% within gender	19.8%	80.2%	100.0%
Total	Count	56	94	150
	% within gender	37.3%	62.7%	100.0%
<i>Statistical test results:</i> – Chi-square: Significant differences according to gender ( $\chi^2 = 26.584$ , $p = 0.001$ )				

Responses to Q25b, a Likert-type item asking about students’ perceptions of gender and safety, similarly revealed that the vast majority of students (90.3%,  $n = 121$ ) believed it is more dangerous for girls than boys to travel alone (see Table 8). In response to Q25a, 84.2% of students ( $n = 91$ ) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the opposing statement, that it is more dangerous for boys than girls to travel alone (see Table 9). There were no statistically significant differences between girls’ and boys’ responses to these items; it seems that there was a near consensus on girls’ lack of safety when travelling alone. 86.0% of respondents ( $n = 80$ ) to the open-ended Q26 (‘Please explain your answer to Q25’) stated that it was less safe for girls than boys to travel alone<sup>23</sup>, with around a third of students who responded in this way explaining that this was due to the threat of sexual harassment or violence ( $n = 29$ ), and another third citing a lack of safety for girls and women specifically in Delhi and/or India ( $n = 32$ ).

*Table 8: Student questionnaire responses, Q25b – ‘Do you think it is more dangerous for girls to travel on their own?’*

		Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
Female	Count	18	33	4	0	55
	% within gender	32.7%	60.0%	7.3%	0.0%	100.0%
Male	Count	30	40	6	3	79
	% within gender	38.0%	50.6%	7.6%	3.8%	100.0%
Total	Count	48	73	10	3	134
	% within gender	35.8%	54.5%	7.5%	2.2%	100.0%
<i>Statistical test results:</i> – Mann-Whitney $U$ : no significant differences according to gender ( $z = -0.201$ , $p = 0.841$ ).						

<sup>23</sup> 93 valid responses to Q26 were coded using NVivo.

Table 9: Student questionnaire responses, Q25a – ‘Do you think it is more dangerous for boys to travel on their own?’

		Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
Female	Count	0	7	26	6	39
	% within gender	0.0%	17.9%	66.7%	15.4%	100.0%
Male	Count	1	9	48	11	69
	% within gender	1.4%	13.0%	69.6%	15.9%	100.0%
Total	Count	1	16	74	17	108
	% within gender	0.9%	14.8%	68.5%	15.7%	100.0%
<p><i>Statistical test results:</i></p> <p>– Mann-Whitney <i>U</i>: no significant differences according to gender (<math>z = -0.328</math>, <math>p = 0.743</math>)</p>						

Responses to Q23-Q26 reflect not only a greater fear for personal safety among girls than boys, but further suggest that the majority of students subscribed to a wider narrative of female vulnerability. Fortunately, none of the girls who participated in the research reported actual experiences of being physically attacked while at school or while travelling between school and home. However, experiences of ‘eve-teasing’ and ‘comment-passing’ seemed to confirm narratives of vulnerable girlhood at all the schools.

Girls and boys alike mentioned that eve-teasing was a regular occurrence at school (CGS Mixed Focus Group 2; RIS Mixed Focus Group 2; SGS Mixed Focus Groups 1 and 2), and following Rogers (2008) and Phadke, Khan & Ranade (2011), I glossed ‘eve-teasing’ and ‘comment-passing’ as forms of sexual harassment. However, this interpretation should also be considered in light of my own discomfort at being stared at and ‘eve-teased’ in the schools and in public spaces while in Delhi, as well as my feminist position; I was aware that students may not have understood eve-teasing as a form of violence in the same way that I did. Nevertheless, the language used by several girls to describe their personal experiences of eve-teasing and comment-passing at school suggested that they did not take it lightly.

[Boys] used to pass comments, you know? Unnecessary comments. They want to show their importance, you know? That, “I am standing here, give me some importance, and don’t ignore me”, that kind of thing [...] Yah yah, I’ve gone to a teacher – for, I don’t know, I was new in the school. It was one – I was, that time I was a little bit childish kind of girl. So I don’t know, one boy commented on me [...] I went and told her. I actually started crying, you know!

(Akira, 11A, CGS – interview)

And sometimes [boys] pass comments, bad comments – they use abusive language, that is – I don't think that is justified. They should get punishment for this. So, at that time I feel like slapping them, on my own!

(Rani, 11A, SGS – interview)

Akira's account of boys passing comments at her school initially suggests that their behaviour is attention seeking (“‘don't ignore me’”) rather than malicious. She also plays down her decision to complain to a teacher when a boy ‘commented on’ her, and excuses her reaction as a sign of her immaturity (‘I was a little bit childish kind of girl’). Akira's dismissiveness may have been a form of defence, perhaps in case I judged her for being unable to ‘deal’ with the situation; it also suggests that in her eyes, maturity involves an acceptance of this kind of harassment, rather than something to be angry or upset about. However, the fact that this incident made Akira cry, along with her reluctance to tell me what the boy had said, suggests she was clearly upset by the experience. Rani is less apologetic than Akira in her reaction, framing comment-passing as unacceptable and calling for such behaviour to be punished. As with Akira's distressed response, Rani's anger (‘I feel like slapping them’) suggests that these girls found comment-passing offensive and upsetting.

Neither girl elaborates on what boys actually say when they pass comments, but by describing these comments as ‘unnecessary’, ‘bad’, and involving ‘abusive language’, their characterisation of eve-teasing as unwanted and offensive arguably supports my interpretation of such behaviour as harassment. As well as making the girls feel uncomfortable, boys who engaged in comment-passing and eve-teasing reinforced gender dynamics in which girls were made to feel powerless, once again confirming narratives of vulnerable girlhood. Akira and Rani's experiences are also consistent with findings from Leach & Sitaram's (2007) study in a secondary school in Karnataka, in which female students discussed experiences of sexual harassment in school by male students, and during journeys to and from school by older boys and men.

In light of such experiences at school, along with restrictions placed upon their movement and daily media reports of sexual violence, it is unsurprising that many of the girls were afraid for their personal safety, and subscribed to wider narratives of female vulnerability. The brother-sister paradigm mentioned in Chapter Four provides one example of this; the idea that girls require rakhi brothers in school to ‘protect’ them from other boys (namely, those who eve-tease and pass comments – see Chapter Six for a more detailed discussion) is also consistent with a narrative of vulnerable girlhood. Additionally, several girls defended their parents for placing restrictions upon them at home:

If I go outside my house it's always with my parents, with my family. So I'm not allowed to travel on my own, that's one of the things [...] Of course I feel more safe with my parents, so that way – I like it when they're always accompanying me.

(Deepika, 11B, CGS – interview)

I mean, somewhere they show that they're very much conservative, but I don't think – I should not give that name of conservativeness, I should give the name of care for me. They care for me, every time they just say *that*, "*Darling* (beta), don't do this", and all that [...] They just want that no-one harm me, or no-one should, ah – I should not get affected by someone.

(Leela, 11D, RIS – interview)

While both Deepika and Leela describe the various restrictions imposed by their parents ('I'm not allowed to travel on my own'; "'don't do this'"), neither of the girls objects to these limitations. Deepika indicates that she prefers to travel with her parents because she feels safer with them rather than alone, while Leela suggests that protectiveness is implicit in the notion of parental care. She is reluctant to describe her parents as 'conservative', a label which was usually viewed unfavourably by students, but frames her parents' restrictions as proof of their concern and love for her. My initial reading of Deepika and Leela's responses was as an understanding of their parents' 'policing' as a form of protection; however, such an interpretation does not adequately take into account the particular moment of the research. While an acceptance of the idea that girls require protection does reinforce unhelpful gender narratives, the fact that these girls felt in need of protection also reflects the powerful ways in which ubiquitous stories of sexual violence affected girls during this period.

Within a context of heightened fears of violence against women, girls' own frequent experiences of harassment in school, and wider narratives of female disadvantage in Indian society, many girls clearly feared for their personal safety in public spaces. However, the tensions between narratives of vulnerable girlhood and narratives of can-do girlhood also left many girls more angry than afraid.

Aaliya: Ma'am, my question is – why the boys every time, every time they feel safe, when anywhere they should go, ah, then – he is safe anywhere! Why should, why these boys are safe and we are not?

Padmini: Why are they? I – yeah I don't know – sometimes I think it's –

Jaya: It's our country!  
[...]

Deepika: Women are less strong, in general, boys are physically stronger than us, so –

Harsha: [*shakes her head vigorously*]

Padmini: No, you don't agree?

[...]

Harsha: Ma'am, Deepika said *that, I mean, that boys are physically strong[er] than girls* – ma'am *it's not like that, because – it's not like that because whatever boys can do, girls can do it too [...]* Ma'am, *their nature is the same [...]* No-one can say that boys are strong[er].

(CGS Girls' Focus Group)

Aaliya starts this discussion by asking me a poignant question about assumed female vulnerability – why should it be the case that boys can feel safe in public, but girls cannot? Fortunately, Jaya interrupted my stumbling attempt at a reply (I remember feeling both touched and worried by Aaliya's assumption that I would have the answer to this question) with her passionate exclamation, 'It's our country!'. This could be read as an assertion that girls have as much right as boys to feel safe, which is specifically linked to their shared and supposedly equal status as Indian citizens – or alternatively, as an exasperated statement on the status quo in India. Deepika's intervention arguably reflects her greater investment in a narrative of vulnerable girlhood (as discussed above), but Harsha passionately rejects the suggestion that women are inevitably vulnerable due to men's physical strength. She argues that girls are just as capable as boys; for her, gender equality lies in boys and girls being 'naturally' the same, and so generalizations such as 'boys are stronger' become meaningless. This is an interesting inversion of biology-as-destiny narratives; Harsha naturalizes gender *equality* rather than gender difference, and uses this to support a narrative of can-do rather than vulnerable girlhood.

Aaliya, Jaya and Harsha's appeals to an ideal of gender equality in response to cases of sexual violence can be linked to the widespread public anger and a feeling that 'enough was enough' in the wake of the Delhi gang rape case, which was prominently expressed during protests in Delhi in December 2012. As well as voicing their frustrations with assumptions of female vulnerability within this specific context, girls at all the schools challenged wider narratives of female disadvantage in Indian society.

Rani: Ma'am, when a girl gets married, sometimes their in-laws, her in-laws force them for dowry [...] So this should not happen, she should show that she is strong enough, that she can fight for her rights, and nobody can easily harm her.

Padmini: Okay, cool. So you mentioned like, fighting for your rights – so how can a woman fight for her rights, what's that about?

Mala: By not letting such people hurt [them], and by fighting for their own rights. Being educated, because they are – if they are educated so they can know what are their rights, they can fight for that. And they can appeal to the government, that, "We are violated".

(SGS Mixed Focus Group – 1)

Although none of the girls explicitly identified themselves as feminists, the idea that women should ‘fight for their rights’ is consistent with progressive political narratives, and the ‘assertive and individualised expressions of power’ of can-do narratives of girlhood. Girls at CGS imagined a fight for women’s rights as a collective effort, arguing that family members, teachers, and friends should support these efforts (CGS Girls’ Focus Group). By contrast, in the SGS quotation, Rani and Mala suggest the ways in which individual women can seek to change their circumstances; for example, by standing up to traditional practices such as dowry extraction. Mala not only makes a direct link between women’s education and empowerment (in terms of an awareness of rights), but also suggests that this level of awareness enables women to place demands on the government to fulfil their human rights.

Post-December 2012, girls’ calls for women to fight for their rights can be understood in terms of their frustrations that promises of a ‘new’, modern femininity were not being fulfilled in their own lives, nor in wider society. Khyati eloquently describes these tensions in the following quotation:

You know, I think that, ah – in India, the views are changing, the mind-sets are changing. The girls are given more opportunities. But even though girls are given more opportunities, the environment, the society for girls is very bad. You know, rape cases, all these stuff, murders, are still happening. And due to this, the girls are – the parents are scared if they allow their girls to go out [...] Due to all this fear we’re getting less freedom.

(Khyati, 11A, CGS – interview)

Khyati suggests here that while attitudes towards girls and women are improving in India (‘the mind-sets are changing’), fears for girls’ safety still lead to parents placing restrictions on their daughters (‘parents are scared if they allow their girls to go out’); in other words, can-do narratives of girlhood in which girls are ‘given more opportunities’ are being disrupted by narratives of female vulnerability (‘the society for girls is very bad’). Many girls’ expectations of equal opportunities and freedoms were directly contradicted by their personal experiences of restrictions and fear. However, as suggested by their angry, often politicized responses to cases of sexual violence and discrimination against women in India, many girls’ investment in can-do narratives of girlhood meant they refused to accept assumptions that they were defined by vulnerability to sexual violence.

This importantly extend Gilbertson’s (2014) discussion of the need for middle-class young women to maintain a ‘fine balance’ between modern freedoms and traditional restrictions; these findings suggest that girls’ expectations of greater freedoms can lead them to vociferously challenge attempts at restriction. The girls’ passionate claims about their equal



rights to safety in public spaces, and the Indian government's responsibility to fulfil these rights, indicates a sense of citizenship among these young women that goes beyond the 'consumer citizenship' discussed by Lukose (2009) and others, in which the rights claimed are those such as 'the right to consume good products' (Phadke, Khan & Ranade 2011: 14). While boys did not necessarily frame their arguments in similar terms of citizenship, the following sections explore the ways in which many boys also sought to challenge dominant gender narratives, particularly in order to distinguish themselves from the figure of the male predator within narratives of sexual violence. As will be discussed, it was often a struggle to do so within existing narratives of masculinity.

#### 5.4 Narratives of masculinity at school

As suggested by the teachers' characterisations of girls as 'good students' in 5.2, can-do narratives of girlhood had less favourable implications for boys. In contrast to idealized female students, teachers and students at all the schools characterized boys as more disruptive in class, and less interested in academic work.

*[Laughs]* What I should tell, let me think... dudes, you know that, they don't wanna study [...] The main purpose of their life is to *have fun* (masti), and hang out with friends, roaming over here and there, not to attend lecture, misbehave with [each] other.

(Bhuvan, 11D, RIS – interview)

Sometimes it's easy to manage girls and difficult to manage boys. Boys are after all boys [...] by nature they are quite rough and tough, they don't bother, if you just call them again and again, they will just think, "Okay let her speak, she will speak and go".

(English (11C) ma'am, SGS – interview)

Just as girls are characterized as 'naturally' inclined to be attentive and studious in can-do narratives of girlhood, these quotations conform to a 'boys will be boys' narrative, suggesting that boys are by nature uninterested in academic work ('they don't wanna study') and lacking in respect for authority ("Okay let her speak, she will speak and go"). The idea of 'masti' ('fun') as an essential part of boys' lives sets up a familiar contrast between restricted femininity and carefree masculinity, and also suggests that boys' untameable natures are essentially incompatible with the self-restraint required for academic application. This 'boys will be boys' narrative is familiar from UK debates on boys' 'underachievement' in schools; however, while sharing features such as biologically determined 'aggression, fighting and

delayed [...] maturity' (Epstein et al 1998: 9), boys' inferior academic ability in these Delhi schools was understood as directly linked to their 'masculine' traits, rather than 'extrinsic to boys themselves' (Epstein et al 1998: 9). Moreover, perhaps in line with India's ongoing policy focus on promoting girls' education (see Chapter Two), girls' superior academic ability (both when assumed and 'proven' by exam results) is largely celebrated in India, in contrast to its problematization within UK 'failing boys' debates (Epstein et al 1998).

In line with other UK studies (e.g. Holland et al 1998), teachers in the three schools suggested that boys were not only inevitably disruptive in class, but that such behaviour also held social value:

Biology ma'am:	They – they feel something very excited when they let down the teacher in the classroom. They feel very, very – like they have become hero. You know? Some students – and boys I am talking about – they feel that "I'm hero, because I have let down the teacher in the class". I mean this is the – this is what is happening with the 60% of the boys, of my school [...]
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(CGS Teacher Focus Group)

Importantly, Biology ma'am makes it clear that not all boys behave in this way – although she suggests that the majority of them do ('60% of the boys'). Additionally, while several teachers referred disparagingly to rebellious boys as 'heroes', this narrative of hero masculinity held considerable value within peer cultures at the schools.

No-one can forget his name, never ever. *Even someone from 12<sup>th</sup> class couldn't touch him* (nahin laga sakta thha). *He was a powerful guy* (damdaar insaan). *He was the best at fighting* (ladaiyo thha mein maahir). *He was, he was something else. Nobody was able to touch him.* When he was in 10<sup>th</sup>, he was having a relationship with a girl in 12<sup>th</sup>, she was the head girl of the school.

(Rapper, 11B, CGS – interview)

In this quotation, Rapper elevates his friend to almost mythic proportions – his description of his friend as 'the best at fighting' (ladaiyo thha mein maahir) translates literally as 'an expert in battles'. In particular, the combination of being a successful fighter and a lover (with a girlfriend of considerable social status) seemed to form an idealized masculine identity ('damdaar insaan') that elevated him above all others ('nobody was able to touch him'). As an example of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005; Holland et al 1998), Rapper's description has the features of a masculine 'performance story', in which an expression of 'male fantasy and bravado [...] help[s] to define the male model of sexuality to which young men are expected to

aspire' (Holland et al 1998: 161). Beyond being disruptive in class, Rapper's masculine 'performance story' indicates that fighting boys and romancing girls formed key aspects of the hero narrative of masculinity.

This image also drew upon popular narratives of successful masculinity in Bollywood movies; the combination of fighting and pursuing heterosexual romance was encapsulated by the slogan from a Bollywood action movie released in December 2013, *R...Rajkumar*. The eponymous hero of the film declares, 'meri life mein sirf do cheez hai: pyaar, pyaar, pyaar – yah maar, maar, maar' ('there are only two things in my life – loving (pyaar) and fighting (maar)'). The relevance of these hero narratives within boys' peer cultures is consistent with previous studies by Lukose (2009), Osella & Osella (2004) and others, who note the importance of Indian cinema in providing 'anchor points' in young people's 'efforts to craft distinctive styles' (Jeffrey, Jeffery & Jeffery 2008: 71). Interestingly, in contrast to Derné's (2000) findings that male filmgoers in India do not emulate the onscreen rebellion of their Bollywood heroes, findings from my doctoral study suggest that rebellion, 'masti' and a lack of regard for authority were important features of hero masculinities as adopted by boys in the schools.

It was also apparent that the activities of fighting and romancing were interconnected; fighting male competitors to win the affections of girls was an important part of the narrative of hero masculinity.

- Keshar: Yah, I think that boys are involved in fights. When they are called – like me, I am also involved in a fight.  
[...]  
Padmini: So why do boys get involved in fights?  
Keshar: For girls  
[laughter]  
Aditya: He recently fought for a girl! Two or three months back [laughter]  
[...] He is the most powerful boy in our school! [laughter]

(RIS boys' feedback session)

I heard numerous, similar accounts of boys fighting over girls at all the schools, and these stories suggested that narratives of hero masculinity unavoidably reinforced narratives of vulnerable girlhood. While being 'fought over' (whether in popular movies or in the school yard), girls are inevitable cast as passive and helpless, with boys fighting to determine who will 'win' her hand. The overtones of male ownership within this narrative clearly contradict the 'self-dependence' celebrated by girls within can-do narratives of girlhood.

While many teachers bemoaned boys' involvement in fights as disruptive to the school atmosphere, school disciplinary practices in fact further reinforced the links between masculinity and violence within hero narratives. During feedback sessions in 2014, teachers at the schools were almost unanimous in asserting that they are stricter with boys because they 'have' to be. This was consistent with the idea that boys are more disruptive and harder to control than girls. Although two teachers (CGS Biology ma'am and SGS Principal ma'am) both made references to the illegal status of corporal punishment in India (following the Right to Education Act 2009), it was clear that such punishment was practised at all the schools, and directed almost exclusively at boys.

For example, the Computer teacher at CGS told me that sometimes she 'just beat the boys out of frustration' because they don't pay attention in class (Field notes, 30.08.13), while the RIS sports teacher told me that he gives boys a 'tight slap on the face' if they require strict punishment (PT sir, RIS – interview). None of the teachers referred directly to hitting students at SGS, but students at all the schools confirmed that boys were the particular targets of corporal punishment.

*[Teachers] think that [...] boys can be beaten to death (maara peeta jae), but they don't raise their hands to girls. They should just be scolded. That's all, I haven't seen any other discrimination.*

(Rajiv, 11B, CGS – interview)

Keshar: [...] All – in school, boys and girls are equally treated. But – when *[laughs]* when boys are, you know, getting slaps and then *[laughs]*, girls do not get anything. That is different thing, but all is equal.  
 Neeraj: All is equal?!  
 Keshar: All are equal, yah.

(Keshar, 11D, RIS – interview)

Ma'am, it's alright. Boys do not even cry when they get slapped. It's okay for them, it's a regular thing for them. They even get slapped at home, and they get slapped at school too, so this is not at all bad for them.

(Rani, 11A, SGS – interview)

These three quotations reflect apparent differences between student perceptions of corporal punishment at CGS on one hand, and at RIS and SGS on the other. At CGS, Rajiv uses worrying hyperbole to characterize teachers' belief that boys can take extreme physical punishment ('*boys can be beaten to death*'), and suggests that by contrast, they only use verbal forms of punishment for girls ('they should just be scolded'). Rajiv also says that he has not seen 'any other discrimination' at his school, which suggests he does view these gendered disciplinary

practices as discriminatory. Rajiv was one of the few CGS students to comment on corporal punishment, so it is unclear if his views reflect those of his peers; by contrast, Keshar and Rani's responses are representative of the numerous RIS and SGS students who described gender-differentiated disciplinary practices as either 'equal' or 'fair'. As Neeraj's response to Keshar's comment indicates, we were both surprised by students' apparently cheerful acceptance of these practices. Rani's comment suggests that acceptance of corporal punishment for boys is based on an assumption that they can 'take' it ('boys do not even cry when they get slapped'), and that being subjected to violence is a regular experience for boys. Leach & Sitaram (2007) have also discussed the ways in which disciplinary practices reinforced gender stereotypes at a secondary school in Karnataka, revealing corporal punishment as another way in which gender is produced. RIS and SGS students' acceptance of these disciplinary practices reflects the extent to which violence and masculinity were normalized in schools, by institutional practices and within narratives of hero masculinity celebrated in peer cultures.

I was struck by the emerging theme of normalized violence within boys' day-to-day experiences of schooling during fieldwork, particularly since violence has been identified as a key manifestation of a 'crisis' of Indian masculinity (Kapur 2012; Roy 2012; Jeffrey, Jeffrey & Jeffery 2008). However, student and teacher participants did not necessarily share my problematization of boys' fights and corporal punishment. For example, while discussing boys' fights with Rajender and Jonny at SGS during a feedback session in November 2014, Jonny asked me, 'Why do you want to know about fights and all?', seemingly expressing disbelief that something so mundane could be of interest to me. Given my attempts to untangle students' understandings of sexual violence at the schools, it was perhaps inevitable that I became sensitive to other forms of violence within school cultures. However, it is also important to note that violence was not a defining feature of all narratives of masculinity within the schools.

Although many teachers characterized boys exclusively along the lines of a narrative of hero masculinity, students' accounts and classroom observations suggested that many boys did not fit this generalization. As indicated by students' career aspirations (Chapter Four), boys and girls were equally likely to be aiming for professional careers, which required a focused commitment to academic achievement while at school. There were many boys who were more studious than those who subscribed to a hero narrative of masculinity; interestingly, girls were more likely to describe such boys, although one of the SGS boys also mentioned a 'good' boy whom he respected:

If a boy is like, intelligent, good in studies, and a sincere person, [girls] used to talk more to them. Because, you know, they used to help each other and all that.

(Akira, 11A, CGS – interview)

Lego: Ah – there's a friend of mine, Abby, ah – I really respect him, he's very gentle. He's good at the studies.

(SGS Mixed Focus Group – 2)

These accounts suggest that a narrative of 'good boy' masculinity, according to which boys worked hard and helped girls with their work, was a means of gaining the respect of female and (at least some) male peers. Importantly, this was in spite of the dominance of narratives of hero masculinity within the schools, and also contrasts Holland et al's (1998) 'gladiator' and 'wimp' formulation of hegemonic and marginalized masculinities in UK schools. The good boy narrative of masculinity, unlike the hero narrative, was compliant with institutional school structures both in terms of discipline and academic focus, as well as middle-class narratives of educational commitment and aspiration. Boys who conformed to this good boy narrative were often rewarded with positions of authority over their peers; at RIS, self-proclaimed 'good boy' Tornado had been made a class monitor for his own compliant behaviour. Importantly, it seemed that 'good boys' tried to avoid disruptive activities typical of 'heroes', such as fighting, although Tornado himself suggested that this was not always possible.

Because I don't prefer fighting, ah – I [am] trying to mostly resist. But [...] I can't [always] handle, control myself *[laughs]* So I also fight sometimes, but not to – ah, *I mean, not in a bad way* *[laughs]* [...] One time it was my friend. They were beating my friend, I was saying, "Don't, don't do that," then they're not listening. When I mean, I push them, "Don't do like that", they all came to me, then I also fight for self-defence [...] The teachers saw me *[laughs]*, and they called me in office, and they told me "You are good student, don't become like that". So I got that, I didn't fight [since] that time.

(Tornado, 11D, RIS – interview)

Tornado distinguishes himself from 'heroes' in his peer group by making it clear that he doesn't like to fight, but on occasion he has been compelled to do so for purely honourable reasons – in this story, to protect a friend from other boys. Although Tornado admits to initiating the fight ('I push[ed] them'), he emphasizes that this was an attempt to stop them from beating his friend; subsequently, when they 'all came' to fight him, he was only fighting 'for self-defence'. Meanwhile, his report of the rebuke he received from his teachers confirms his status as a good boy ("You are a good student"), and the incompatibility of fighting with this status ("don't become like that"). Tornado's story reflects the contradictions often

inherent in adopting 'alternative' masculine positions at school; as Holland et al (1998) have noted, even while resisting or rejecting violence within male peer cultures, boys are nevertheless implicated in the demands of hegemonic masculinity.

Tornado's insistence that he tries to avoid fighting ('I [am] trying to mostly resist') also reflects the idea that a certain amount of discipline is required in order to be a good boy. Lego, one of the boys at SGS, also suggested this during the 'Act like a Man' brainstorming activity in a mixed FGD.

- Lego: Ah, real man is disciplined, confident and responsible. It's a good thing. Ah – if he's disciplined he can respect women, it's included in that.
- Padmini: Okay. So disciplined like how?
- Lego: Like when, in the mentality. Manners and all that.

(SGS Mixed Focus Group – 2)

Lego's assertion that a 'real man' is 'disciplined, confident and responsible' contrasts the image of the reckless, fighting, romancing hero; crucially, Lego links this idea of discipline not only to a more positive form of masculinity, but to a general respect for women. It is possible that Lego emphasized the importance of respecting women due to the presence of girls (and myself) in this mixed FGD. However, at RIS in particular, the idea of respecting women within a narrative of good boy masculinity was also discussed in both mixed and boys' focus groups, suggesting it was not always expressed with a female audience in mind. Additionally, this respect could also lead to boys supporting a can-do narrative of girlhood:

- Tornado: And, we should not judge women the weakling in our society. Because women can also do that thing that man does. Because nowadays womens [*sic*] are coming forward in every field of, ah, work [...] and ah, that we should not think [that] they are the weakling of the society.

(RIS Mixed Focus Group – 2)

By arguing that women and men are equally capable ('women can also do that thing that man does'), and that women are now 'coming forward' in the world of work, Tornado affirms a can-do narrative of girlhood and rejects a narrative of female vulnerability ('we should not judge women [as] the weakling in our society'). However, many students also viewed 'respecting women' as synonymous with 'not harassing women' (see Chapter Six). As discussed in the following section, in their responses to prominent cases of sexual violence, heroes and good boys alike seemed to conflate ideas of 'respecting' and 'protecting'. This, in turn, ultimately undermined can-do narratives of girlhood and affirmed narratives of vulnerable femininity.

### 5.5 Protect and respect: boys' responses to cases of sexual violence

When discussing cases of sexual violence, from eve-teasing to the December 2012 case, many girls, boys and teachers explained that a particular 'male mentality' was to blame.

Honey Singh: Because the mentality of the boys that they, they think that they are boys, and they must tease [...] And I think also that – boys have attitude and they have the, ah, backs, ah – in India the backs means that they have so much of power from the leaders so that they can do anything. They think that they can do anything.

(CGS Mixed Focus Group – 1)

In one of the mixed FGDs at CGS, Honey Singh suggests that according to this 'male mentality', boys feel compelled to 'tease' or harass girls as a defining aspect of their masculinity ('they think that they are boys, and they must tease'). He also describes this male mentality in terms of power – Honey Singh mentions that boys directly have the support of political leaders ('they have so much of power from the leaders'), perhaps as a way of describing politicians' complicity in sexual violence due to their lack of action. Whether literal or figurative, Honey Singh suggests that this powerful backing leads to a sense of invulnerability among boys and men ('they think they can do anything'), which implicitly leads to their involvement in sexual harassment.

Girls' stories of comment-passing and eve-teasing in the schools, as well as my own experiences, suggested that there were at least some boys who might have had this 'male mentality' at the schools. However, none of the boys who passed comments at me in the schools volunteered to take part in the research beyond the questionnaire stages. When responding to ongoing cases of sexual violence, the boys who did participate in FGDs and interviews all sought to distance themselves from the negative male mentality said to be at the root of abusive behaviour. It seemed that there was no place for these negative attitudes towards women in either hero or good boy narratives of masculinity, and these findings importantly undermine the notion that violence, and violence against women in particular, is an intrinsic feature of 'Indian' masculinity (Roy 2012).

One of the most striking forms of response to sexual violence emerged from questionnaire item Q27, which asked students to reflect on the December 2012 case (valid N = 112). Of these responses, just under 20% (n = 19) of students gave strongly violent responses; over half of



these (n = 12) came from boys, who imagined brutal forms of retribution for the rapists (all quotations verbatim):

My reaction was that when that group of men came ahead me I would set fire [to] the[m] all. Ok i will burn [them] in that bus, in which they attacked and killed Damini.

(11B boy, CGS – Q27 response)

I want that the 5 of mens should be killed. They all should be killed like in [the] movie SAW.

(11D boy, RIS – Q27 response)

I am strongly remember that even[t] & I want to kill those people who did that. I just want to do with them what they did with damini.

(11A boy, SGS – Q27 response)

This imagined retribution for the rapists, whether at the hands of the boys themselves ('I would set fire [to] the[m] all', 'I want to kill those people') or unspecified others ('They all should be killed like in [the] movie Saw') can be understood as examples of 'rape-revenge' narratives discussed by film studies scholars such as Projansky (2001). According to Projansky (2001), rape-revenge narratives in which men take revenge on behalf of women who have been raped 'depend on rape to motivate and justify a particularly violent version of masculinity' (in Heller-Nicholas 2011). The imagined assertion of masculine strength in these boys' responses enables them to simultaneously distinguish themselves from the rapists and assert a superior form of masculinity, as they describe 'good' violence that allows them to avenge the female victim.

It should be noted that just under half of these 'rape-revenge' questionnaire responses came from girls (n = 7), who similarly imagined killing the rapists themselves, or asserted that they should be violently punished by others. Projansky (2001) suggests that, in film, rape-revenge narratives with female protagonists can be understood as feminist retribution, but within the context of the December 2012 case, both girls' and boys' expressions of rape-revenge narratives (which were also expressed by women and men during the protests in Delhi following the December 2012 case) are perhaps better understood in terms of a violent (re)inforcement of class boundaries.

The juxtaposition of Jyoti Singh's middle-class 'normality' and the brutality of the December 2012 attack significantly contributed to the case capturing the 'horrified imagination of middle-class urban India and the world beyond' (Gopal 2015). Girls and boys who participated in this study were similarly responding as urban, middle-class young people; through imagined

vengeance in rape-revenge responses, both girls and boys position themselves as ‘civilized’ (middle-class, urban, educated) Indians who are protectors of similarly ‘civilized’ women, and slayers of the ‘uncivilized’ (lower-class, migrant, illiterate) rapists. As discussed above, many of the girls were invested in the can-do narratives of girlhood of which Jyoti Singh became emblematic following her death. Their outrage and anguish could therefore be understood as a class-based identification with Jyoti Singh, and in relation to the fear and personal restrictions they experienced following her death. Similarly, there was much emphasis in media reports on the working-class, migrant status of the men convicted of the rape, which reinforced narratives of sexual violence in which urban ‘unbelongers’ (such as low caste, working class or Muslim men) are seen as a direct (sexual) threat to those who ‘belong’, including higher caste, middle- and upper-class women (Phadke, Khan & Ranade 2011: 10). Many of the boys sought to repudiate this ‘uncivilized’ masculinity in their responses, whether by invoking violent rape-revenge narratives or asserting non-violent, good boy masculinity defined by modern, respectful attitudes towards women.

As discussed in 5.4, male violence to protect a woman’s honour can also be located within narratives of hero masculinity, which simultaneously celebrate masculine strength and feminine vulnerability. One of the CGS teachers alluded to a similar motif of revenge when describing ‘fights’ among heroes at school.

Actually, eve-teasing and boys fighting, they are interrelated, or they can be linked. Because, many times it happens that the boys, ah – they, they want to set an authority over the girls. [...] Ah, [if] anybody comments or goes for eve-teasing [a boy’s] so-called girlfriend, so actually he starts feeling he definitely has to take revenge, or he has to defeat that boy [...] Because he thinks he has the final authority, or he wants to set an authority over that girl.

(English sir, CGS – feedback session)

According to the English teacher, it is eve-teasing rather than rape that is being avenged by ‘heroes’ within the school, but his analysis echoes key aspects of rape-revenge narratives. Deploying violence against boys who insult girls adds an extra dimension to a narrative of hero masculinity, as it enables heroes to distinguish themselves from and assert physical and moral superiority over boys with a negative male mentality.

Boys’ angry, aggressive responses to cases of sexual violence (whether through imagined or actual retribution) can therefore be located within narratives of hero masculinity, but ‘good boys’ also sought to distance themselves from the negative male mentality associated with sexual violence. Rather than responding aggressively, many boys who participated in the research seemed defensive when issues such as eve-teasing and rape cases were discussed.

The first of the following exchanges took place during a mixed FGD at CGS, in which the students were debating whether the attitudes motivating eve-teasing could be changed, while the second took place during a mixed FGD at SGS.

Khyati: *No matter what we do, nothing will change*  
 Rapper: Not at all  
 Padmini: Okay, so what do you –  
 Rapper: Not at all. I've never commented on a girl [...] Whenever any girl is wearing short skirts, or whatever – I've never done this. Never done this.

(CGS Mixed Focus Group – 1)

Jonny: [Girls] think that all boys are bad – that all boys are rapists. All boys are bad.  
 [...]  
 Rajender: They talk like that, they talk like that, we are – say that you are just talking to a boy, and you think that he is a rapist, but he is not a rapist [...]  
 Naina: The situation has made her think, has made us think so. *It's become so bad, so obviously we'll think like that*  
 Jonny: Arré, wah!  
 Padmini: So do you girls agree?  
 Lego: I am not a rapist  
 Naina: I can't – I don't believe you, I don't trust you!  
 Lego: I don't mind about your thinking. Okay? But I am not.

(SGS Mixed Focus Group – 2)

In the CGS exchange, Rapper vehemently rejects Khyati's pessimistic conclusion that 'nothing will change' when it comes to eve-teasing; he firmly disassociates himself from such behaviour through his repeated use of negatives ('Not at all. I've never commented on a girl [...] I've never done this. Never done this'). His mention of girls who wear short skirts is a link to a preceding discussion about whether girls' clothing has an effect on boys eve-teasing them, and Rapper makes it unequivocally clear that no matter how girls are dressed, he has never passed comments on them. In his response to Khyati, Rapper seems to use his own behaviour as proof that 'change' is in fact possible. Rather than suggesting violent retribution for eve-teasers as a 'hero' might do, Rapper asserts that a positive alternative to such behaviour exists, in the shape of a non-violent form of masculinity.

In the exchange at SGS, Jonny and Rajender complain about the kind of attitude that is implicit in Khyati's comment; that girls think 'all boys are bad'. This is an extension of a narrative of vulnerable girlhood, located within wider narratives of sexual violence; if all girls are potential victims, then by implication all boys are potential predators. Indeed, Naina defends this

position by locating girls' fears within the specific post-December 2012 moment, arguing that girls inevitably think like this because the situation has '*become so bad*'. Jonny's incredulous exclamation ('Arré wah!') suggests he does not have the words to respond to this, while in a response comparable to Rapper's, Lego intervenes to disassociate himself from a predatory male identity ('I am not a rapist'). Naina's rejection of Lego's assertion ('I can't – I don't believe you, I don't trust you!') and Lego's insistent repetition of his defence ('I am not') poignantly suggests the extent to which this climate of fear may have affected gendered dynamics among students.

These exchanges suggest that boys such as Lego and Rapper were struggling to assert a masculine identity distinct from the male predator of sexual violence narratives, and their responses were also importantly located in 'good boy' rather than hero narratives of masculinity. Rather than seeking violent revenge, these boys made it clear that they would never harass or assault girls because they respected them. While they did not necessarily assert that 'heroes' were potential eve-teasers, there was some suspicion among good boys that those who engaged in disruptive *pyaar-maar* (loving/fighting) behaviour did not necessarily respect women. For several boys, this seemed based on an assumption that 'respecting' a girl and being sexually attracted to her were mutually exclusive. The following debate in the boys' FGD at RIS reflects some of the confusions within the 'respecting women' paradigm of good boy narratives of masculinity.

- Hursh: [...] If someone is your sister you do respect her, and if you have a girlfriend or your wife, or you[r] spouse, anyone, then you respect them also
- Bhuvan: Like a sister only
- Hursh: You respect them like a sister? If you think about each and every girl as a sister who will you marry?
- Tornado: [...] You respect your sisters like, how do you respect, you – younger or elder, you talk them properly, you normally don't abuse them –
- Hursh: Hmm
- Tornado: – like that, and, ah, you care about them. Okay? And – every girl you have a girlfriend or anyone, other girl which you know, you should also respect them like that.
- Hursh: I actually do! *[laughs]*

(RIS Boys' Focus Group)

In this exchange, Hursh rejects the idea that respecting and being sexually attracted to a girl are mutually exclusive ('if you have a girlfriend or your wife [...] you respect them also'). However, for Bhuvan and Tornado, respecting a girl and not 'abusing' (i.e. harassing) her

initially seems inextricably linked with a platonic relationship. By the end of this exchange, Tornado seems to clarify his position; in the same way that boys respect their sisters, they should respect all girls – this does not mean having platonic relationships with all girls, but simply not teasing or harassing them. The implications of respecting women within brother-sister (and other) heterosocial relationships are discussed in more detail in Chapter Six, but the boys' efforts to define appropriate attitudes towards women here further suggests their struggle to establish a positive masculine identity. Within the context of pervasive narratives of sexual violence, it also suggests confusion around what constitutes legitimate sexual attraction as opposed to predatory sexual behaviour. This was further apparent in an exchange during a mixed FGD at SGS.

- Padmini: So we're kind of talking about this mentality towards girls. So how do you think it can be changed, like what do you think can be done?
- Rani: Since the birth of a boy, the parents should teach him to respect girls
- Rocco: Respect  
[...]
- Lionel: But I think it is very tough to change the mentality [...] it's a physical process that ah, means you are attracting towards a girl. Because of the lust and this type of thing. And – but, ah, I don't think that – but there is very tough, to change the mentality
- Rani: We also get attracted to the boys, but we do not rape them
- Neeraj: Even I was about to say the same!  
[laughter]

(SGS Mixed Focus Group – 1)

Rani and Rocco reiterate the importance of ensuring that boys 'respect' girls as an alternative to the negative mentality that motivates sexual violence. Lionel, however, is unsure as to whether this mentality can be changed, as he seems to assume that sexual violence is motivated by sexual attraction ('you are attracting towards a girl', 'because of the lust and this type of thing'). Although Rani and Neeraj laugh off his confusion between sexual attraction and sexual violence, Lionel's misunderstanding of rape as motivated by an uncontrollable male sex drive is not uncommon. Moreover, understandings of male sexuality as generally uncontrollable were apparent in all the schools (see Chapters Four and Six). While boys' attempts to distinguish themselves from male predator stereotypes can be located in both hero and good boy narratives of masculinity, these exchanges suggest that within a context where sex was frequently being discussed within narratives of sexual violence, and biologized male adolescence was understood as requiring tight (and even violent) control, many boys struggled to understand how they could conceptualize sexual desire in positive terms.

## 5.6 Conclusions

The findings discussed in this chapter indicate that gender narratives were celebrated within institutional and peer cultures in both complimentary and contradictory ways. Narratives of can-do girlhood and good boy masculinity, compliant with the academic aims of the schools, were rewarded through the prestige of school prizes and positions of responsibility given to students. Narratives of can-do girlhood also held particular value within girls' peer cultures, arguably reflecting the celebration of the modern Indian woman as educated and assertive in popular culture and middle-class narratives (see Chapter Two). However, in the wake of the December 2012 rape case, and amid heightened fears for women's security in Delhi, these can-do narratives of girlhood were under threat. Unsurprisingly, motifs of protection and female vulnerability became all the more powerful within this context. Narratives of vulnerable girlhood led to heightened restrictions and conditional access to public spaces, and schools themselves reinforced narratives of vulnerable girlhood by providing girls with advice on how best to protect themselves. Nevertheless, girls who participated in the research subscribed to more transformative gender narratives, perhaps motivated by the intensity of post-December 2012 debates about 'appropriate' forms of (Indian) femininity, and the direct implications that these debates had for their own lives. In doing so, many girls viewed their rights to safety and access to public spaces in terms of their rights as Indian citizens.

Narratives of hero masculinity had much in common with the hegemonic masculinity described by Connell (2005) and others, particularly in terms of its dominance in relation to other narratives of masculinities and girlhood. Violence, particularly in terms of fighting with male peers, formed an important part of hero narratives, while on an institutional level, 'boys will be boys' narratives led to violent disciplinary practices being reserved for boys, in light of assumptions that they could 'take' such punishment as well as a perceived need to curb their 'untameable' natures. Nevertheless, the concept of a 'crisis of masculinity' does not seem to accurately capture the multiple ways in which violence was embedded in boys' everyday experiences at school. Rogers (2008) has argued that young men's use of violence in post-liberalization India can be seen as a 'strategic consolidation of men's social power' (Rogers 2008: 92), which was perhaps true of fighting within boys' peer cultures. Boys sought to assert their dominance over their male peers through these fights, and to 'win' possession of girls they were romancing. Although eve-teasing was unequivocally condemned by boys who participated in the study, other boys' verbal harassment of girls (and myself) within the schools

can also be understood as a means of asserting and 'consolidating' their social power over their female peers.

Importantly, boys also used hero masculinities in order to aggressively distance themselves from sexually violent behaviour, and moreover, several boys also invoked alternative, 'good boy' narratives which repudiated violence, and emphasized the importance of respecting girls and women. The conflation of respecting and protecting women did mean that good boy narratives sometimes still reinforced narratives of vulnerable girlhood – perhaps (consciously or unconsciously) drawing on the hegemonic masculinity of hero narratives. However, these findings importantly suggest that some boys were attempting to engage with more modern, can-do narratives of girlhood, and to develop ways of interacting with girls and women on 'equal' terms. The ways in which heterosocial friendships contributed to more equitable peer relations are explored in the following chapter.

This chapter also indicates that the dominance of conversations about sexual violence created confusions in young people's understandings of sexuality; this was evident in boys' attempts to distance themselves from male predator stereotypes, but also in their struggles to distinguish sexual desire from sexual violence. The seemingly ubiquitous stories of sexual violence during the fieldwork period evidently compounded the risk-based narratives of sexuality within formal sexual learning sources at school. As discussed in the following chapter, cautionary tales from other media sources further emphasized the health and social risks of sexuality; however, I will also argue that school peer cultures provided an alternative and more positive source of sexual learning for young people.

## **Chapter Six: From rakhi to romance – alternative sources of sexual learning**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The previous chapters have explored the ways in which young people's everyday experiences within school and beyond were shaped by particular narratives of gender and sexuality; in Chapter Four, following Connell (2000), I explored the role of schools as institutional agents, while in Chapter Five, I considered the interactions between gender narratives on an institutional level and within peer cultures at the schools. Narratives of gender and sexuality in the previous chapters included 'storm and stress' narratives of adolescence which shaped disciplinary practices at the school, risk-based narratives of sexuality within formal sources of sexual learning (Chapter Four), and narratives of girlhood and masculinities which were both contradicted and reinforced within the context of pervasive media coverage of sexual violence in India (Chapter Five). These stories about sexual violence formed a particularly disturbing source of sexual learning in 2013, but their gendered, risk-based narratives of sexuality are comparable to those within many of the other sources of sexual learning accessed by students.

This chapter focuses on the role of students as agents within schools (Connell 2000), specifically looking at school peer cultures as a key space within which 'young people [are] active in producing their own identities' in terms of gender and sexuality (Alldred & David 2007: 5). Following Plummer (1995) and Epstein & Johnson (1998), I also consider the role of sexual stories in students' gendered and sexual learning in more detail, with a particular focus on stories of romantic and sexual liaisons which circulated in the schools, as well as the ways in which students re-told these stories within research encounters.

The chapter starts by exploring the informal sources of sexual learning described by students, including cautionary tales from TV shows and films which repeatedly associated sexual activity with health and social risks (6.2). While Chakraborty (2010), Orsini (2006) and Banaji (2006) have discussed the role of popular media, and Bollywood films in particular, as a positive source of informal knowledge about sex which influences young people's ideas of romance, pleasure and eroticism, findings discussed here suggest that sexual stories in popular media also reinforce more negative, risk-based narratives of sexuality. In the examples discussed by participants, these narratives either implicitly or explicitly reinforced formal sources of learning which sought to discourage young people from exploring their sexuality. However, this association of sexuality with risk also strengthened students' sense that receiving sex education in school was all the more important.



I then explore students' responses to the claim that sex education is 'against' Indian culture and, in light of their overwhelming rejection of this idea, examine students' own definitions of what school-based sex education should entail (6.3). These findings not only address the lack of young people's voices heard in response to the sex education debates of the early 2000s (see Chapter One), but also add to findings from Gilbertson (2014), Lukose (2009) and others, by exploring middle-class young people's understandings and contestations of what 'Indian' or 'Western' culture means to them, particularly in terms of sexual learning, in post-liberalization India.

After this, I discuss the ways in which heterosocial dynamics within peer cultures formed an important site of learning about gender and sexuality. These findings engage with and extend the considerable body of literature on heterosocial interactions, romance, sexual relationships and expectations of marriage among young people in modern-day India (including Chowkhani 2015; Gilbertson 2014; Twamley 2013; Sancho 2012; Chowdhry 2007; Donner 2008; Mody 2006; Abraham 2002, 2001; Osella & Osella 1998). As will be discussed, findings from the present study indicated that students negotiated and adapted 'rakhi' (brother-sister) relationships (6.4) to form less strictly platonic, more 'modern' heterosocial friendships (6.5), which left open the possibility of romance. Students' own definitions of 'appropriate' heterosocial interactions within peer cultures suggested that they were adept at negotiating norms of gender segregation which were enforced in the schools. While peer romances in the schools reinforced heterosexual and caste boundaries (6.6), experiences and stories of romances which circulated in the schools also offered alternative, more positive ways of understanding teenage sexuality and intimacy (6.7).

## **6.2 Cautionary tales from media sources**

Unsurprisingly, students' sexual learning was not restricted to the limited information offered by formal sources in their schools, although their experiences of sexual learning beyond the classroom continued to be shaped by gender. Boys reportedly accessed a wider variety of sources than girls; when asked where they learned about sex education topics outside the classroom, girls at all the schools mentioned that they mainly shared information in their friendship groups (CGS Girls' Focus Group; RIS Girls' Focus Group; Naina, 11B, SGS – interview). By contrast, boys at RIS and SGS offered comparable catalogues of learning sources – 'friends', 'internet', 'Google', 'mostly library or internet' (RIS Boys' Focus Group); 'internet', 'magazines',

‘friends’, ‘YouTube’ (SGS Boys’ Focus Group) – while boys at CGS mentioned mostly using the internet (CGS Boys’ Focus Group).

Boys’ use of the internet as a source of sexual learning was frequently discussed in disapproving terms; for example, in the RIS girls’ FGD, Leela, Jyoti and Sweetie referred to boys learning about sex online as a further example of boys’ excessive interest in sexual learning, and girls’ comparative lack of interest (‘girls are very shy, they never share something like that’ – Leela, RIS Girls’ Focus Group). ‘Using the internet’ often seemed to be a euphemism for watching pornography, which Rani discussed disapprovingly during her interview.

[Boys], like – everybody has access to internet, so they even watch blue films and that. So, by seeing that, they feel that they are also at the age of doing this [...] They do not understand what consequences they can have, after having a physical relationship. And usually the boy will not get affected by this, the girl will. And boys – if they are in a relationship with a girl, they force the girl to do things with him. And if she refuses, then that boy will obviously break that relationship. So some girls are strong, they do not care if the relationship is broken, she’ll not do this at all. But some just get melted and [...] have a physical relationship with the boy.

(Rani, 11A, SGS – interview)

Although she asserts that ‘everybody’ has access to the internet (arguably a reflection of the middle-class backgrounds of many SGS students), Rani claims that it is only boys who use the internet to watch ‘blue films’. She offers a pessimistic sequence of events from this starting point; boys want to become sexually active after watching porn (particularly because ‘blue films’ do not educate them about ‘what consequences’ sexual activity can have), which in turn leads to them coercing their girlfriends into having sex with them (‘they force the girl to do things with him’). Rani’s characterisation of this coercive, and perhaps even non-consensual, sexual activity draws upon the predator/victim gender binary from narratives of sexual violence, reflecting her strongly negative perceptions of pornography. Although she does not completely deny female agency here, describing some ‘strong’ girls preferring to end their relationship rather than have sex, Rani does not seem to imagine female *sexual* agency here, whether in terms of mutual interest in having sex or personal interest in accessing online porn.

According to Rani and the RIS girls, then, stories of boys watching online porn confirmed broader gender narratives – particularly the unstoppable male sex drive, but also exploitative male sexual behaviour and female sexual passivity. At RIS and SGS, the boys did not go into detail about whether they watched porn, but at CGS, Rapper offered a brief defence of porn as a source of sexual learning:

- Rapper: Well if we have no idea of sex – we should go to internet and search. Many of people does *[sic]*
- Neeraj: So do you think so like, if he just said if you don't know about sex and you know how to do a sort of activity, then you usually do – you usually watch porn or something and get some sort of idea, right?
- Honey Singh: Yeah
- Rapper: Yeah
- Neeraj: So what do you guys think about this?
- Rapper: It's not wrong use, watching porn. You can get also knowledge, if we don't – have no idea. So that's why. It's useful also and it is disruptive also.

(CGS Boys Focus Group)

Rapper's description of porn as both potentially 'useful' and 'disruptive' is intriguing; unfortunately, although Neeraj introduced the idea of porn as a source of sexual learning here, he did not encourage Rapper to expand on exactly what he meant by these terms. It seems that Rapper's defence of porn is based on its potential usefulness to those who 'have no idea about sex'. Again, any direct references to masturbation or pleasure are absent here ('disruptive' may be a reference to feared health risks from frequent masturbation), but interestingly Rapper seeks to legitimize porn by emphasizing its potential use as source of knowledge. In contrast to purely negative understandings of porn from several of the girls, Rapper's brief comment here suggests that boys may also be using porn as a means of filling the gaps in formal sources of sexual learning.

Although we did not gain a more detailed insight into boys' experiences of watching porn, an exchange in the boys' FGD at SGS revealed the ways in which other media sources could fuel boys' anxieties about the physical consequences of sexual activity.

- Jonny: You know, *having sex has a lot – a lot of effects on the body. Like you lose your memory power, and you get back pain [...]*  
*Sometimes you get problems with your eyes*  
*[...]*
- Abby: Where did you get information that ah, ah – after sex they, they feel, become weak, and become –
- Rocco: Weak and all
- Abby: – their eyes, and back would pain
- Jonny: 'Bhaag Milka Bhaag'  
*[laughter]*
- Lionel: He's an athlete! *Mate, you must have understood!*  
*[...]*
- Rajender: A doctor told me [also]. Wikipedia –
- Abby: I don't think so!  
*[...]*

- Rocco: No, I watched the show in sport science, *there was a boxer—*  
 Lego: *Yeah, I saw that too*  
 Rocco: *He – I mean, he had a DNA test and all, so – I mean, it generally showed his power, and then he was left with his wife (biwi) for one night in a room. After he had sex, the next day they showed that his RBC [red blood count] and all increased – the process is— I mean, he had become more powerful.*

(SGS Boys' Focus Group)

Jonny seeks to back up his claim that sex has various negative effects on the (male) body and mind ('you lose memory power', 'you get back pain', 'you get problems with your eyes') with a reference to a popular Bollywood film, *Bhaag Milka Bhaag* (2013). The particular scene he refers to involves an Indian athlete losing a crucial race after forming a relationship with (and it is strongly implied, having sex with) an Australian woman. Jonny's concerns around male weakness may also draw upon wider 'semen loss' anxieties (Srivastava 2003); additionally, in contrast to Chakraborty (2010), Orsini (2006) and Banaji (2006), whose studies emphasize the romantic and erotic content of Hindi cinema, Jonny's interpretation of *Bhaag Milka Bhaag* suggests that sex scenes from popular Bollywood films can also fuel existing confusions and anxieties about sex.

The other boys in the group did not seem too convinced by Jonny's assertion, nor by Rajender's attempt to support his friend's claim by referring to both 'a doctor' and 'Wikipedia' as potentially more reliable sources. Instead, Rocco offers a counter-example, again focused on a sportsman, but this time from a seemingly more scientific (and therefore more authoritative) source. Rocco not only mentions that he saw this programme in 'sports science', but seeks to legitimize his source further by describing the experimental set up, including a 'DNA test' prior to the boxer's sexual encounter with his wife, and a red blood count check afterwards. While Rocco's conclusion that sex made the boxer 'more powerful' seems as exaggerated as Jonny's claims of post-coital weakness, the discussion moved on before the boys could consider the claims more thoroughly. Nevertheless, this exchange reflects an example of the boys attempting to disentangle some 'truth' from their various sources of sexual learning, and this process was not always conclusive. For example, after his individual interview, Lego asked Neeraj whether having sex really did have harmful effects on the body, and seemed to be under the impression that Neeraj had told them this during the boys' FGD (which, of course, he had not).

While girls did not report accessing information online to learn more about sex, TV shows seemed to be a popular source of sexual learning for many of the girls who participated in the

research. In the following quotation, Mala tells the story of a recent episode of a popular Hindi TV show.

Mala: Once there was a boy, and he loves girl, and the girl get pregnant, through contact on that. Later then, the boy asks the girl to get a, to abort the child. She went to the hospital, she aborted, and ah – after that, she, start internal bleeding. And the girl died within a day.

(SGS Girls' Focus Group)

This story is not just an example of a reproduction-and-risk narrative, but a specifically reproduction-*as*-risk narrative. In Mala's version of the episode, while the boy drives the action of the story ('lov[ing]' the girl, 'ask[ing] her to abort the child'), the consequences of the off-stage sexual activity are exclusively on the girl's body, which becomes pregnant, undergoes an abortion, experiences 'internal bleeding', and then dies. Mala's formulaic start to the story ('Once there was...') makes each step – and the ultimate outcome – seem all the more inevitable: boy loves girl, girl gets pregnant, girl gets abortion (at boy's request), girl dies.

This cautionary tale, and many similar examples told by girls at the schools (discussed in more detail in 6.3), not only reinforces the idea that sexual activity is inevitably linked to pregnancy, but also characterizes any attempt to 'fix' this outcome (in this case, with an abortion) as having fatal consequences. It is perhaps unsurprising that boys and girls told stories which explored the potential effects of sexual activity on male and female bodies respectively. However, it also seemed that boys viewed more examples of consequence-free sexual activity by watching online porn, suggesting that they have access to a counter-narrative to risk-based narratives of sexuality that girls did not (or could not) access. Moreover, the repeated motif of teenage sexual activity resulting in feared or actual pregnancy in numerous stories from TV shows (told by both boys and girls) heightened the impression that it is girls who are primarily at risk from sexual relationships, whether from socially or actually fatal consequences.

Many of the youth-oriented Hindi TV shows described by the girls, such as *Gumrah – End of Innocence*, presented sensationalized 'true stories' of teenage sexual misadventures; given the medium of the message, the tone of these stories is inevitably much more dramatic than the comparatively gentle discouragement in the Class 10 reproduction chapter (see Chapter Four). The presentation of these cautionary tales as entertainment also meant that they were much more engaging for students; in shows such as *Gumrah*, the stories are framed by straight-to-camera monologues from famous Bollywood actors and various 'experts', who explain the moral of each episode to the viewers. This form of direct engagement with the teenage viewer

provides a clear contrast to their hesitant teachers – as Rani said in her interview, ‘the people on television are more frank with us, than the people around us’ (Rani, 11A, SGS – interview). However, even as these TV shows provided an easy-to-access (at least for middle-class young people), socially acceptable source of sexual learning, the cautionary tales they told reinforced narratives within institutional sources of sexual learning, with teenage sexual activity exclusively associated with both health and social risks. Interestingly, these risk-based narratives fuelled an urgent sense among students that they needed better sex education in school in order to protect themselves from these numerous threats; this also led students to reject the idea that ‘Indian culture’ should limit their sexual learning.

### **6.3 Defining sex education – and Indian culture?**

While aware that terminology matters when it comes to learning about sexuality in school (see Chapter One), I continued to use the term ‘sex education’ with students as shorthand for any formal education about sexuality they had received in school. This was partly in the interests of avoiding over-complicated terminology, and partly because Neeraj advised, based on his experience as a peer educator, that this was a term with which students were likely to be familiar. This was borne out in single-sex FGDs, during which students seemed comfortable using the term ‘sex education’ in our discussions<sup>24</sup>.

The influence of morally conservative arguments from the ‘sex education debates’ in India (see Chapter One) was apparent in the limited ways in which students were able to access information about sexuality at school – most notably, through a Science textbook which actually censors out sexual intercourse from an explanation of human reproduction (see Chapter Four). Meanwhile, the prohibition of openly discussing sexuality within conservative ‘Indian culture’ was also apparent in students’ inability to broach sexuality-related topics with adults, instead receiving euphemistic exhortations against inappropriate interactions with the opposite sex (see Chapter Four).

I do not intend to argue, however, that the study schools and their institutional practices are wholly representative of ‘Indian culture’. While it was never an aim of the research to understand what Indian culture is, or whether it is really ‘for’ or ‘against’ sex education (see Chapter One), I was curious to learn what students would make of these ideas. How would

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<sup>24</sup> However, most students did not use the term until we had introduced it, and initially talked about ‘reproduction’ or ‘learning how to reproduce’ – arguably reflecting the dominant reproduction-and-risk narratives within their sources of sexual learning.

they react to the quotation which originally piqued my interest in this research, the former Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh's claim that 'sex education is against Indian culture', and that 'the younger generation should be taught about yoga, Indian culture and its values'?

Rapper: I think he's brainless. The Chief Minister [...] *I would like to tell him that we already learn yoga, we are being taught it. But, we know what Indian culture is and we are adopting Western culture, because if we keep Indian culture, our life will get spoiled [...] I would like to ask him if he has kids or not? He must have had sex, so how can he say that it's against Indian culture?* [...] We should also be familiar with the sex education. So that after married life we would not be, our life would not be –

Rocker: We will not be able to sex, after married life! *[laughs]*

(CGS Boys' Focus Group)

Rapper's initial reaction ('I think he's brainless') is an example of the fairly unflattering ways in which many students rejected the Chief Minister's statement on sex education<sup>25</sup>. Importantly, however, Rapper also seems to accept the premise of the Chief Minister's statement; that sex education is *not* part of Indian culture. Rapper suggests that they (with the second person plural perhaps used to speak for the group, or for all young people in India) have consciously chosen Western culture over Indian culture ('we know what Indian culture is and we are adopting Western culture'), which therefore means that his generation (or at least this group of boys) are in favour of sex education. Rapper and Rocker's apparent understanding that sex education is a means of learning 'how to sex' (notably after marriage) leads to their conclusion that adopting Indian culture, which rejects sex education, can only have negative consequences ('our life will get spoiled'). Rapper therefore refutes the Chief Minister's claim by arguing that sex education is essential for young people in India, even if it is against 'Indian culture'. Rapper's use of *reductio ad absurdum* to ridicule the Chief Minister ('he must have had sex') also briefly challenges the notion that learning about sex can be 'against' any culture, since having children entails at least some form of sexual learning (and certainly to a greater level of detail than offered by the Class 10 Reproduction chapter).

Rapper's reference to a younger generation 'adopting Western culture' reflects one of two ways in which most students responded to the Chief Minister's statement on sex education. Whether or not explicitly invoking 'Western culture' as its ideological opposite, many students responded to the statement by expanding upon the idea of a universally conservative 'Indian culture'.

<sup>25</sup> Others included: '[He] should be in jail!' (Bhuvan – RIS Boys' Focus Group); 'I don't think he even has a mind' (Rani – SGS Girls' Focus Group); 'He doesn't know what he's saying' (Rajender – SGS Boys' Focus Group).

- Leela: As Indian culture is very, very sensitive type, I mean– they don't want–
- Archana: They want us to go, not very far
- Leela: No no, they think that sex edu– sex is a word like, it will pollute the children, or pollute the society [...] So they never share something like that. Indian culture is like [...] They worship the god, they respect their tradition–
- Jyoti: They don't have sex education
- Leela: – they respect their relatives and their juniors and all that.

(RIS Girls' Focus Group)

In this exchange, the RIS girls clearly accept the idea that Indian culture is fundamentally conservative, expressed in terms of restrictions against discussing sexuality ('they think that sex [...] is a word [that] will pollute the children [...] pollute the society'). However, their use of the third person plural here distances themselves from the Indian cultural practices they describe, and later in the discussion, the girls made it clear that they do not subscribe to this perspective on sex education. But the girls do seem to agree that the Chief Minister's quotation is representative of Indian culture which, according to Leela, is essentially composed of religion, tradition and family ('they worship the god, they respect their tradition [...], they respect their relatives and their juniors and all that'). Like Rapper, the RIS girls seem to understand Indian culture as not only conservative, but essentially static.

Other students, however, rejected the monolithic version of Indian culture presented by the Chief Minister.

- Hursh: Old mentality means – like ah, *we must also change with the times* (waqt ke saath humein bhi badalna chahiye), but we should not change totally. Because ah... ah – our values and Indian culture [...] it is a very vast thing. Indian culture is, mix with many different culture, like Punjabi, ah, Hindu, Christian, Marathi – every *[laughs]* every religion has its own culture, and when they all mixed, then became – then it becomes India. So, we should not forget our culture, and, but we should make changes according to the century, what's going on, and all that.

(RIS Boys' Focus Group)

- Mala: And about Indian culture – some cultures must be changed [...] About Indian culture – [...] Indian culture taught us to give equal opportunity to boys and girls. And – I think, sex education gives that kind of thing. Have an equal chance to learn about this. So, we are the younger generation and we know what is good for us, and what is not. So – he is a chief minister, he has not a right hypocrite *[sic]* on this topic.

(SGS Girls' Focus Group)



In the boys' FGD at RIS, Hursh offers a familiar, 'unity in diversity' definition of Indian culture, and uses both regional and religious identities to characterize this diversity ('Indian culture [...] is mix with [i.e. made up of] many different culture[s], like Punjabi, Hindu, Christian, Marathi'). Mala, meanwhile, defines Indian culture according to the country's progressive constitutional values, specifically gender equality ('Indian culture taught us to give equal opportunity to boys and girls'). Within this definition, she argues that sex education is therefore very much a part of Indian culture, since it offers girls and boys 'an equal chance' to learn about sexuality.

Importantly, neither Hursh nor Mala accept the idea that Indian culture is homogenous or static; both emphasize that Indian culture must (and can) change over time: '*we must also change with the times* [...] we must make changes according to the century'; 'some cultures must be changed [...] we are the younger generation and we know what is good for us'. In doing so, Mala and Hursh (and other students who adopted a similar stance) characterize Indian culture as not only heterogeneous in terms of religion, region, and ideology, but also in generational terms. They associate the Chief Minister's conservative version of Indian culture (through which he opposes sex education) as belonging to an older generation; by contrast, they claim a more progressive conceptualization of Indian culture (which is definitively in favour of sex education) for their own generation. As discussed later in the chapter, these ideas of tradition, modernity, 'Indian' and 'Western' culture also shaped perceptions of appropriate and desirable heterosocial relationships within peer cultures at the schools.

Whether they identified their views with liberal 'Western culture' or a more modern version of 'Indian culture', the students who participated in the research were almost unanimously in favour of sex education, and did not subscribe to a version of Indian culture which was 'against' it. When asked what schools should teach when it comes to sex education, many students mentioned the topics covered in the reproduction chapter (e.g. puberty, STIs, pregnancy), but explained that these topics should be discussed in more detail. Boys at CGS and RIS particularly emphasized the importance of learning about HIV and AIDS, and the dangers of not being informed about it:

Rocker: [...] In sex education we will come to know about the topic HIV/AIDS, mainly – [...] I think that if we will not be aware about that, then we will begin to sex with anybody! And after, what will happen? Our life will be shorter, shorter, shorter. So I think sex education is much important, mainly for our life.

(CGS Boys' Focus Group)

Rocker imagines the effect of HIV and AIDS in dramatically destructive terms ('our life will be shorter, shorter, shorter'), and importantly, he argues that a lack of awareness about the

disease will lead to these fatal outcomes: 'If we [are not] aware [...] we will begin to [have] sex with anybody!'. Rocker underlines the dire biomedical consequences of sexual ignorance to emphasize the importance of sex education which, he implies, saves lives ('sex education is much important, mainly for our life'). Rocker therefore calls for sex education which both informs young people about HIV and AIDS, and also uses this information to discourage them from becoming sexually active. Students at SGS described a similarly preventative role for sex education, but many emphasized the social rather than biomedical risks associated with sexual ignorance.

- Naina: *Yeah, they should learn, otherwise they will do something wrong in their – lead them do something like – how do you say... trouble. Anything like that. So, and, yeah, that's all*
- Padmini: *Yeah. But when you say something wrong, or trouble, what do you mean?*
- Naina: *Like, if I don't know about anything, and get into relationship, I'll be physical with him, and I'll [get] pregnant [laughs] or anything like that – so, it is a problem, it is a trouble. My parents will like [...] they'll get angry*
- Mala: *They'll say, "What kind of girl you are?"*

(SGS Girls' Focus Group)

Again, Naina suggests here that sexual ignorance inevitably leads to a sexual relationship ('they should learn, otherwise they will [...] get into [a] relationship'), which in turn leads to unwanted physical consequences ('I'll [get] pregnant'). Unlike Rocker, Naina emphasizes the negative social rather than biomedical implications of teenage sexual activity ('My parents will [...] get angry'), while Mala underlines the gendered dimensions of social shaming: 'They'll say, "What kind of girl are you?"'. The recurring motif of teenage sexual activity being inevitably linked to pregnancy was apparent in media sources of sexual learning (see 6.2), and students also drew upon stories from TV shows such as *Gumrah* to reinforce the importance of sex education for young people.

- Rocco: *They should give money for sex education, like, "Come, children – don't make these mistakes (galti)". Like it's shown on Gumrah, they do it like this. I mean, they showed a boy and a girl. They thought that kissing causes pregnancy – I mean the girl thought that, the boy didn't. So the girl's friends, they thought she was pregnant, they teased her and all. So she committed suicide – this is the kind of problem, this is why sex education should be given to children.*

(SGS Boys' Focus Group)

In this episode of *Gumrah* described by Rocco (and also described by Naina in her interview), the girl's suicide is portrayed as the consequence of a teenage relationship, sexual ignorance, and (implied) fears of social shame associated with pre-marital pregnancy. The moral drawn from this episode by Rocco (and probably by the show itself, given its usual format) is that sex education must be provided to young people; it is not just teenage sexual activity, but teenage sexual ignorance which is portrayed here as a potent threat.

The form of sex education envisioned by Rocco, which provides young people with accurate information to contradict various myths and misconceptions, is importantly distinct from that described by Rocco and the SGS girls, which discourages young people from becoming sexually active by providing them with information about the health or social risks associated with sexual activity. Some students, particularly the RIS girls and one of the SGS boys, further suggested that sex education should provide explicit moral guidance for students. For example, in the girls' FGD at RIS, Leela, Jyoti and Sweety suggested that while young people should be provided with information through sex education lessons, such lessons should also emphasize (in a similar vein to institutional narratives discussed in Chapter Four) that young people are not 'ready' to become sexually active yet.

Students' conceptualizations of sex education therefore seemed to be firmly located within the risk-based narratives of sexuality to which they already had access. With school and media sources emphasizing the health risks, social costs and even life-threatening consequences of teenage sexual activity, the majority of students perceived sex education as an essential means of protection from these various risks. This protection would largely be achieved by discouraging young people from becoming sexually active, either implicitly by explaining the biomedical and social risks of sexual activity, or explicitly by emphasizing the socially sanctioned context within which they could be sexually active (e.g. within a heterosexual marriage). As explored in the following sections, the moral guidance that students sought from formal sex education was already apparent to some extent within school peer cultures, within which many students deemed heterosocial relationships as socially 'appropriate' or otherwise, according to particular degrees of emotional and physical intimacy.

#### **6.4 Rakhi relationships – institutional and student perspectives**

As mentioned in Chapter Four, and as explored in previous studies by Sancho (2012), Sinha-Kerkoff (2003) and Abraham (2001), brother-sister relationships are often idealized as the most appropriate form of heterosocial interactions within co-educational schools in India.

Moreover, at RIS, one of the teachers argued that brother-sister relationships were an essential part of Hindu cultural identity.

In my opinion – say, Raksha Bandhan is there. Raksha Bandhan means brother or sister [...] In actuality, Hinduism is there, Hinduism make *[sic]* some rules and regulations, and we can neglect it – but the thinking of today's generation, [they] are always neglecting [it].

(Commerce sir, RIS – interview)

Commerce sir refers here to Raksha Bandhan, a Hindu festival celebrating the relationship between brothers and sisters. As part of this festival, sisters tie rakhi (colourful string bracelets) on their brothers' wrists, symbolising their gratitude for their brothers' protection. The practice of tying rakhi is not exclusive to actual family members, however; as I learned on Raksha Bandhan during fieldwork, girls and women also tie rakhi on the wrists of any boys or men from whom they gain or seek protection, including soldiers, policemen and future Prime Ministers (Field notes 21.08.13; Hindustan Times 2013).

Raksha Bandhan also has particular significance within co-educational schools. Although only two teachers directly mentioned the importance of this rakhi-inspired brother-sister relationship (RIS Commerce sir; RIS Physics sir), Raksha Bandhan was also celebrated at CGS, as one of the ways in which the school fulfilled its aim of promoting 'Indian-ness' among students (see Chapter Three). One of the school's co-curricular activities was an inter-house rakhi making competition (Vice Principal ma'am, CGS – interview), but the rakhi relationship was also celebrated every day at CGS, in the first line of the school pledge recited by students in morning assembly: 'India is my country / and all Indians are / my brothers and sisters' (CGS School Diary 2013-14).

As RIS Commerce sir's quotation suggests, rakhi relationships provide certain 'rules and regulations' that determine appropriate forms of interaction between girls and boys at school, and are even framed as an essential part of Indian national identity. As well as reflecting the pervasive slippage between Hindu practices and Indian-ness, this location of brother-sister relationships within Indian culture creates an emotive, patriotic compulsion for students to form and maintain firmly non-sexual relationships with members of the opposite sex. It also provides an example of tradition and religion that students associated with an innate conservatism within 'Indian culture' (see 6.3, 6.5).

Although the RIS Commerce teacher asserted that 'today's generation' are 'always neglecting' Indian traditions such as brother-sister relationships, students at all three schools in fact

discussed rakhi relationships to a greater extent than their teachers. Several students elaborated on what it meant to have a rakhi brother at school, including Leela at RIS:

I myself have my brother in my school. I mean, he's not my real brother but I just tied the rakhi and he was very much protective and caring to me. [...] So – and whenever something get wrong, any boy just pass the comment [...] he's very much protective, and he comes forward [for] me, [and says] *"Say that again – what did you say?"* [...] Very caring and protective! *[laughs]*

(Leela, 11D, RIS – interview)

Leela emphasizes the 'protector' dynamic within brother-sister relationships here, and gives an example of her brother standing up for her, quite literally. Leela draws attention to her brother's physical act of chivalry, as he comes forward and shields her from harm ('he comes forward [for] me'). The potential 'harm' reported here is another boy verbally harassing her ('pass the comment'), but Leela characterizes her brother's protection as unconditional ('whenever something get wrong'). Leela's account of her rakhi brother stepping forward is further dramatized with the use of direct speech, with Leela's brother's words directed aggressively at the offending boy. In this example, the brother not only stands up for but also speaks on behalf of his sister.

This element of protection within the brother-sister relationship provides a clear echo of the brother-as-protector who is celebrated during Raksha Bandhan. The idea of brothers 'respecting' their sisters provided an extension of this idea of protection, as discussed in Chapter Five, with respect defined in quite a specific way:

Um, like [with] eve-teasing, like that. So – [my parents tell us] how should we protest [against] that, and – we should uh, they always tell us [to say] that even the girl, "She is your sister or not?" [...] You should give them respect like you give your sister [...] Like, the manner you talk to [girls]. If [you] think, someone talks to your sister [like that], then how do you feel? Then – you have to talk them [girls] like that only.

(Tornado, 11D, RIS – interview)

They even say it in the morning pledge. They have that, "All Indians are my brothers and sisters" – so that's one of the lines. But, um – I mean, by that they mean that [boys] are not – you know, teasing any girl, or, um – maybe, I don't know, harassing her, mentally or whatever. So that's the way they should treat all girls, like their sisters. They should give respect to all girls like their sisters. Because especially at school, they should be giving more attention to studies, rather than looking at all those things. So that's what they meant by treating all the girls like their sisters.

(Deepika, 11B, CGS – interview)

Tornado, a vocal advocate of treating girls as siblings, provides an insight into the motivation of boys who step forward to protect their 'sisters'. Tornado reports his parents' advice, to take a stand and discourage other boys from verbally harassing ('eve-teasing') girls by appealing to their assumed sense of duty and protective feelings for their actual sisters. Unlike Tornado and Leela, Deepika does not mention the idea that brothers have to protect their sisters from the unwelcome advances of other boys, but like Tornado, she characterizes the brother-sister relationship as one in which boys do not 'harass' or 'tease' girls. Deepika also contextualizes the rakhi relationship to a greater extent than the other students; she recognizes the place of this brother-sister ideal within school and nationalistic narratives in her reference to the CGS school pledge. Moreover, she emphasizes the specific importance of brother-sister relationships within school, where 'all those things' (another oblique reference to sexual feelings) should be subordinated to academic pursuits ('giving...attention to studies').

Tornado and Deepika implicitly defined 'respecting' a girl and sexually harassing her as mutually exclusive; this is uncontroversial enough, but equating 'giving girls respect' with treating girls 'like their sisters' perhaps more problematically suggests that girls can only be respected within a non-sexual relationship. It is apparent that the institutional narrative of brother-sister relationships not only perpetuates regressive gendered power dynamics (in which vulnerable women require protection from their powerful 'brothers'), but also a deeply restrictive conceptualization of sexuality. Taken to its logical end, the respecting-girls-as-sisters trope frames not just sexual harassment but all male sexual desire as derogatory towards women, and (insofar that female sexuality is imagined at all), characterizes women who express sexual desire or agency as unworthy of male respect. As discussed in Chapter Five, many students hotly disputed this paradigm, but these ideas arguably contributed to some of the confusion around how young people could understand sexual desire in positive terms.

However, some students did describe brother-sister relationships as more mutually supportive:

So, ah – it's even like that, and – some brother-sister relationship are [*sic*] very strong in our school. And – ah, [if] some boys initially tease that girl, so the [brother] do not finds it right [*sic*]. And if anything bad happens with that boy, so even the girl will not like this because she considers him her brother. So, she will not like this at all, and she will even – if a teacher scolds a boy for no reason, it has happened so many times in our school. [...] And if that boy has a sister, in the school ah – so, that sister will always stand by that boy, and she'll even fight with the teacher like, she'll say – she will say to that teacher that, "Why did you scold him when [he] didn't do anything bad?". So even the girls are very concerned about their brothers.

(Rani, 11A, SGS – interview)

There is a greater sense of reciprocity in Rani's account of brother-sister relationships than in other students'. While she does give a brief, now familiar account of a brother objecting to other boys harassing his sister, Rani follows this with a more detailed example of how a sister might reciprocate. The story of a girl 'fight[ing]' with a teacher who has unfairly scolded her brother ("“Why did you scold him when [he] didn't do anything bad?”") characterizes a sister's protection of her brother through the considerable feat of directly challenging a teacher's authority. However, on the whole, Rani's account is an exception to the ways in which students described brother-sister dynamics. As discussed below (6.5), students usually described relationships in which girls and boys were on more equal footing as 'friendships', which were distinct from 'brother-sister' relationships in a number of ways.

Contrary to the RIS Commerce teacher's assumption that young people 'these days' neglect ideas about brother-sister relationships, students did draw upon institutionalized, Raksha Bandhan narratives when defining heterosocial peer relationships. Brother-sister relationships also importantly contradict the characterisation of education and schools as gender-neutral spaces. Masculinity and femininity are arguably conceptualized as oppositional (and one-dimensional) within the rakhi relationship, while the framing of heterosocial relationships as familial and therefore non-sexual reflects another attempt to control young people's sexuality within co-educational schools. However, in spite of schools' promotion of and some students' adherence to these platonic relationships, many students indicated that they preferred heterosocial relationships which were less strictly platonic.

### **6.5 Heterosocial friendships**

The rigid disciplinary structures at CGS and RIS through which norms of gender segregation were maintained at the schools, outlined in Chapter Four, suggested institutional concerns that students would not necessarily remain within the platonic confines of rakhi relationships. While I was immediately struck by the extent to which spaces were gender segregated at CGS and RIS, I observed more relaxed, open heterosocial interactions at SGS, and the absence of disciplinary structures at the school seemed to be a key factor in this (see Chapter Four). These observations were complemented by a nuanced description of gender dynamics in Class 11 from Rani:

Some girls, they really keep distant from boys, they have their separate groups. But if I talk about my group, we have as much friends in girls as we have in boys. And we all, like [...] I think that is the only group of girls [that] boys respect the most. The other girls, the boys do not like other girls because

they are always separate from them. *Okay?* The other – we are also friends with boys, and we also like play with them, or something, we are very friendly, so the – the boys usually like the group of girls, like – who are my friends in the school more than the other girls. Ah – and some boys are even very separate, they do not talk to girls. Nobody even knows them, except their own classmates, *okay?* So they are very, very, very separate. And some girls are also like this, but some groups of students are there, who are very mixed up.

(Rani, 11A, SGS – interview)

Rani characterizes three distinct types of peer groups here; the girls who ‘are always separate’ from the boys, the boys who ‘do not talk to girls’, and groups in which there are ‘as [many] friends in girls as [...] in boys’. Rani ranks two of these groups based on her male friends’ opinions of them; the boys ‘do not like’ the girls who are ‘always separate from them’, while the girls they ‘respect the most’ are those who socialize with them. Rani locates herself and her girlfriends within the latter group, in which girls are ‘friends with boys’. She expresses considerable disdain for the groups of boys who do not mix with girls, suggesting their irrelevance to the school’s social scene (‘nobody even knows them, except their own classmates’, ‘they are very, very, very separate’), and perhaps echoing her male friends’ poor opinions of girls who similarly remain ‘separate’. This description indicates that peer cultures at SGS include heterosocial friendships as well as gender segregated groups, and, at least according to Rani, membership of a heterosocial friendship group confers greater social legitimacy at the school.

While these heterosocial friendships were more visible and more talked about at SGS, it is also important to note that peer cultures at CGS and RIS were not exclusively marked by gender segregation. At CGS, I did observe some interactions between girls and boys in 11B, and particularly in 11C.

[Fifth period] At one point, Shivani went to talk to a girl at the front of the class – as she came back, Anish stuck out his leg for her to trip over her, and she scowled at him. Later, Shivani flicked her bright green hanky at the boy next to me – she caught him in the face with it, which made Surbhi and the girl next to her burst out laughing. Anish and Sonali were conferring across the rows for quite some time, and seemed to be negotiating whether Anish could come and sit next to Sonali.

(Classroom observations, 11C, CGS)

These forms of playful, flirtatious interactions at the back of the classroom were the kinds of gendered dynamics I had been expecting to see, perhaps based on my own schooling experiences at a similar age. At CGS, my observations suggested that such interactions were



particular to 11C, and moreover, I learned that students in other sections did not take kindly to the heterosocial interactions that were common in the Humanities stream:

You know, girls in section C, that arts, Humanities section- the girls are so irritating! They used to open their door, and our door – they want to look at the boys of [my] class [...] They want to see them, they used to tell me, “Just open the, you know, door” – and they’d see the boys of the class, you know? It was so weird. Seriously.

(Akira, 11A, CGS – interview)

Akira’s story suggests that girls in 11C not only talk to boys in their own class, but are brazen enough to openly display an interest in the 11A boys. Akira condemns this behaviour as abnormal (‘weird’), and her description is also consistent with the general portrayal of Humanities students as less academically able and therefore inevitably more interested in pursuing ‘inappropriate’ activities by interacting with the opposite sex. The simultaneously disapproving and suggestive tone that Akira strikes here is ironically reminiscent of the conservative mentality that she heartily condemned when expressed by teachers (see Chapter Four), and it also suggests that, unlike Rani at SGS, she has a dim view of girls who socialize with boys<sup>26</sup>. This does not necessarily suggest that gender segregated peer groups held more social legitimacy at CGS as compared to SGS, but is perhaps more of a reflection of the students to whom I spoke. If girls from the ‘separate’ group at SGS had participated in my research, it is possible that I would have heard similar condemnations of Rani’s ‘mixed’ group. However, that there was a ‘mixed’ group in SGS 11A (the Science stream) does suggest that unlike at CGS, SGS students did not necessarily view academic achievement and heterosocial friendships as mutually exclusive.

Similarly, at RIS, heterosocial interactions did not seem to be confined to the non-Science streams; I observed relaxed interactions between girls and boys during classroom observation days with both 11B (Science Medical) and 11D (Commerce). During a sports period at RIS, the 11B students arranged themselves into mixed teams for a game of volleyball, and proceeded to tease each other (and me) for mutually low standards of play (Classroom observations, 11B, RIS). I particularly noticed these relaxed, good-natured interactions in comparison to sports periods at CGS, during which girls and boys quickly separated into their own groups, with minimal interaction until they returned to their classrooms (and, in the case of CGS 11A and 11B, usually after that as well).

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<sup>26</sup> Akira was not averse to interacting with all boys; she was involved in a romantic relationship with a college student (see 6.7), and it seemed that she reserved her disdain for boys her own age.

One of the RIS girls suggested that most friendship groups at her school were made up of both girls and boys:

Everyone has group of two girls or three boys, I mean, they are having – they are happy in their friend circle, and I don't think they are separate. Even if we are having a school trip or anything, we come together there and have a lot of fun. *We don't talk that much in class, but say a trip or something is organized. Then we all come together... groups are formed, so it's okay, we're all together. So it's okay. Everyone mixes up.*

(Leela, 11D, RIS – interview)

While describing heterosocial friendship groups, Leela draws an interesting contrast between behaviour in the classroom (*'We don't talk that much in class'*) and in non-academic school contexts, such as school trips (*'everyone mixes up'*). This suggests, perhaps unsurprisingly, that heterosocial friendships developed more freely outside the classroom than within it, but as I observed with 11B and 11D at RIS, this camaraderie seemed to translate back into the classroom (Classroom observations, 11B, RIS; Classroom observations, 11D, RIS).

Students did not discuss these heterosocial interactions purely in terms of 'brother-sister' relationships at any of the schools; in fact, many students questioned the need for brother-sister relationships, and also objected to them for several reasons. In particular, rakhi relationships were viewed as problematic due to their exclusively platonic undertones.

Ah, in school life, the statement [that boys should treat girls like sisters] is correct. But in college ah, no, this statement is wrong, because if we treated all girls like our sister, then what about our married life? [...] In Hindu[ism], we cannot marry our sisters, so, if we make all the girls our sister so [...] who the boys will marry?

(Akash, 11B, CGS – interview)

Akash does not reject rakhi relationships entirely, suggesting that brother-sister relationships are appropriate for their current age (*'in school life'*), but not beyond that (*'in college [...] this statement is wrong'*). Akash problematizes the non-sexual nature of rakhi relationships for the future (*'married life'*) by pointing to their incestuous implications; Keshar, one of the boys at RIS, made a similar argument, asking *'how will the world go, more'* (i.e. how will populations grow) if girls and boys only form rakhi relationships. Interestingly, Neeraj did not explicitly ask the boys if they thought *all* girls should be treated as sisters in either interview; Akash and Keshar seem to have assumed this themselves when answering, or alternatively, they may have deliberately used hyperbole to characterize rakhi relationships as absurd.

The platonic undertones of the rakhi relationship also meant that being labelled as a ‘brother’ or a ‘sister’ could be viewed as socially undesirable:

Padmini: [...] So in general, do you think girls and boys treat each other like brother and sister in your school?

Sweety: No!

Padmini: No? *[laughs]*

Sweety: Not at all! *[laughs]* By mistake, any – ah, [if] any girl said any boy [is a] brother – they said, “Whose brother?!” [...] *[laughs]* Actually no boy like that a girl call him brother.

(Sweety, 11F, RIS – interview)

*One of the guys proposed to a girl. He said, “I like you”, and she said, “I think of you as a brother (bhai)” [laughs]*

(Jonny, 11C, SGS – interview)

Sweety’s laughter suggested that she found the idea of girls and boys in her class forming rakhi relationships somewhat absurd, while Jonny’s brief story provides a potential explanation for her assertion that none of the boys like to be seen as brothers. In Jonny’s story, a girl rejects a boy’s romantic proposal by saying that she thinks of him as a brother – perhaps the equivalent of relegating someone to the friend zone. Interestingly, Jonny uses the English words ‘propose’ and ‘like’ when characterizing the boy’s romantic intentions, and the Hindi word ‘bhai’ when voicing the girl’s deflection of the proposition. These linguistic shifts subtly point to a difference between the conservative, ‘Indian mentality’ that the implied rakhi relationship entails, and more liberal, ‘Western’ notions of ‘proposing’, ‘liking’ (being attracted to) someone, and wanting to form a girlfriend-boyfriend relationship.

The undesirably platonic nature of rakhi relationships also seemed to have currency in wider popular culture, as I learned while watching an episode of *Jhalak Dikha Jha* (the Indian version of *Strictly Come Dancing*) in my hostel. During a skit on the show, a glamorous Bollywood actress told the two male hosts that she had a surprise present for them. The first host closed his eyes and leaned forward in anticipation; the actress leaned in, held his hand, and tied a rakhi bracelet on his wrist. He howled in mock-horror as he realized what had happened, while the second host quickly ran to the back of the stage to avoid a similar fate, shouting ‘No thank you, no thank you!’. The rakhi-tying and the first host’s crestfallen reaction provoked a roar of laughter from the studio audience & my viewing companions in the hostel, suggesting a shared appreciation for his unfortunate relegation to a clearly undesirable, non-sexual relationship with the actress (Field notes, 06.09.13).

This skit suggested that rakhi relationships could be located within an alternative narrative; as well as being glorified as a nationalistic celebration of men as the brave protectors of women (as in the more 'official' images of Raksha Bandhan discussed in 6.4), brother-sister relationships could also be suggestively undermined in order to express sexual attraction. Students' stories of their own engagement with or rejection of brother-sister relationships implied that they wove these diverse understandings of the rakhi relationship into their everyday heterosocial interactions at school.

As discussed in 6.4, some students clearly did value their own brother-sister relationships, but on the whole, students cast brother-sister relationships as either rare or undesirable. Instead, many students described 'friendship' between girls and boys as the preferred way of framing heterosocial relationships.

*You shouldn't treat everyone like a sister (behen), - I mean, everyone in our class should be friends. Not like a sister, and not like a girlfriend either. You can't treat everyone like a sister, it wouldn't be right (achha bhi nahin lagega). To live in the present (aajke zamaane) you can't treat everyone like sisters. If you think someone's a friend then treat them like a friend and don't cross the limit (had).*

(Harsha, 11C, CGS – interview)

Harsha describes three ways in which boys' friendships with girls can be classified: as (brother-)sister, friends, or (boyfriend-)girlfriend. Her assertion that the idea of boys treating *all* girls as sisters is not right ('achha bhi nahin lagega') echoes the arguments made by Akash and Keshar, but Harsha provides an alternative justification for her argument. She suggests that brother-sister relationships are old-fashioned, no longer relevant in the present ('aajke zamaane', literally 'today's time'); this also seems to be reflected in her use of the Hindi word for sister, 'behen', in comparison to the English words 'friend' and 'girlfriend'. These linguistic distinctions again potentially characterise 'bhai-behen' (brother-sister) relationships as traditional and Indian, compared to more modern, 'Westernized' friendships and girlfriend-boyfriend relationships.

Importantly, Harsha presents 'friend' as a distinct category from rakhi relationships and romantic relationship ('*Not like a sister, and not like a girlfriend either*'). Other students offered explanations for what the difference between a brother-sister relationship and a heterosocial friendship might be.

*We can't share our personal views [with a sister] - I mean like, say by chance there is an incident, if you are with her, and she is just like your sister. Now if you see a girl in front of her, you can't say anything, like if you're you are just passing a comment like you do in front of your friends. Like, "Wow! Man, she's*

*looking good, she's looking hot!", and all that. With her, I mean standing next to a sister, you can't say all this. [...] And you can't even share personal views, like you can't tell her about girlfriends and all; but you can talk to a friend about all of that.*

(Abby, 11A, SGS – interview)

Abby characterizes heterosocial friendships as closer and less restricted than brother-sister relationships (*'you can talk to a friend about all of that'*). As an example, he describes a scenario in which a boy cannot 'pass comments' about (i.e., express his attraction to) another girl while he is standing with his sister. Similarly, he indicates that while a boy can't talk to his sister about *'girlfriends and all'*, such things can be discussed with a friend. This suggests that treating a girl like a sister not only precludes being sexually attracted to her, but also requires a sense of decorum that prohibits discussion of anything sexual. Without these brother-as-protector requirements, Abby suggests that a heterosocial friendship can be a more equal and emotionally closer relationship.

While students characterized heterosocial friendships in these ways, as more 'free', equal and modern than brother-sister relationships, it is important to note that such friendships were still marked as platonic relationships. However, a further, crucial distinction seemed to be that, unlike rakhi relationships, heterosocial friendships were not seen as permanently platonic.

You know what, until 10<sup>th</sup> [Class] I used to tie rakhi on [my brother's] hand, on his wrist, but now, in 11th – he said, "Sweety, now no more rakhi – I'm your friend!" [laughs] I said, "Rakhi?" – he said, "No!" [laughs] So – now I don't have any brother in school, I only have friends.

(Sweety, 11D, RIS – interview)

Sweety's story, describing the changing nature of her relationship with a rakhi brother, provides an important example of the ways in which students negotiated and played with variously defined heterosocial relationships. By informing Sweety that she should not tie rakhi on his wrist in Class 11, her former brother indicates that he wants to be 'friends' with her instead. The timing of this change also seems important; while such a firmly platonic relationship may have been appropriate at age 15 in Class 10, it is apparently no longer fit for purpose at age 16 in Class 11. As the rejection of rakhi-tying in popular culture and among peer cultures at other schools suggests, this marks a symbolic move into a heterosocial friendship which has the potential to develop into something more romantic, or even sexual.

Overall, students' critiques and rejection of brother-sister relationships, which were sanctioned by school and wider cultural narratives, reflect the ways in which they actively

engaged with and subverted attempts to control potential expressions of their sexuality. These findings also indicate more complex heterosocial dynamics within youth cultures than those outlined by Abraham (2001), who does not point to distinctions between rakhi relationships and heterosocial friendships in her conceptualization of 'bhai-behen' relationships. Stories told by students at all three schools in this study suggest that they played with expected boundaries and engaged with each other within heterosocial friendships which were highly valued within peer cultures (see also Gilbertson 2014). Findings discussed here are also reminiscent of Kehily & Nayak's (1996) description of sexuality as a site where 'boundaries may be created by the school and tested by the pupils', revealing sexuality as a 'playground within which humour is used and power struggled over' (1996: 214). Overall, students' preferences for less restricted heterosocial friendships suggest that they did not feel their interactions with the opposite sex had to be closely monitored or defined within the 'safe' confines of brother-sister relationships. Moreover, as discussed in the following section, the preference for friendships over rakhi relationships can be linked to the high social value placed upon peer romances by students.

### **6.6 Peer romances – heterosexual and caste boundaries**

In spite of the pervasive, stark warnings against the dangers of teenage sexual activity (as discussed in 6.2, 6.3), students and teachers described 'girlfriend-boyfriend' relationships as commonplace at all the schools. From teachers' perspectives, 'infatuations' and 'affairs' between students were most commonly seen as an unwelcome distraction from academic work, in line with concerns of teenage sexuality disrupting academic achievement (see Chapter Four). Some students expressed concerns about relationships in terms consistent with these institutional narratives, and therefore explained that they avoided getting involved in 'all these things' (e.g. Khyati, 11A, CGS; Violet, 11B, RIS; Lego, 11A, SGS). However, it seemed that peer romances were an important source of sexual learning for students, whether or not they were actively involved in such relationships. This section explores the ways in which notions of acceptable social limits were defined and occasionally circumvented within school peer cultures, as well as the implications of these limits for students' ideas of future relationships and marriage. The following section (6.7) then explores the ways in which appropriate physical limits within romantic relationships were understood; I refer to students' (mostly) non-physical girlfriend-boyfriend relationships as 'romantic' relationships, as distinct from the 'sexual' relationships described later on.

In a brief exchange in the SGS girls' FGD, two girls pointed to specific forms of peer pressure by which students were 'encouraged' to enter into peer romances.

- Mala: [...] The peer pressure, [a girl's] friends force her to have any boyfriend –
- Rani: This happens with boys also. His friends force him to have a girlfriend –
- Mala: "What a kind of boy you are, you have not a girlfriend"
- Rani: "Oh, you don't have a girlfriend", and all. So –
- [...]
- Mala: If you are not doing so, you are like – a gay. Being called a gay *[laughter]* so – "You are not interested in girls, so what, you are interested in boys? So just stay away from us" *[laughs]*.

(SGS Girls' Focus Group)

Mala and Rani suggest that both girls and boys experience peer pressure to form relationships; for boys, this pressure seems to include 'questioning' a boy's masculinity ("What kind of a boy [are you]...?") in specifically homophobic terms: 'if you are not doing so, you are like – a gay'; "You are interested in boys? So just stay away from us". It would seem that romantic relationships were therefore not only an ideal to aspire to, but that a lack of interest in pursuing peer romances could be construed as an unacceptable deviation from heteronormativity.

Although none of the boys who participated in the research mentioned pressures to form romantic relationships in order to 'prove' their heterosexual masculinity, this exchange does largely reflect attitudes that students expressed towards the idea of same-sex relationships. It was perhaps unsurprising that, apart from this exchange, the topic did not come up organically during student FGDs, since homosexuality is constructed as particularly 'taboo' within conservative attitudes towards sexuality in India (see Chapter Two). During individual interviews, Neeraj and I therefore asked students to imagine that one of their friends was gay – what would they say, or what would they do? While some students expressed progressive attitudes (particularly Khyati at CGS, who argued in favour of same-sex marriage), most students found the idea confusing (with a lack of certainty as to whether it was 'natural') or faintly ridiculous (being unsure why anyone would want to be 'like that'). Others reacted in clearly homophobic terms, ranging from vows to 'stay away' from anyone who was gay, to physical assault as 'punishment' for a hypothetically gay friend. While Mala and Rani were the only students to directly mention pressure to form heterosexual romantic relationships as a means of repudiating same-sex desire, students' confusion, discomfort or hostility towards the

idea of homosexuality raise the possibility of implicit or explicit homophobia within peer cultures at all the schools.

Peer romances were also conducted within certain social boundaries, even as they transgressed them:

Jyoti: I love someone. And – his name is Arjun. And we are in a relationship from last one year. Okay? [...] So – they... I don't know from where [his family] belong, they, um – I know *that*, I know they're SC/ST [scheduled caste/scheduled tribe] – and my mum used to say they're, okay, "they're from backward, *they're this and that*", all that. Despite all this [...] my, ah... mom's big brother. Ah – [his] daughter got love marriage from that – SC/ST. Okay? So they – her marriage was simple, in the temple. They don't do any, they didn't have anything [big]. And my *sister* is doing arranged marriage – everything is arranged for her. Dowry is given. Everything is so – awesome.

Padmini: Okay, yeah. But the family allowed, um – your cousin sister to get married, like love marriage – they allowed it?

Jyoti: Actually, she got – she ran away. Okay? [...] She used to stay away, but ah – she came, and she was crying, so they accepted it. Her mother accepted it. Because – my *aunt*, she is good, so. She accepted her.

Padmini: [...] But you never know like, in the future your – your mum might accept?

Jyoti: No

Padmini: No?

Jyoti: No.

(Jyoti, 11B, RIS – interview)

By forming an inter-caste relationship, Jyoti is clearly going against the 'norm' of intra-caste unions (see Chapter 2); however, although she is currently transgressing these boundaries (and evidently has strong feelings for her boyfriend), their caste differences and her family's attitudes to those from lower castes ("they're [...] backward") mean that she does not anticipate a future for their relationship. Jyoti contextualizes her pessimism about the relationship by explaining the circumstances of her cousin's wedding, a 'love' marriage to someone from a low-caste background, and her elder sister's forthcoming wedding, an 'arranged' marriage to (implicitly) someone from the same caste background. Jyoti's cousin's experience follows a familiar narrative of family rejection following an inter-caste love marriage (Donner 2008; Chakravarti 2003) – the union involved exile from her family ('she ran away') and a functional, non-celebratory wedding ('her marriage was simple [...] they didn't [do] anything [big]'). By contrast, Jyoti's elder sister is fulfilling familial and social expectations through her arranged marriage, and therefore convention is followed; her parents will pay



dowry to the husband's side, and, as Jyoti later told me, a large celebration was being planned for the wedding (pointed to by 'everything is awesome' here).

Although Jyoti's cousin was eventually welcomed back into the family through an emotional reunion ('she came, and she was crying – so they accepted it'), Jyoti does not anticipate similar acceptance from her mother for her own inter-caste relationship. Later in the interview, I asked Jyoti if she would marry Arjun anyway, in a similar way to her cousin, and she responded:

No. I would not. Because my – I know I hate my parents but, I want them to be respected in society. I will not follow anything which is – not respectable for me and for them as well.

(Jyoti, 11B, RIS – interview)

This response indicates that Jyoti was ultimately prepared to end her relationship out of respect for her parents, therefore prioritising familial and social obligations over her personal feelings (both her love for her boyfriend, and her animosity for her parents). One of the other girls at RIS, Sweety, similarly envisaged a clash with her family over her (currently clandestine) inter-caste relationship, but was more hopeful that her parents would eventually support her (Sweety, 11D, RIS – interview). This was a marked contrast to students who had formed romantic relationships with partners from the same caste background; for example, at CGS, Kamya informed me that she did not see any problems in marrying her boyfriend, Vinay, as they shared a high-caste background (Kamya, 11B, CGS – interview).

It seemed that students understood their current and future romantic relationships as inevitably dictated by caste-related family expectations. Although the majority of 'main' student participants (21 out of 30) indicated that caste background did not matter to them when choosing a life partner, many of them nevertheless anticipated that their parents would arrange intra-caste marriages for them. These findings are consistent with those from Donner (2008) and Mody (2006), who note that such marriages continue to be the norm among middle-class families in India. However, some students also described 'love-come-arranged' marriages as a potential compromise (e.g. Khyati, 11A, CGS – interview; Abby, 11A, SGS – interview). These were described both in terms of young people finding their own partners and then having them accepted by their families, or alternatively a partner being selected by families, and then being agreed to by the young people in question. As discussed by van Wessel (2011), Fuller & Narasimhan (2008), Chowdhry (2007) and Mody (2006), the 'love-come-arranged' narrative importantly allows (usually middle-class) young people to anticipate

some agency in their choice of life partner, while also balancing this with family approval and expectations.

As well as reinforcing heterosexual boundaries, then, peer romances at school were conducted with an awareness of, if not adherence to, intra-caste boundaries. Students currently in inter-caste romantic relationships seemed prepared either to give up these relationships due to potential opposition from their families, or else expected conflict with their families in order to marry lower-caste partners. While the majority of students did not personally view caste as an important factor in choosing a life partner, even those who hoped for the compromise of love-come-arranged marriages anticipated that these would remain within intra-caste boundaries. As discussed in the following section, peer romances while at school therefore seemed to offer greater opportunities for expressing agency when choosing a romantic partner than would be available later in life.

### **6.7 Peer romances – defining (and circumventing) physical ‘limits’**

The majority of students who participated in the research emphasized that girlfriend-boyfriend relationships were fine, as long as the couple remained within their ‘limits’.

Tornado: Girlfriend-boyfriend is not a bad thing that, in a limit [...] [but] if we do anything wrong at this age, then we have to suffer for our whole life, and the girl’s life will also be destroyed [...] And – if our parents get to know this, it will be – society also will be shame of us. And we are not able to [show] our face also.

Neeraj: And – what is, what is ‘wrong thing’?

Tornado: Means – being sexual and like that.

(Tornado, 11D, RIS – interview)

Tornado emphasizes the importance of the physical ‘limits’ of girlfriend-boyfriend relationships here within a now familiar risk-based narrative. Teenagers having sex (‘do[ing] anything wrong’) leads to ‘suffer[ing]’, particularly for the girl, although it is not clear if Tornado anticipates her life being ‘destroyed’ by the general shame they would both experience (‘society will be [a]shame[d] of us’), or by an implied pregnancy. At CGS, Akira provided an example of how these limits worked within her own relationship:

If you want to be physical you can hug each other. That’s it. See, I’m in a relationship from the past three years. My boyfriend’s good, he never does any such things. Finally we just hug each other, that’s it. He used to kiss me on my cheeks, that’s it. That’s a physical relationship in my relationship, you

know. This much is good but, you know – um, ah – physical relationship is bad for us in this age. Seriously.

(Akira, 11A, CGS – interview)

Akira's account offers a slightly less strict definition of 'limits' than Tornado, with some physical intimacy permitted in her relationship ('we just hug each other', '[he] kiss[es] me on my cheeks'); many students (both those in relationships and those who were single) explained that similar degrees of intimacy were acceptable within romantic relationships. Although Akira's reason for enforcing these limits is fairly non-specific here ('physical relationship is bad for us in this age'), she praises her boyfriend of three years for not initiating further sexual intimacy ('he never does any such things'). At SGS, I was also told about couples who were viewed as exemplary because of the physical limits within their relationships.

[A] girl was committed for four years, to that other boy, who has just passed out [i.e. left school]. And they [were] the perfect couple, ah, in our school. And all people – all children said that, "Oh yeah – oh god! May you grant us a boy [...] like that boy". And – they are so beautiful – look so beautiful with each other. Like, there is such an emotional bond between them.

(Mala, 11A, SGS – interview)

Mala idealises the couple she describes both in her own words ('they [were] the perfect couple', 'they are so beautiful') and in the reportedly adoring words of 'all [the] children' in school ('May you grant us a boy [...] like that boy'). This near-worship of the couple importantly hinged upon their 'emotional bond' – which Mala emphasized (both in her interview and in the girls' FGD) was far superior to a mere 'physical bond', echoing the non-physical 'true love' relationships described by Abraham (2001) and Gilbertson (2014). Interestingly, Akira and Mala reserved particular praise for the boyfriends in these relationships for not initiating a sexual relationship – Akira similarly emphasizes her boyfriend's, rather than her own, sexual restraint ('he never does any such thing'), while Mala suggests that all the students (presumably all the girls – see 6.6) hope to find such a boy for themselves. The implication is that not all boys are like this, perhaps with undertones of the uncontrollable male sex drive narrative, although it should be noted that it was not only the girls who valued romantic relationships in the study. Several boys also emphasized the importance of imposing physical limits within appropriate girlfriend-boyfriend relationships (e.g. Tornado, 11D, RIS; Rocco, 11A, SGS). Overall, as a source of sexual learning, these stories seemed to encourage other couples in school to aspire to similarly idealized, romantic relationships by imposing physical limits with their partners.

Within the 'acceptable' boundaries of heterosexual peer romances at school, romantic relationships with limited (or no) physical intimacy were also celebrated in opposition to something else – namely, students who went 'too far' by having sex.

Sweety: I [came] to know that – an 11<sup>th</sup> class girl... She – was being intimated [*sic*] with a boy in 12<sup>th</sup>. And they were not committed! [*laughs*] I thought, when both are not committed, then with sex – if they would be committed then what would they do! [*laughs*]

Padmini: [*laughs*] And – what do you think about that?

Sweety: I was feeling bad, that – um, if you are doing something, if you're in relation[ship], then everything should be in limit. Everything is good if they're in limit.

(Sweety, 11D, RIS – interview)

Sweety laughingly expresses her disapproval of a couple who have had sex ('being intimated'), particularly since they were not actually in a relationship ('they were not committed!'). When explaining her response to this story, she returns to an emphasis on the importance of remaining within appropriate 'limits' when in a relationship (which she had earlier defined in a similar way to Akira – restricted to hugging and kissing).

Sweety does not elaborate on how she 'came to know' about this particular couple's sexual activity, but it was apparent that stories of students' sexual activity circulated in all the schools.

*I heard that – I mean, students in Class 12, one called Dimple and one called Gaurav. They were like brother-sister (bhai-behen) in school. But they went out together – I mean, they booked a room in a hotel – and there, whatever happened – I don't know what. But there was a boy from our school, so he saw them when they came back, and he told us – like, "They went to the hotel, booked a room and a lot has happened between them".*

(Harsha, 11C, CGS – interview)

Harsha was not the only student who told a story about student liaisons in a hotel room; Akash told a similar (perhaps the same) story at CGS, while at SGS, Rocco also shared a story about a couple from his school who had sex in a hotel room (Akash, 11A, CGS – interview; Rocco, 11A, SGS – interview). I was intrigued by the repetition of these stories across the two schools, and wondered if perhaps this was something of an urban legend, or a trope of teenage sexual rebellion. Harsha does point to a source just close enough to the events to suggest validity ('a boy from our school [...] saw them'), but the telling of these stories is perhaps of more interest than the veracity of their claims. For example, Harsha suggests that the couple in question

used a rakhi relationship (*'they were like brother-sister'*) while in school to conceal their actual girlfriend-boyfriend relationship – further suggesting how adept students were at playing with notions of 'acceptable' heterosocial interactions, and consistent with previous findings from Sinha-Kerkoff (2003) and Abraham (2001), who report brother-sister relationships being used as a cover for romantic or sexual liaisons. Additionally, even when recounting the events at the heart of the story, Harsha avoids directly stating what the couple got up to in their hotel room ('whatever happened'; "'a lot has happened between them'"). Harsha may have used these euphemisms because Neeraj was interviewing her<sup>27</sup>, but her choice of language also suggests tension between what is implicitly tell-able and explicitly unsayable within sexual stories (Plummer 1995).

Perhaps most strikingly, Harsha omits to mention what happened to the couple after they (presumably) had sex – were they punished by their parents, or by the school? Were they struck down by disease, or socially outcast? This lack of emphasis on the consequences of teenage sexual activity is particularly intriguing as a contrast to the cautionary tales of sex followed by pregnancy or abortion-related death on *Gumrah*; unlike the tragic events of these stories when told on TV, their 'real life' counterparts circulating in schools seem less morally conclusive – or at least, the students re-telling these stories do not use them to illustrate moral lessons.

It would be a stretch to suggest that these hotel room stories completely undermine more graphic stories of the risks and dangers of teenage sexual activity, but they do provide closer-to-home examples of peers going to considerable lengths to engage in sexual relationships, and not necessarily facing dire consequences. While stories about students' sexual experiences were told at all schools, sexual activity among students did not seem to be particularly common; as discussed above, romantic relationships seemed to have higher social value if they stayed within broad peer definitions of 'acceptable' limits, with physical intimacy restricted to hugging and kissing. Confirming findings from Twamley (2013) and Abraham (2001), it seemed that sexual activity among student couples was the exception rather than the norm. However, even if most couples did not go quite as far as booking hotel rooms, numerous stories of students seeking out clandestine spaces to explore these forms of physical intimacy suggested alternative experiences and understandings of 'risk' within peer romances. At CGS, classrooms on the top floor of the school were only used for lessons during the second shift, and therefore empty during the first shift; Akash, one of the CGS boys, told a story in

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<sup>27</sup> Harsha was more comfortable speaking in Hindi, so Neeraj conducted her individual interview instead of me.

which a couple darted between these empty classrooms in order to avoid getting caught by the Sanskrit teacher – she did, however, eventually find them kissing in one of the rooms (Akash, 11B, CGS – interview). The unused top floor was also a popular kissing spot for some couples at SGS (Jonny, 11C, SGS – interview), while others went behind the school building to avoid being caught by teachers (Priyanka, 11B, SGS – interview). Meanwhile, Keshar reported that ‘there were rumours’ that empty classrooms were well-used by couples at RIS (Keshar, 11D, RIS – interview).

Certain spaces beyond school also offered opportunities for peer romances to blossom more openly. The majority of students who participated in the research revealed that they attended tuition classes or coaching centres or institutes frequently<sup>28</sup>. Kumar (2011) and Sancho (2012) have characterized coaching centres as emblematic of middle-class pressures to achieve success through career-oriented education, and I also initially understood students’ coaching centre attendance as further proof of the academic pressures weighing down on students. However, it became apparent that coaching centres were also a significant space for less academic aspects of peer cultures.

Like, I’m in an institute, there it’s also huge [for] couples. Only, *I mean, on the second floor you’ll find couples, I mean that place is packed with all the couples in Delhi!*

(Rocco, 11A, SGS – interview)

Rocco was one of several students who mentioned that young people frequently paired off at coaching centres (‘it’s also huge [for] couples’); his claim that ‘all the couples in Delhi’ are to be found on the second floor of his institute evocatively suggests that young people from all over the city flock to coaching centres (and apparently his in particular) in search of romance. Rocco said that he himself had not found a girlfriend at his institute, indicating that romances were not a guaranteed feature of after-school classes. However, this collision of extra study and potential romance is intriguing; the students’ presence at coaching centres ostensibly reflects the urban, middle-class pursuit of academic and career success, and yet these centres also offer a legitimate, unsupervised space in which heterosocial peer cultures (and therefore romances) can flourish. As Kehily (2012) has argued, in the context of ‘increased regulation of school life through testing, monitoring and processes of individualisation’, sexual cultures within (and beyond) schools become important to young people as ‘autonomous, peer-

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<sup>28</sup> 73.0% of students (n = 119) stated that they attended tuition ‘sometimes’ or ‘all the time’ (Q17n, valid N = 163).

generated sites of resistance, providing adult-free and education-free zones in which students can negotiate what is acceptable, desirable and what is “too much” (2012: 263-4).

Empty classrooms and coaching centres therefore offered couples physical spaces in which they could pursue their relationships, but it also became apparent that virtual spaces played an important role in facilitating peer romances. In particular, stories from several girls suggested that technology allowed them to circumvent restrictions placed upon them by their parents. At the end of her interview, Mala (11A, SGS) told me a lengthy story about a recent flirtation with a friend’s ex-boyfriend, who vacillated regularly between needing comfort for his recent break-up and seeking a new romance with Mala. Since Mala’s parents did not allow her to spend time outside the house when not at school (see Chapter Five), the various stages of this drama had played out entirely via WeChat (an instant messaging app popular in India) and through late-night phone calls. At RIS, Leela also told me that she spoke on the phone ‘all the time’ to her boyfriend. Although the boy was also a student at RIS, the RIS sports teacher had threatened to tell her parents if she did not end the relationship. Unable to interact openly with her boyfriend at school, speaking on the phone every night meant that Leela could continue the relationship unobserved (Classroom observations, 11D, RIS). Technology, and particularly having access to their own 3G-connected smartphones, therefore seemed to enable students to undermine school and parental authority and to engage in romantic relationships within the privacy of their own homes.

Overall, risk-based narratives of sexuality from school and media sources of sexual learning clearly did have some influence within peer cultures; this is particularly apparent in the definition of ‘appropriate’ relationships as mostly non-physical, and definitely not involving sex. At least among the students who participated in my study, having sex while still at school seemed inescapably associated with negative risks to their health, their social reputation and to their academic achievement. At the same time, a lack of interest in peer romances seemed to run the social risk of going against the heteronormativity of peer cultures. The norm of heterosexual romances was reinforced through explicit homophobic attitudes in at least one of the schools, and while students at all the schools were familiar with the concept of same-sex relationships, many were confused by or explicitly hostile to the idea that such relationships might exist within their peer cultures. This arguably reflects the limited (or non-existent) discussion of same-sex desire within the sources of sexual learning accessed by students.

Within heterosexual limits, however, students willingly risked institutional and parental censure by seeking out liminal spaces within school and beyond in order to pursue romantic

relationships. These risks not only translated into considerable prestige among peer groups, but also offered alternative, more positive understandings of teenage sexuality. Pursuing romantic relationships arguably provided young people with a means of expressing agency – choosing their own romantic partner, a freedom which may in fact be limited to their pre-marital years – and further undermining norms of gender segregation and platonic ideals of heterosocial relationships. While actual sexual relationships were not necessarily sanctioned within peer cultures, peer romances meant that students could explore and understand ideas of intimacy and desire in much more positive terms than the risk-based narratives of sexuality available in other sources of sexual learning.

## 6.8 Conclusions

Findings discussed in this chapter indicate that students accessed numerous sources of sexual learning beyond school, and beyond the limited, euphemistic information on sexuality offered by their Class 10 Science textbooks. Most of these sources seemed to reinforce associations between teenage sexuality and negative health and social consequences, through pervasive reproduction-and-risk (and even reproduction-as-risk) narratives. These findings importantly extend existing literature on youth consumption of popular media in post-liberalization India. For example, TV shows specifically aimed at an adolescent audience, such as *Gumrah*, have not previously been considered as sources of sexual learning for young people; while these cable TV shows may largely be accessed by middle-class young people, they strongly reinforced associations between teenage sexual relationships and numerous health and social risks.

In light of the ominous tales of teenage sexual activity they heard, students' arguments that they needed to protect themselves with accurate information (and, in some cases, firm moral guidance) through sex education were perhaps to be expected. This sense of urgency could also explain their rejection of the idea that sex education is 'against Indian culture'; several students argued that this conservative position was just one of many 'Indian cultures', and many firmly identified themselves as a more modern, progressive generation for whom sexual learning was essential. When mentioning these plural 'Indian cultures', it seems significant that none of the students cited erotic cultures within India, such as the *Kamasutra* or Tantric traditions (see Chapter One), to refute the notion that sex education is 'un-Indian'. This may have been due to students' lack of awareness of these traditions, or an unwillingness to discussing erotic cultures with my research assistant and myself. However, students' lack of



engagement with these alternative sexual cultures may also reflect the dominance of Hindutva definitions of 'Indian culture', to the exclusion of alternative traditions, in contemporary India.

Students' negotiations between specific understandings of 'tradition' and 'modernity' were further apparent within the heterosocial dynamics of peer cultures. While some findings discussed in this chapter are consistent with those from previous studies (e.g. Sancho 2012; Sinha-Kerkoff 2003; Abraham 2001), my doctoral research also extends the literature by considering students' attitudes towards and 'use' of rakhi relationships in more depth. Many students rejected the idea that girls and boys could only interact within officially sanctioned rakhi relationships, choosing instead to form heterosocial friendships. Unlike previous studies, I also consider students' preferences for certain heterosocial dynamics within the context of wider cultural narratives. For example, the celebration of brother-sister relationships through Raksha Bandhan meant that rakhi relationships were tied to notions of Indian culture and national duty. However, this nationalistic trope was also playfully undermined in popular culture, with rejection of a brother-sister relationship widely read as suggestive of sexual desire. Students often framed their own preferences for heterosocial friendships in terms of a rejection of traditional, conservative values; friendships were associated with more modern social patterns, with boys and girls on a more equal footing within friendships (unlike the protector/protected binary of rakhi relationships), allowing greater emotional closeness within platonic relationships, and also leaving open romantic and sexual possibilities.

These findings also point to important class distinctions in terms of young people's ability to 'choose' between tradition and modernity. While rakhi relationships could be re-negotiated and played with among the urban, middle-class young people who participated in my study, Chowdhry (2007) has discussed the more violent connotations of rakhi-tying in rural North India, in which inter-caste marriages are annulled by forcing couples to acknowledge each other as brother and sister. The fluidity of the boundaries between rakhi relationships and less platonic relationships is therefore arguably enjoyed by those of higher class status; while negotiating tradition and modernity can often be a fraught process for the urban middle-classes (Gilbertson 2014; Phadke, Khan & Ranade 2011), the ability to carry out these negotiations with some freedom are themselves a marker of class privilege.

Findings on coaching centre romances add an important dimension to existing literature on the importance of education to middle-class families in India; it would seem that these 'definers of middleclassness' (Kumar 2011: 238) also offer students the chance to interact with girls and boys outside school, and beyond the restrictive gaze of their parents and teachers. As well as sites of heightened academic pressure, coaching centres also act as new spaces for

peer cultures to develop, and offer important opportunities for romance and release. These spaces for romantic and sexual possibility seemed all the more important in light of the lack of autonomy in future marital decisions anticipated by students. On the whole, findings discussed in this chapter suggest the continued importance of caste to marital practices among the urban middle-classes. However, while students anticipated being bound by these attitudes towards caste, it is important to note that the majority of students said that they themselves did not believe that caste should be a defining factor when choosing a life partner.

It seemed that sexual activity among student couples was the exception rather than the norm; at least according to the students who participated in the research, ‘appropriate’ levels of intimacy within girlfriend-boyfriend relationships did not extend beyond hugging and kissing. Although stories of sexual encounters were told, the ‘timepass’, casual sexual relationships discussed by Abraham’s (2001) participants were not referred to by the young people who participated in this study, which may reflect their lower age bracket; in Abraham’s (2001) study, ‘timepass’ relationships were largely discussed by participants over the age of 18. Although not reported from personal experience or stories from within schools, participants’ discussions on the negative outcomes of teenage sexual activity (for example, by citing *Gumrah* episodes in which this was shown) pointed to a general perception that sexual relationships carried greater social and health risks for girls. On the whole, the romantic relationships mostly highly valued in peer cultures were characterized by emotional attachment, with limited or no physical intimacy involved – comparable to the ‘true love’ relationships described by Abraham (2001) and Gilbertson (2014).

Within the present study, stories of couples who did seek out spaces for any kind of physical intimacy were therefore filled with a sense of social risk. Such activity clearly contravened the norms of gender segregation imposed at the schools, and as discussed in Chapter Four, many of the disciplinary mechanisms at the schools were specifically aimed at preventing such liaisons. However, many students were clearly willing to take these risks, which crucially suggests that through peer romances, students exercised their agency in order to explore experiences of pleasure and intimacy – in terms of being able to choose their own romantic partner, this may have been a freedom which was limited to their pre-marital years. As they circulated within peer cultures, stories of these encounters offered other students an alternative source of sexual learning, in which risk-taking was viewed as exciting rather than life-threatening, and young people’s exploration of their sexuality celebrated rather than condemned.

## Chapter Seven: Conclusions

### 7.1 Introduction

This thesis was shaped by two public controversies relating to gender and sexuality in India – the sex education debates from 2007-2009, and the national and international outcry over the gang rape of a young woman in Delhi in 2012-2013. These panics over youth sexuality and debates over changing gender dynamics can be understood within the context of shifting gendered and sexual politics over the past 25 years in post-liberalization, globalized India. This period has seen increasing LGBT and feminist mobilization around sex-positive, non-normative sexualities on the left, denunciations of ‘un-Indian’ and immoral sexual behaviour from the Hindu right, and the rise of a consumer culture in which new technologies and spaces present the allure of ‘Western’ modernity.

Working with a group of middle-class secondary school students (aged 15-17), I have sought to understand how these macro-narratives of gender, sexuality and culture have played out within young people’s everyday lives, and particularly within school contexts. The research questions guiding the study were:

**RQ1:** How are gender and sexuality understood, experienced, and ‘learned’ in Delhi secondary schools?

**RQ2:** How do these understandings, experiences and processes of learning relate to national and international understandings of gender, sexuality and education?

This final chapter begins with reflections on the study limitations (7.2), discusses the key methodological and substantive contributions of the study (7.3), and then considers the implications of the study findings for policy and practice (7.4).

### 7.2 Study limitations

Based on the methods used and my researcher positionality, there are inevitably limitations to the study. For example, carrying out the research in co-educational, English-medium schools in Delhi meant that the study has captured the experiences of a specific group of young people. As an English-speaking, middle-class researcher, conducting the research largely in English meant that even though there were young people from low-income backgrounds at the schools, these students were less confident in their English language skills, and therefore may have been less likely to volunteer to participate beyond the questionnaire stages. However, by

maintaining a focus on intersections of gender, sexuality, caste and class throughout the thesis, I have been able to consider the ways in which my participants' experiences and performed identities are specific to their urban, middle-class backgrounds.

Importantly, the feminist approach adopted in the study involves acknowledging that my research inevitably 'constitutes a partial and situated account' (Allen 2005: 17). Adopting a critical, reflexive approach has also enabled me to consider the ways in which participants may have responded to my diasporic identity. For example, participants may have framed their experiences and stories in terms of distinctions between the 'Indian' and 'Western' as an explanatory device for my benefit. However, my diasporic identity and liminal status within the schools may have also encouraged students to tell their 'sexual stories' more freely; they may have perceived me to be a less judgemental audience due to my 'Western' identity, while assumed similarities due to my 'Indianness' (e.g. experiences of parental restrictions) may have also encouraged a sense of intimacy.

There were limitations to individual methods used within my multi-method approach. While I designed questionnaires in order to provide a broad introduction to some of the research topics explored in the study, some questionnaire items were ultimately too broad to usefully address my research questions. In light of my concerns about gatekeepers' potential objections, and the difficulty of gauging students' level of comfort when providing written answers to sensitive or intimate questions, questionnaires were not the ideal medium through which to explore sexuality-related topics. In terms of participant observation, although I adopted an ethnographic approach throughout the study, carrying out a limited number of classroom observation days in each school had implications for the quality of ethnographic data. For example, I remained something of a novelty to the students, and so consistently disturbed the environment I was observing. Had I become a more regular presence in their classrooms, students may have become more accustomed to my presence, and I may have observed homosocial and heterosocial interactions playing out between girls and boys rather than becoming implicated in these interactions myself.

However, overall, the multi-method approach adopted meant that the limitations of individual methods were complemented by the strengths of others. Adopting a 'building block' approach (Allen 2005: 24) meant that emerging themes and questions from each method informed the design of the next; for example, the lack of findings on sexuality from the questionnaires contributed to a clearer focus on these topics in mixed and single-sex FGDs. Classroom observation days also provided an opportunity to explore emerging themes from qualitative methods, but through more relaxed interactions than formal research activities. While

Neeraj's work with male participants in single-sex FGDs and interviews was invaluable (it did seem that the boys were more comfortable speaking to him, particularly on sexuality-related topics), adopting an ethnographic approach meant that I could interact more freely with male participants within informal school spaces, while also strengthening existing relationships with female participants. Overall, the amount of methodological time spent with participants, and the decreasing level of formality within research interactions (from quantitative to qualitative and ethnographic methods), supported the development of closer relationships with the girls and boys who participated in the study, which in turn led to multi-layered insights into their experiences and understandings of gender and sexuality.

### **7.3 Key study findings; methodological and substantive contributions to knowledge**

#### *7.3.1 Micro- and macro-narratives of gender, sexuality, education and cultures*

A methodological contribution of the study is the use of a narrative analytical approach which considered Plummer's (1995) sexual stories within Andrews' (2014) political narratives framework. As Plummer (1995) has noted, sexual stories told by individuals are always 'part of the wider discourses and ideologies abroad in society' (1995: 6). In my study, considering the social and ideological nature of sexual stories in terms of 'the relationship between macro and micro narratives' described by Andrews (2014: 86) provided a means of closely examining the co-construction of stories within research encounters, considering how participants 'use[d] culture in doing narratives' (Andrews 2014: 86), and how this could be linked to their sense of 'what it means to be' from a particular place and a 'sense of belonging and/or alienation' (Andrews 2014: 88). Paying attention to the performative work within micro-narratives and particular positionings (whether conscious or unconscious) within macro-narratives therefore meant that it was possible to explore the ways in which young people and their teachers performed particular gendered, sexual, classed, national and global identities within research encounters.

Overall, examining 'the relationship between the stories of individuals and the stories of the communities in which they live' (Andrews 2014: 86) meant that interrelations between local experiences and national and international understandings could be examined (RQ2). The narrative analytical framework adopted meant that it was possible to go beyond simply identifying a gap between 'official' understandings of gender, sexuality and education in India and young people's 'unofficial' understandings and everyday experiences. Instead, I could explore the possibilities, new expectations, frustrations and confusions which arise from young

people's daily engagement with contradictory macro-narratives of gender, sexuality and education in contemporary India.

Chapter Two explored some of the macro policy narratives through which gender and education have been understood in post-independence India. Since the late 1980s, a dominant narrative within education policies has identified increasing girls' access to primary schooling as a means of achieving gender equality. This has developed alongside post-liberalization, middle-class narratives in which the educated, professional woman has been seen as 'the icon of the new India' (Dasgupta 2014: 135); in these narratives, girls' and women's education is seen as a measure of family, community and national progress (Phadke, Khan & Ranade 2011). Macro-narratives of aspirational femininity can be linked to can-do narratives of girlhood, which strongly shaped teachers' and students' expectations of girls' education in the study schools. Previous studies have highlighted the value of education among Indian middle-class families (Sancho 2012; Donner 2008), but a key finding of my doctoral research is that the urban, middle-class girls who participated in this study shared equal aspirations of higher education and professional careers with their male classmates. This suggests that these macro-policy, popular and middle-class narratives of gender and education may have had a positive effect on middle-class girls' perceptions of their capabilities.

However, following the December 2012 gang rape case and the pervasive media coverage of sexual violence cases in 2013, these can-do narratives of girlhood were significantly challenged. Tensions between aspirational narratives of femininity and persistent concerns about young women's 'virtue, sexual choices and matrimonial alliances' in post-liberalization India have previously been identified (Phadke, Khan & Ranade 2011: 23). It has been argued that narratives emphasizing protection and 'safety' are in fact motivated by attempts to control female sexuality; restricting young women's access to public spaces not only 'protects' them from sexual violence, but also prevents them from forming unsanctioned romantic and sexual relationships (Phadke, Khan & Ranade 2011). These concerns were apparent through narratives of vulnerable girlhood in the study schools, which were reinforced by teachers, families, and the girls themselves, who internalized notions of their vulnerability when in public spaces. Gilbertson (2014) has characterized the tensions between these can-do and vulnerable narratives of girlhood in terms of young women's attempts to find a 'fine balance' between modern freedoms and traditional restrictions. However, my findings suggest that tensions between contradictory macro-narratives of femininity also encourage girls to vociferously challenge attempts at restriction. Many of the girls spoke passionately about their equal rights to safety in public spaces, and the Indian government's responsibility to fulfil

these rights. This suggests that girls' expectations of greater freedoms, encouraged by narratives of can-do femininity, can lead them to politicized understandings of citizenship and rights in terms that go beyond the 'consumer citizenship' among young middle-class people in contemporary India identified by Lukose (2009) and Phadke, Khan & Ranade (2011)

Contradictory macro-narratives of gender, sexuality and education also manifested as tensions within micro-narratives of boys' experiences in the study. For example, media stories of sexual violence consistently invoked narratives of violent, predatory masculinity alongside narratives of vulnerable femininity. Boys and girls who participated in the study invoked middle-class narratives which associate education with a greater degree of 'civilisation' (Jeffrey, Jeffery & Jeffery 2004) to condemn and distance themselves from such behaviour. These narratives were also apparent in media coverage of sexual violence cases, and are consistent with the rejection of working-class, lower caste 'unbelongers' in urban spaces (Phadke, Khan & Ranade 2011). Findings from this study also caution against understanding modern Indian masculinity as comprehensively in 'crisis' (Dasgupta 2014; Kapur 2012; Roy 2012). Violence was certainly central to 'hero' narratives of masculinities within peer cultures (which drew upon narratives of masculinity popularized in Bollywood films), and on an institutional level, 'boys will be boys' narratives led to violent disciplinary practices being reserved for boys. Adopting a narrative analytical approach meant it was possible to consider the alternative narratives invoked by boys as they sought to distance themselves from sexually violent behaviour. For example, several boys also invoked 'good boy' narratives which repudiated violence, emphasized the importance of respecting women and girls, and viewed education as an essential means of ensuring this level of 'civilized' behaviour. Nevertheless, just as tensions between more progressive and restrictive narratives of girlhood led to frustrations among the girls who participated in the study, tensions between these narratives of 'civilized' and 'backward' masculinities led to considerable confusions among boys. This was most apparent in their struggles to distinguish sexual desire from sexual violence, which led to uncertainties about whether it was possible to both 'respect' and be sexually attracted to girls.

The use of a narrative analytical framework, then, has highlighted the ways in which young people directly engaged with contradictory macro-narratives of gender, sexuality and education in India, whether evident in policy, media or popular understandings of 'middleclassness', within their own micro-narratives of everyday experiences in school and beyond. This suggests that a narrative analytical approach, particularly one shaped by considering Plummer's (1995) (sexual) stories within Andrews' (2014) political narratives framework, can productively support the exploration of interconnections and tensions

between local understandings and experiences and national- and international-level understandings. In my doctoral study, this has specifically led to a consideration of the ways in which young people's experiences and understandings of gendered and sexual possibilities are shaped by their direct engagement with macro-narratives of gender, sexuality and education in contemporary India.

### *7.3.2 Middle-class experiences of learning about gender and sexuality*

One of the substantive contributions of the study is to address the lack of research on how young people learn about gender and sexuality in Indian schools, as identified by Bhattacharjee (1999) and reiterated more recently by Thapan (2014). The use of Connell's (2000) framework has been central to this, as it has enabled me to conceptualize schools both as institutional agents in gendering and sexualising processes, and as sites in which young people act as agents by responding to and shaping these processes themselves. This is a particularly important contribution to the literature, as although recent studies have explored the importance of peer cultures in young people's gendered and sexual experiences in post-liberalization India (Gilbertson 2014; Twamley 2013; Lukose 2009; Sinha-Kerkoff 2003; Abraham 2002, 2001; Osella & Osella 1998), most of these have not examined the key role of institutional contexts within young people's lives, even when working with school and college students.

My use of Connell's (2000) framework was therefore particularly important when addressing RQ1, in order to consider the ways in which institutional contexts and peer cultures shape understandings, experiences and processes of learning about gender and sexuality in Delhi schools. The narrative analytical framework discussed above and the concept of 'sexual learning' (Thomson & Scott 1991) were also central to the substantive contributions of the study, and to exploring young people's experiences of gendered, sexual learning beyond schools. Particular macro-narratives seemed to dominate formal and informal sources of gendered and sexual learning accessed by young people, but attention to sexual stories (for example, in popular and news media, and stories of school romances and sexual experiences which circulated within peer cultures) meant that the influence of alternative narratives could also be identified. Participants' understandings and experiences of learning about gender and sexuality have also been considered in terms of their 'middleclassness'. The research therefore provides a substantive contribution to the existing body of literature on middle-class



experiences in post-liberalization India, and specifically, highlights the importance of education as a site for middle-class young people's negotiation of gendered and sexual politics.

The discussion of policy narratives in Chapter Two revealed that young people's sexuality has been understood as a 'problem' to be addressed and ideally controlled through education in post-independence India, from implicit concerns about co-education in the 1950s and 1960s, to population education in the 1970s and 1980s, and HIV prevention-focused adolescence education from the 1990s to the present day. The influence of the latter approach was apparent in the main formal source of sexual learning available to students in this study, the Reproduction chapter in the Class 10 Biology textbook, which was dominated by risk-based, biologized understandings of (hetero)sexuality. However, the influence of conservative cultural narratives opposing sexual learning was also evident in the silences and euphemisms within this chapter. Additionally, 'storm and stress' narratives of adolescence within the schools echoed the implicit anxieties of mid-twentieth century policy narratives on co-education. Concerns that teenage (hetero)sexuality would disrupt career-oriented narratives of education led to disciplinary mechanisms which maintained gender segregation in the schools, while teachers also regularly advised students to remain within their 'limits' when interacting with the opposite sex.

These findings are consistent with existing literature emphasizing how young people's sexuality is constructed as 'taboo' in India (Chowkhani 2015; Twamley 2013), and also echo studies reporting the use of disciplinary practices to monitor and control young people's sexuality in UK schools (e.g. Nayak & Kehily 2008; Alldred & David 2007; Epstein & Johnson 1998). As in those studies, teachers' anxieties in my doctoral study were based in fears that young people's discovery of their sexuality would inevitably disrupt academic achievement. Attempts to control young people's sexuality through gender segregation also reflect the familiar mind/body dichotomy within secondary education, as well as Gandhian narratives of sexuality in which the body is suppressed and controlled in pursuit of loftier, intellectual purposes.

While these storm and stress narratives of adolescence and risk-based narratives of sexuality were apparent in institutional practices and formal sources of sexual learning at the schools, informal sources of sexual learning and student peer cultures were also shaped by these narratives. For example, youth-oriented TV shows strongly reinforced reproduction-and-risk, and sometimes reproduction-as-risk, narratives through storylines associating teenage sexual activity with extreme health and social risks. These findings contradict existing literature on young people's consumption of popular media in post-liberalization India; Chakraborty (2010),

Orsini (2006) and Banaji (2006) have all described Bollywood films as a source of alternative, erotic sexual content, but in this study, sex scenes in Bollywood films were found to fuel existing confusions and anxieties about sex, further reflecting young people's pervasive understandings of sexuality within risk-based narratives.

Risk-based narratives of sexuality also shaped young people's ideas about the kinds of formal sexual learning they should receive in school. The vast majority of student participants indicated that school-based sex education was essential for young people in India, and used risk-based, health prevention narratives to counter conservative cultural arguments against sex education. Students' arguments that they needed to protect themselves with accurate information indicated that their understandings of sexual learning were largely shaped by the risk-based narratives they already accessed, as well as their sense that existing sources had not provided them with sufficient information so far. Even though students explicitly rejected cultural narratives in which sex education is seen as 'against' Indian culture, the influence of conservative narratives of gender and sexuality was also evident within student peer cultures. For example, confirming findings of gender asymmetrical access to sexual knowledge (Nath 2009; McManus & Dhar 2008), many students assumed that boys were more interested in sexual learning than girls, and it also emerged that boys were more likely to access a wider range of informal sources, including online pornography (which girls either did not access, or did not feel comfortable revealing that they did).

Additionally, although students frequently undermined institutional norms of gender segregation in the schools, many shared teachers' concerns that exploration of teenage sexuality would disrupt the career-oriented narrative of education that was so highly valued within schools. As a result, the importance of imposing 'limits' on heterosocial relationships, whether in platonic or romantic relationships, was particularly emphasized within peer cultures. Confirming findings from Twamley (2013) and Abraham (2001), this study suggested that sexual activity among student couples was the exception rather than the norm; at least according to the students who participated in the research, 'appropriate' levels of intimacy within girlfriend-boyfriend relationships did not extend beyond hugging and kissing.

On the whole, the romantic relationships most highly valued in participants' peer cultures seemed consistent with those described elsewhere as 'true love' relationships (Abraham 2001; Gilbertson 2014), characterized by emotional attachment and limited or no physical intimacy. The celebration of couples who embodied these ideals provided an important source of peer learning about socially sanctioned degrees of physical intimacy, which were in turn influenced by fears relating to the potential costs of teenage sexual activity as emphasized in dominant

risk-based narratives of sexuality. Peer romances also reinforced heterosexual and caste boundaries at the schools, and students' expectations of arranged intra-caste marriages (in spite of many students' own opposition to the enforcement of caste boundaries) are consistent with previous studies which have highlighted the continued importance of caste to 'sanctioned' sexuality, particularly in relation to marital practices, among the urban middle-classes (Donner 2008; Mody 2006).

It was apparent, then, that risk-based narratives of sexuality dominated formal and informal sources of sexual learning within and beyond school, and shaped young people's understandings and experiences of gender and sexuality within peer cultures and institutional contexts. However, peer cultures also offered an opportunity for students to contest and re-define certain cultural narratives of gender and sexuality. As in previous studies (Sancho 2012; Sinha-Kerkoff 2003; Abraham 2001), I found that acceptable heterosocial interactions were framed in terms of brother-sister, 'rakhi' relationships in otherwise gender-segregated spaces. As Sinha-Kerkoff (2003) and Abraham (2001) have found, students in my study also reported that these platonic relationships could turn into romantic relationships, or serve as a cover for romantic or sexual liaisons. However, my narrative analytical framework meant that it was possible to go beyond findings from existing studies. By considering students' preferences for certain heterosocial dynamics within the context of wider cultural narratives, students' attitudes towards and 'use' of certain heterosocial relationships could be considered in more depth.

For example, the celebration of brothers and sisters through Raksha Bandhan meant that rakhi relationships were tied to notions of Indian culture. However, this nationalistic trope was also playfully undermined in popular culture, with rejection of a brother-sister relationship widely read as suggestive of sexual desire. Students often framed their own preferences for heterosocial friendships in terms of rejecting traditional, conservative values; friendships were associated with more modern social patterns, with boys and girls on a more equal footing (unlike the protector/protected binary of rakhi relationships). In turn, heterosocial friendships allowed greater emotional closeness, and left open romantic and sexual possibilities. While Abraham (2001) does not consider distinctions between rakhi relationships and heterosocial friendships, findings from the present study are consistent with Gilbertson (2014), who points to the desirability of heterosocial friendships as markers of modernity in post-liberalization India. Findings on heterosocial peer cultures further suggest that young people had not only 'learned' the officially sanctioned boundaries for peer interactions in co-educational spaces,

but were also adept at actively negotiating and undermining these boundaries in order to define such relationships themselves.

These findings also point to important class distinctions in terms of young people's ability to 'choose' between narratives of tradition and modernity. While rakhi relationships could be re-negotiated and played with among the urban, middle-class young people who participated in my study, more violent connotations of rakhi-tying have been reported in rural North India, where inter-caste marriages are annulled by forcing couples to acknowledge each other as brother and sister (Chowdhry 2007). The fluidity of the boundaries between rakhi relationships and less platonic relationships is arguably enjoyed by those of higher class status; while negotiating tradition and modernity can often be a fraught process for the urban middle-classes (Gilbertson 2014; Phadke, Khan & Ranade 2011), I would argue that the ability to carry out these negotiations with some freedom is a marker of class privilege in itself.

These class-related freedoms are also reflected in my findings on coaching centre romances. Kumar (2011) and Sancho (2012) have characterized coaching centres as emblematic of middle-class narratives of career-oriented education; however, while my student and teacher participants did discuss coaching centres in relation to academic pressure, students' stories revealed that coaching centres also served as liminal spaces within which new peer cultures could develop. My findings indicate that these 'definers of middleclassness' (Kumar 2011) were not only spheres of heightened academic pressure, but also offered opportunities for romance and release.

In light of pervasive risk-based narratives of sexuality, stories of couples who sought out liminal spaces for any physical intimacy were filled with a considerable sense of social risk. However, study findings indicated that many students were willing to take these risks, which crucially suggests that through peer romances, students exercised their agency in order to explore experiences of pleasure and intimacy. While risk-based narratives of sexuality may have been dominant, my findings suggest that peer romances led to more positive experiences of gender and sexuality among students. Moreover, as they circulated within peer cultures, stories of intimate encounters offered other students an alternative source of sexual learning, in which risk-taking was viewed as exciting rather than life-threatening, and young people's exploration of their sexuality celebrated rather than condemned.

#### 7.4 Implications for policy and practice

One of the most relevant findings of my doctoral study for policy and practice is that the vast majority of students stated that sex education was essential at school, from at least Class 8 (age 12-13) onwards. This is particularly relevant for advocacy work around sex education in India – as carried out, for example, by NGOs such as TARSHI (Talking about Reproductive and Sexual Health Issues) and The YP Foundation in Delhi. However, young people’s definitions of sex education may also prove compelling to policymakers in India’s current right-wing government. As discussed above (7.3.2), young people’s risk-based definitions of sex education had more in common with medico-moral approaches than sex-positive approaches such as comprehensive sexuality education (CSE). Specifically, most of my student participants defined sex education as ideally discouraging young people from becoming sexually active. This directly contradicts the conservative claim that sex education encourages sexual activity, and where a global body of evidence (e.g. UNESCO 2009) has failed to convince Hindutva politicians that this is not the case, young Indians’ own calls for morally conservative sex education (which could even be labelled as ‘moral education’) may prove more compelling.

However, while young people’s definitions of sex education may prove strategically relevant to policy and practice under a BJP government, other findings from my doctoral research suggest the importance of more comprehensive approaches. Debates around sexual violence, and young people’s (particularly boys’) struggle to distinguish between sexual attraction and sexual violence, strongly indicate the importance of starting conversations about consent with young people. Recently introduced ‘consent classes’ in UK universities (Dearden 2014) may struggle to gain acceptance within colleges in India, let alone school contexts, but such an approach could also importantly extend the ‘protection’ focus of many NGO interventions on child and youth sexuality in India (e.g. Delhi-based NGO Parwarish) to include ideas of sexual agency and decision-making for young women and men. My research also indicated that prominent cases of sexual violence encouraged heated debates over and challenges to gendered stereotypes among both girls and boys, and framing such discussions within ideas of sexual agency and consent could further encourage young people to question gendered narratives of sexuality.

My findings therefore suggest that young people’s risk-based understandings of sexuality and debates over gender and sexual violence present starting points which could be built upon within school-based sex education in India. However, alternative approaches to sex education (such as CSE) could importantly challenge these dominant risk-and-reproduction narratives accessed by young people, and offer alternative, sex-positive narratives. As Kehily (2002b) has

discussed, sex education which draws upon young people's own experiences is often recommended as a more youth-centred approach, and findings on peer romances from my doctoral study indicate that using young people's own stories could also be a means of starting discussions about pleasure and desire within sex-positive, youth-centred sex education in India.

Evidently, an important consideration is how any form of sex education would be implemented within Indian school contexts. The most promising example of school-based sex education in the study schools came from RIS, where the School Counsellor told me about sex education workshops which she had introduced for Classes 8-10 in 2013. While this unfortunately meant that none of my student participants (who were in Class 11 in 2013) had participated in them, the RIS Counsellor's account suggested that these workshops provided a formal source of sexual learning which went beyond dominant reproduction-and-risk narratives. After conducting sessions with parents to emphasize the importance of sex education, the RIS Counsellor told me that single-sex workshops for students included myth-busting activities, opportunities for students to ask anonymous questions, further information on topics covered in the Reproduction chapter (e.g. contraception), as well as topics that are not (e.g. masturbation). Perhaps most strikingly, while still discouraging students from becoming sexually active until after they left school, during these workshops the Counsellor also reportedly emphasized to both girls and boys that their sexual desire was 'normal' – an acknowledgement of youth (and particularly female) sexuality that was absent from most other sources of sexual learning accessed by student participants (Counsellor ma'am, RIS – interview).

Based on the RIS Counsellor's seemingly more comprehensive sex education workshops, as well as student participants' apparent readiness to discuss gender and sexuality-related issues with 'outsiders' such as Neeraj and myself, one of the recommendations I presented during fieldwork Phase Three (November 2014) was that sex education could be provided by school counsellors. This was well received by teachers and students in all the schools; the idea that an individual who is specifically trained to discuss adolescence-related issues seemed to be attractive. However, NGO and academic stakeholders to whom I spoke cautioned against school counsellors being perceived as a 'silver bullet'. In order to create and sustain whole school environments in which restrictive gender and sexuality norms can be challenged and transformed, TARSHI's Director of Programmes was among those who strongly emphasized the importance of teacher training to support the provision of formal sex education and non-judgemental pastoral care for students on gender and sexuality-related issues. The importance

of teacher training for effective sex education has also been emphasized globally (e.g. UNESCO 2009), and this is undoubtedly an important way to support young people's formal sexual learning in schools in the long term. Additionally, involving school counsellors who are trained and motivated to discuss gender and sexuality-related issues with young people could be a first step towards creating more transformative 'whole school' environments.

My doctoral research also indicated that the feasibility of any sex education initiative varies across school systems. As a private school, it seemed that RIS crucially had both the resources to employ a school counsellor and the will to support her initiative in introducing sex education workshops. This combination of resources, interest in and managerial support for addressing gender and sexuality-related issues in Delhi private schools is also apparent at Tagore International School, one of the city's elite private schools, where the Life Skills teacher has set up an LGBT-awareness initiative ('Breaking Barriers') as an extra-curricular activity for Classes 9-11 students (Life Skills teacher, Tagore International – interview). Breaking Barriers is a striking example of a school-based initiative to transform gender and sexuality norms in Delhi.

Within the CGS system, implementation of the new version of the Adolescence Education Programme (AEP) began in up to 1,000 Central Government Schools in 2014. During fieldwork Phase Three, I learned that it was also being introduced at the CGS in which I had worked; four teachers had received preliminary training to act as AEP resource teachers by November 2014 (English sir, CGS – feedback session). At another CGS which I visited during fieldwork Phase Three (in the neighbouring state of Haryana), the AEP was in more advanced stages, with teachers already fully trained and AEP modules (e.g. warning against smoking, discouraging students from forming romantic relationships) being implemented with students. An NCERT requirement to provide feedback on AEP modules being taught means that the programme is being implemented fairly regularly, and that there are now more structured (albeit still largely risk-focused) sources of sexual learning for students at the school (AEP Resource Teacher, CGS-2 – interview).

Between fieldwork Phase Two (August-December 2013) and Three (November 2014), then, the CGS in which I worked had begun the process of implementing the AEP, and over time, the programme is likely to resemble the AEP in the Haryana CGS. By contrast, there were no such developments at the SGS when I returned in November 2014. While the SGS Principal responded positively to the idea of having a school counsellor to discuss gender and sexuality-related topics with older students, she was pessimistic about the likelihood that her school would be allocated one; she had been 'asking and asking' the Pratibha Education Society for a

counsellor for many years (Principal ma'am, SGS – feedback session). Even though it is within a network of the best State Government Schools in Delhi, a lack of resources and slow bureaucratic processes present formidable challenges to introducing any new programmes in the SGS. This is not to say it is impossible, however; during Phase Three of fieldwork, I learned about the 'Gender Equality Movement in Schools' (GEMS) initiative developed and implemented by the ICRW (International Centre for Research on Women) with Class 5-7 students in Mumbai State Government Schools. GEMS included school-based campaigns around equal rights to education and ending gender-based violence; the programme is now being scaled up by the State Education Department in Mumbai, and introduced with weekly sessions in state primary schools across the city (Adolescent and Gender Specialist, ICRW – interview).

From this brief discussion, it is apparent that there can be a class-based discrepancy in the extent to which alternative gender and sexuality narratives can be introduced across school systems – for example, the active presence of the school counsellor at RIS or the LGBT-awareness initiative at Tagore International compared to the inability of the SGS Principal to provide a counsellor at her school. However, findings from my doctoral research reveal that, in spite of frequent claims that sexuality is a 'taboo' topic in India, and that patriarchal norms are too entrenched to be challenged, there is not only a demand from young people themselves to learn about sexuality and to challenge prevailing gender norms, but that school-based initiatives to support this can and are being implemented across school systems in the country.

## **7.5 Concluding discussion**

My doctoral study certainly suggests that middle-class young people's experiences of learning about gender and sexuality, both within Delhi secondary schools and beyond, can be characterized as a 'jigsaw puzzle' (Thomson & Scott 1991). The sources of sexual learning which made up this jigsaw puzzle sometimes worked together in ways that I had not anticipated. This thesis began with a quotation from a right-wing Indian politician who claimed that sex education is 'against Indian culture', and that the 'younger generation should be taught about yoga, Indian culture and its values' (quoted in Gentleman 2007). I had suspected that this understanding of 'the younger generation's' needs would not necessarily correspond with young people's own perspectives. Indeed, students who participated in this study almost unanimously rejected this conservative, homogenous vision of 'Indian culture', arguing that school-based sex education was essential for young people in India. However, study findings



also indicate that young people's experiences, understandings and ways of learning about gender and sexuality in Delhi secondary schools are nevertheless infused with conservative understandings of teenage sexuality, which many students, along with their teachers, viewed as potentially disruptive to middle-class narratives of career-oriented education. Formal and informal sources of sexual learning were also dominated by gendered, risk-based understandings of sexuality, with risks to educational attainment, health and social reputation emphasized in both institutional and peer culture contexts, particularly (but not exclusively) for girls.

However, study findings also reveal that new possibilities and expectations, as well as frustrations and confusions, have arisen in young people's lives as a result of their engagement with contradictory macro-narratives of gender, sexuality and education in contemporary India. The clash between aspirational narratives of the modern Indian woman and restrictive narratives of vulnerable femininity was heightened in the wake of the December 2012 gang rape case; girls who participated in this study in 2013 expressed their frustrations with these tensions, and demanded that their rights as equal citizens should be met. Boys seemed to struggle to distance themselves from narratives of violent, predatory masculinity, and although they asserted alternative forms of 'civilized', educated middle-class masculinity, confusions persisted over how to distinguish between sexual desire and sexual violence. However, student peer cultures also provided an opportunity for students to explore more positive understandings of sexuality, as well as to re-negotiate 'acceptable' forms of heterosocial relationships. In spite of the dire consequences associated with an exploration of teenage sexuality, experiences and stories of intimate encounters suggested that romantic relationships could be a source of pleasure for both girls and boys.

While I have maintained a critical perspective on heteronormativity throughout the research, the experiences of LGBT youth are absent from my study. Future research could therefore crucially explore same-sex desire, experiences of transgender youth, and LGBT young people's experiences of learning about gender and sexuality within the compulsory heteronormativity and sanctioned homosociality of Indian schools. Additionally, future research exploring experiences of gendered and sexual learning among young people from more diverse urban and rural backgrounds – whether from wealthier or poorer backgrounds – would provide further insights into intersections of gender, sexuality, caste and class in young people's lives in post-liberalization India.

Overall, as well as substantive contributions to existing literature on middle-class experiences in post-liberalization India, this study has addressed a lack of research on how young people

learn about gender and sexuality in Indian schools. Moreover, the study has provided a methodological contribution in its use of a narrative analytical framework, guided by considering Plummer's (1995) sexual stories within Andrews' (2014) political narratives framework. This enabled the study to go beyond simply identifying a gap between 'official' and 'unofficial' understandings of gender, sexuality and education in India. Instead, it has been possible to consider the ways in which young people's experiences and expectations of gendered and sexual possibilities, and their understandings of what it means to be both Indian and modern, are shaped by their direct engagement with macro-narratives of gender, sexuality and education in contemporary India. More broadly, the study indicates that a narrative analytical framework, particularly one shaped by a 'narrative in context' approach, can productively support the exploration of interconnections and tensions between national and international understandings and local experiences.

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## Appendices

<b>Appendix 1a:</b>	Certificate of ethical approval.....	203
<b>Appendix 1b:</b>	Ethical review submission .....	204
<b>Appendix 2a:</b>	Information sheet for student participants .....	217
<b>Appendix 2b:</b>	Information sheet for teacher participants.....	219
<b>Appendix 2c:</b>	Consent form for all participants .....	221
<b>Appendix 3:</b>	Student questionnaire .....	222
<b>Appendix 4a:</b>	Student demographics – parents’ current occupations.....	239
<b>Appendix 4b:</b>	Student demographics – students’ age and religion.....	242
<b>Appendix 4c:</b>	Student demographics – Stage 2 and 3 participants.....	243
<b>Appendix 5:</b>	Student and teacher participants.....	244
<b>Appendix 6a:</b>	Mixed student focus group guide .....	245
<b>Appendix 6b:</b>	Single-sex student focus group guide .....	246
<b>Appendix 6c:</b>	Teacher focus group guide.....	247
<b>Appendix 7:</b>	Examples of students’ ‘Be Ladylike’ and ‘Act like a Man’ brainstorm.....	248
<b>Appendix 8a:</b>	Student semi-structured interview guide .....	251
<b>Appendix 8b:</b>	Teacher semi-structured interview guide .....	253
<b>Appendix 9a:</b>	School observation schedule .....	254
<b>Appendix 9b:</b>	Classroom observation schedule .....	258
<b>Appendix 10:</b>	Example of data analysis and translation.....	261
<b>Appendix 11a:</b>	Flash cards with preliminary findings and recommendations .....	262
<b>Appendix 11b:</b>	Summaries of preliminary research findings .....	263

## Appendix 1a: Certificate of ethical approval



<b>Social Sciences &amp; Arts Cross-School Research Ethics Committee</b> <b>CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL</b>	
<b>Reference Number:</b>	ER/PI34/1
<b>School:</b>	ESW
<b>Title of Project</b>	Gender, sexuality and schooling: competing discourses and lived experiences in New Delhi
<b>Principal Investigator: (Supervisor)</b>	Padmini Iyer (Dr M Dunne/Dr M Unnithan)
<b>Expected Start Date:*</b>	06/01/2013
<p>*NB. If the actual project start date is delayed beyond 12 months of the expected start date, this Certificate of Approval will lapse and the project will need to be reviewed again to take account of changed circumstances such as legislation, sponsor requirements and University procedures</p>	
<p><b>This project has been given ethical approval by the Social Sciences/Arts Research Ethics Committee (C-REC). Please note the following requirements for approved submissions:</b></p> <p><b>Amendments to research proposal</b> - Any changes or amendments to the approved proposal, which have ethical implications, must be submitted to the committee for authorisation prior to implementation.</p> <p><b>Feedback regarding any adverse and unexpected events</b> - Any adverse (undesirable and unintended) and unexpected events that occur during the implementation of the project must be reported to the Chair of the Social Sciences C-REC. In the event of a serious adverse event, research must be stopped immediately and the Chair alerted within 24 hours of the occurrence.</p>	
<b>Authorised Signature</b>	
<b>Name of Authorised Signatory (C-REC Chair or nominated deputy)</b>	Professor Stephen Shute    07/03/2013



<b>Appendix 1b: Ethical review submission</b>
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Ethical Review Application (ER/PI34/1) Padmini Iyer	
<b>Project Title:</b>	Gender, sexuality and schooling: competing discourses and lived experiences in New Delhi
<b>Status:</b>	Draft
<b>Department:</b>	Education
<b>Email:</b>	pi34@sussex.ac.uk
<b>Applicant Status:</b>	PG (Research)
<b>Phone:</b>	+447905057180
<b>Supervisor:</b>	Dunne, Mairead M
<b>Project Start Date:</b>	06-Jan-2013
<b>Project End Date:</b>	01-Sep-2015
<b>External Funding in place:</b>	Yes
<b>External Collaborators:</b>	No
<b>Funder/ Project Title:</b>	
<b>Name of Funder:</b>	

**Project Description:**

This project explores gender, sexuality and schooling in New Delhi. The first phase of the project examines competing discourses on gender and sexuality issues among young people in international and national policy and curriculum documents, which will involve document collection and analysis in India (January to March 2013) and the UK (April to July 2013). The second phase of the project explores secondary school students' lived experiences of gender, sexuality and schooling; this phase will involve an extended period of fieldwork in New Delhi, working with young people (aged 16 to 18 years) and teachers in three secondary schools (August to December 2013). Research methods adopted during this phase will include single-sex focus group discussions (FGDs) and semi-structured individual or paired interviews with students and teachers, and students will also be asked to complete questionnaires. Participant observation of informal school environments will take place in order to familiarise myself with participants. Visual and spoken texts gathered from these observations will offer an insight into gender practices in informal school settings, while gender practices and expressed attitudes towards gender and sexuality will also be observed in classroom settings (e.g. in sex education lessons). I will be seeking guidance from academics at the School of Education, Tata Institute for Social Sciences, who will provide additional support and advice during my fieldwork. A male research assistant may be recruited from a Delhi university in order to provide support when carrying out research with male students.

The key research questions guiding the research study are as follows:

1. How is young people's sexuality constructed in 'official' international and national documents, and to what extent are these constructions gendered?
2. In what ways are secondary school environments in Delhi gendered?
  - a. To what extent do young women and men's gender practices (re)produce and regulate 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' femininities and masculinities?
  - b. How do teachers' interpretations of sex education relate to or differ from the official curriculum?
  - c. What are teachers' attitudes towards gender practices and young people's sexuality?
  - d. To what extent are teachers' interpretations and attitudes shaped by intersections of gender, caste and / or class?
3. How do secondary school students (aged 16-18) define notions of gender and sexuality?
  - a. To what extent are these definitions affected by intersections of gender, caste and / or class?
  - b. How do these definitions relate to constructions of masculinities, femininities and sexualities as expressed by their teachers, sex education curriculum documents, state officials, and / or popular media?
  - c. What discourses do young people utilise through their constructions of femininities, masculinities and sexualities? e.g. discourses informed by HIV prevention, morally conservative values, human rights, or alternative discourses?

## Ethical Review Form Section A (ER/PI34/1) (cont.)

Ethical Review Form Section A (ER/PI34/1)	
Question	Response
>> Checklist	
1. Will your study involve participants who are particularly vulnerable or unable to give informed consent or in a dependent position (e.g. people under 18, people with learning difficulties, over-researched groups or people in care facilities)?	Yes
2. Will participants be required to take part in the study without their consent or knowledge at the time (e.g. covert observation of people in non-public places), and / or will deception of any sort be used?	No
3. Will it be possible to link identities or information back to individual participants in any way?	No
4. Might the study induce psychological stress or anxiety, or produce humiliation or cause harm or negative consequences beyond the risks encountered in the everyday life of the participants?	Yes
5. Will the study involve discussion of sensitive topics (e.g. sexual activity, drug use, ethnicity, political behaviour, potentially illegal activities)?	Yes
6. Will any drugs, placebos or other substances (such as food substances or vitamins) be administered as part of this study and will any invasive or potentially harmful procedures of any kind will be used?	No
7. Will your project involve working with any substances and / or equipment which may be considered hazardous?	No
8. Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses, compensation for time or a lottery / draw ticket) be offered to participants?	No
>> Risk Assessment	
9. If you have answered 'Yes' to ANY of the above questions, your application will be considered as HIGH risk. If however you wish to make a case that your application should be considered as LOW risk please enter the reasons here:	

Ethical Review Form Section C (ER/PI34/1)	
Question	Response
>> C.1 Risk Checklist - Participants	
1. Does the study involve participants who are particularly vulnerable, or unable to give informed consent, or in a dependent position (e.g. children (under 18), people with learning difficulties, over-researched groups or people in care facilities, including prisons)?	Yes
2. Is Criminal Records Bureau clearance necessary for this project? If yes, please ensure you complete Section C.6.	No
3. Will participants be asked to take part in the study without their consent or knowledge at the time (e.g. covert observation of people) or will deception of any sort be involved? Please refer to the British Psychological Society Code of Ethics and Conduct for	No
4. Could the study induce psychological stress or anxiety, or produce humiliation, or cause harm or negative consequences beyond the risks encountered in normal life?	Yes
5. Are alcoholic drinks, drugs, placebos or other substances (such as food substances or vitamins) to be administered to the study participants?	No
6. Can you think of anything else that might be potentially harmful to participants in this research?	No.
>> C.2 Risk Checklist - Researcher(s) Safety and Wellbeing	
7. Does the project involve working with any substances and/or equipment which may be considered hazardous? (Please refer to the University's Control of Hazardous Substances Policy).	No
8. Could the nature or subject of the research potentially have an emotionally disturbing impact on the researcher(s)?	Yes
8a. If yes, briefly describe what measures will be taken to help the researcher(s) to manage this.	I may find sensitive disclosures from participants (e.g. of any non-/sexual harassment or abuse) emotionally disturbing during the research process. While in India on my fieldwork, I will be in regular contact with my supervisor via Skype, who will be an important source of support should any disturbing disclosures arise. It will be possible to share any sensitive disclosures with my supervisor without breaking participant confidentiality; however, it is possible that sensitive disclosures may require me to break confidentiality in the interests of duty of care. Once again, my supervisor will be a key source of advice and support in such cases, and any disturbing disclosures would be discussed in the abstract until the participant in question consents to confidentiality being broken.

## Ethical Review Form Section C (ER/PI34/1) (cont.)

9. Could the nature or subject of the research potentially expose the researcher(s) to threats of physical violence and / or verbal abuse?	No
9a. If yes, briefly describe what measures will be taken to mitigate this.	
10. Does the research involve any fieldwork - Overseas or in the UK?	Yes
10a. If yes, where will the fieldwork take place?	Fieldwork will take place in three secondary schools in New Delhi, India.
11. Will any researchers be in a lone working situation?	Yes
11a. If yes, briefly describe the location, time of day and duration of lone working. What precautionary measures will be taken to ensure safety of the researcher(s)?	Although I will be the sole researcher on this project, my research will take place within school contexts, so I will not be conducting research alone in public spaces. However, in the mornings and afternoons, it is likely that I will be travelling alone between my accommodation and the schools, for approximately three hours in total per day. In order to ensure my safety during these journeys (primarily using the Delhi metro and auto-rickshaws), I will not travel alone when it is dark, and I will inform my aunt (who I will be staying with) of my expected schedule every day. I will also be carrying a mobile phone which is equipped with a local sim card, so I will be fully contactable at all times.
12. Can you think of anything else that might be potentially harmful to the researcher(s) in this research?	No.
>> C.3 Data Collection and Analysis (Please provide full details)	

Ethical Review Form Section C (ER/PI34/1) (cont.)

<p>13. PARTICIPANTS: How many people do you envisage will participate, who they are, and how will they be selected?</p>	<p>It is anticipated that a total of 105 people will participate in this study:</p> <p>90 students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 90 questionnaire respondents (30 students from each school) - voluntary participation</li> <li>- 30 participants in single-sex FGDs &amp; individual / paired semi-structured interviews (10 students from each school) - selected from questionnaire respondents who express an interest in further involvement in the study.</li> </ul> <p>If more than the expected number of students volunteer for a particular stage of the research, participants will be selected in order to provide a sample which is as representative as possible in terms of gender, caste and class.</p> <p>15 teachers and other members of staff (e.g. head teachers, pastoral staff - five from each school)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 15 teachers / members of staff in single-sex FGDs, and interviewed individually or in pairs</li> </ul> <p>These teachers will be selected using purposive sampling, based on the subjects they teach (e.g. sex education or subjects such as literature which may cover issues relating to gender and sexuality), and pastoral care duties or decision-making duties which affect students' experiences of schooling (e.g. head teachers, senior administrators).</p>
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<p>14. RECRUITMENT: How will participants be approached and recruited?</p>	<p>Students (participant observation and questionnaires): After gaining the appropriate permissions from head teachers and providing parents with information on my research, students in Standard XI (aged 16 to 18 years) will be approached to participate in the study. The research study will be fully explained to students, and it will be emphasised that participation is entirely voluntary, and informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity procedures will also be outlined in detail. This will ideally take place during a routine class or assembly, or (if more appropriate), a meeting organised in order to introduce my study. Students will be asked to privately write their names and 'yes' or 'no' on a piece of paper to indicate whether they would like to take part, and to place their answers in a box. This is to ensure that students do not feel any pressure to respond publicly to the request to participate. Based on these answers, students who answer 'yes' will be approached and asked to sign consent forms indicating that they give their informed consent to participation in the study. This will be done before I begin the participant observation stage of my research, in order to ensure that all students and teachers being observed have the opportunity to refuse involvement in the study.</p> <p>Students (FGDs and interviews): Students will be asked via questionnaires if they would be willing to take part in further stages of the study. As young people can often feel more comfortable discussing sensitive topics in familiar peer groups, as part of the questionnaire, respondents will be asked to list friends who they would prefer to be present if they were to take part in FGDs and / or paired interviews. It will be made clear that these groupings / pairings will be followed as far as possible, and on the condition that named friends also express an interest in participating in further stages of the study.</p> <p>Teachers and other staff (FGDs and interviews): After permission has been gained from head teachers to conduct the research in each school, I will seek their advice on the members of staff who they feel are best suited to participate in the research based on the focus of the study. It will be important to ensure that teachers do not feel obliged to take part in the study due to the head teacher's endorsement, and so I will aim to explain my research thoroughly to around 10 teachers at each school, in the hope that at least five of these teachers will volunteer to participate in the study.</p>
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## Ethical Review Form Section C (ER/PI34/1) (cont.)

15. METHOD: What research method(s) do you plan to use; e.g. interview, questionnaire/self-completion questionnaire, field observation, audio/audio-visual recording?	The following research methods will be used: participant observation; questionnaires; focus group discussions; semi-structured individual or paired interviews. FGDs and interviews will be audio-recorded digitally, conditional on participants' consent for this to take place.
16. LOCATION: Where will the project be carried out e.g. public place, in researcher's office, in private office at organisation?	<p>Participant observation will primarily take place in classrooms, although more informal interactions with students and teachers will take place all over the school campuses. Students will complete questionnaires in classrooms which are large enough to accommodate 30 respondents. FGDs and interviews will also take place in empty classrooms or in other locations on the school campus which are private, to ensure that these sessions cannot be overheard. As it is crucial that students feel at ease throughout the research process, and particularly during interviews, school offices will not be used for student FGDs or interviews.</p> <p>FGDs with teachers will either take place in empty classrooms, the staff room or any other large office space which similarly provides a quiet, private atmosphere which is unlikely to be disturbed or overheard. Individual interviews with teachers will take place in similar locations, or in school offices if available.</p>
>> C.4 Ethical Considerations (Please provide full details)	



<p>17. INFORMED CONSENT: Please describe the process you will use to ensure your participants are freely giving fully informed consent to participate. This will usually include the provision of an Information Sheet and will normally require a Consent Form unless it is a purely self-completion questionnaire based study or there is justification for not doing so. (Please state this clearly).</p>	<p>Parents: I will provide information sheets detailing what will be asked of students during the research, which will be sent out to parents of all students in Standard XI. Although I will not directly seek parental consent for their children's participation in the study, I will provide the option for parents to opt their children out of the study if head teachers advise that this is the most appropriate course of action.</p> <p>Head teachers, students and teachers: I will provide information sheets for head teachers, all students in Standard XI, and teachers selected via purposive sampling. I will encourage all prospective participants to ask any questions about the study if they require clarification about the purpose, methods, required time commitment or any other aspects of the research. Head teachers who are willing for the study to take place in their schools, and all those who are willing to participate in the study, will be asked to sign consent forms, and their right of withdrawal will be explained. If students do not consent to participant observation, I will ensure that I do not use any data relating specifically to them during classroom observations or any other informal interactions within the schools. If staff do not consent to participant observation, I will not carry out classroom observations when they are teaching, and will not use any data relating specifically to them from informal interactions within the schools.</p> <p>As issues relating to sex and sexuality are taboo topics in most sections of Indian society, and particularly within a school context, it will be important to situate my research carefully when approaching gatekeepers. I will therefore avoid using words such as 'sex' and 'sexuality' on information sheets, consent forms &amp; in discussions with gatekeepers, and instead will frame the study in terms of an interest in teachers' and students' experiences of the new life skills curriculum as well as their everyday experiences of schooling, health and well-being. When sharing information on the study with participants and gatekeepers, my indicative study title will therefore be: 'Schooling and life skills education in New Delhi: exploring students' and teachers' experiences'. However, all topics of discussion which may be raised in the course of the research will be fully disclosed to all gatekeepers and participants alike. I believe that this approach will allow all gatekeepers and participants to give fully informed consent to participate in the study, while also allowing me to conduct research on a sensitive topic and to work within existing taboos.</p>
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<p>18. RIGHT OF WITHDRAWAL: Participants should be able to withdraw from the research at any time. Participants should also be able to withdraw their data if it is linked to them and should be told when this will no longer be possible (e.g. once it has been included in the final report). Please describe the exact arrangements for withdrawal from participation and withdrawal of data for your study.</p>	<p>It will be emphasised to all participants that, even if they sign a consent form, they will be able to withdraw their consent for participation at any point before or during the research process, without giving a reason. Participants will be able to do this directly by telling me, or indirectly by asking a friend, teacher or the head teacher to notify me of their withdrawal. It will be crucial to ensure that withdrawal procedures are flexible and confidential so that participants do not simply take part in the study due to embarrassment and/or an unwillingness to say 'no'.</p> <p>When carrying out participant observation, it is possible that I will observe members of the school community who have not given their consent to participate in the study. While I will ensure that I do not use any data relating to these students and/or members of staff, I will also make sure that I am available at a fixed location and time every week in each school, so that members of the school communities can raise any concerns and questions related to participant observation (or any other aspect of the research process). I will also set up a comments box system so that students and members of staff have the option of leaving anonymous or signed comments at their convenience. I will explain both my availability and the comments box system when initially explaining the research to potential participants, and also (with the head teacher's permission) share this information with the school community via posters explaining my research on school noticeboards.</p> <p>I will inform participants that they can contact me via email or telephone (or have someone do this on their behalf) to request that their data is excluded from the study once data collection is complete, and that this can be done at any time up to the end of February 2014 (i.e. at least 2 months after the end of the fieldwork period). I will let participants know that since intensive analysis and writing-up stages of the research will begin after this, it would not be possible to withdraw their data beyond this date. If participants request the removal of their data within this time frame, I will delete all electronic copies of their personal information and of all data relating to them from my laptop computer (and any backed-up copies). I will also destroy any paper copies which contain personal information and data relating to these participants.</p>
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<p>19. OTHER ETHICAL ISSUES: If you answered YES to anything in C.1 you must specifically address this here. Please also consider whether there are other ethical issues you should be covering here. Please also make reference to the professional code of conduct you intend to follow in your research.</p>	<p>Student participants in this study will be aged 16 - 18 years old. All efforts will be made to ensure that they are able to give fully informed consent to participate, but informed consent for the study to take place in each school will also be secured from head teachers. Parents will also be sent information sheets to explain the nature of the study, and if head teachers advise that it is appropriate, parents will be provided with the opportunity to opt their children out of the study.</p> <p>Issues relating to sexuality are widely taboo subjects in India, and so the discussion of topics relevant to this study may potentially cause anxiety or discomfort for participants. So that participants feel as comfortable as possible during the research process, I will ensure that questions are phrased sensitively, and will avoid asking intrusive questions about participants' private lives. Additionally, due to the social norms surrounding 'respect for elders' in India, student participants may be unlikely to openly refuse to answer questions. I will therefore remain alert to participants' potential unease within an FGD or interview context, and will not push participants to answer questions which they appear uncomfortable with. I will also emphasise that students and teachers are not required to participate in the study because it is taking place in school, nor do they have to continue participating in the study if they become uncomfortable with the subject matter and / or methods.</p> <p>Sensitive disclosures may also arise during the study, and so the limits of confidentiality may be encountered. For example, if a participant reports experience of sexual abuse or harassment, I will have a duty of care to report this. Following the ESRC Research Ethics Guidebook (2011), I will therefore inform all participants during the consent procedure that if I hear or see something that gives cause for concern, I have a duty to act, but will talk to the participant first about what to do. Sensitive disclosures, particularly those which may implicate members of staff at the school, will have to be handled with careful consideration. As well as maintaining regular contact with my supervisor for support, I will establish links with TARSHI, a local NGO which has extensive experience of dealing with sex-related issues in schools with both students and teachers. Advice from both my supervisor and NGO staff could be sought by describing cases in the abstract if participants are unwilling for confidentiality to be broken. TARSHI will also be an important point of contact for any participants who need further advice and support on sex-related issues.</p>
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## Ethical Review Form Section C (ER/PI34/1) (cont.)

>> C.5 Data Protection, Confidentiality, and Records Management	
20. Will you ensure that the processing of personal information related to the study will be in full compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA)?	Yes
20a. If you are processing any personal information outside of the European Economic Area (EEA) you must explain how compliance with the DPA will be ensured.	Although participants' personal information will be collected outside of the EEA, the data will be brought back to and analysed within the UK, and so this will be processed in full compliance with the DPA. All data will be anonymised, and no identifying information (for participants or schools) will be recorded in the same document, or stored (electronically or physically) in the same location as data.
21. Will you take steps to ensure the confidentiality of personal information?	Yes
21a. Please provide details of anonymisation procedures and of physical and technical security measures here:	<p>Participants will be asked to choose their own pseudonyms if they wish or, alternatively, I will select pseudonyms for them once data has been collected. Pseudonyms will also be adopted for all schools, and the location of schools will only be referred to in generic terms (e.g. in an affluent area of the city, in a predominantly low-caste area etc.) so that they cannot be identified. In addition to these anonymisation procedures, I will ensure that all folders containing data (including participants' personal information) on my laptop computer are password protected, and my laptop computer itself will also be password protected. Once audio files have been uploaded, backed-up and transcribed, they will be deleted from the digital recorder, and these audio files will also be password protected.</p> <p>In the case of FGDs and paired interviews, it will be important to establish 'ground rules' which, among other things, emphasise the need to respect confidentiality after the FGD / paired interview is over (please see 'Indicative Student FGD Guide'). As discussed in Section C.3, question 14, FGDs and paired interviews will ideally be based around existing friendship groups, which will help to encourage confidentiality being respected after the research process.</p>
22. Will all personal information related to this study be retained and shared in a form that is fully anonymised?	Yes
22a. If you answered "no" to the above question you must ensure that these arrangements are detailed in the Information Sheet and that participant consent will be in place. If relevant, please outline arrangements here:	

## Ethical Review Form Section C (ER/PI34/1) (cont.)

23. Will the Principal Investigator take full responsibility during the study, for ensuring appropriate storage and security of information (including research data, consent forms and administrative records) and, where appropriate, will the necessary arrangements be made in order to process copyright material lawfully?	Yes
23a. If you answered "no" to the above question, please give further details:	
24. Who will have access to personal information relating to this study?	As the principal investigator, I will have access to personal information relating to this study. In the event that a male research assistant is recruited to conduct FGDs and interviews with male students and teachers, he will be fully informed as to the confidentiality, anonymity and other requirements set out in the DPA. I will also transcribe and anonymise any data collected by the research assistant, and he will not retain any data or personal information on participants beyond the initial point of collection.
25. Data management responsibilities after the study. State how long study information including research data, consent forms and administrative records will be retained, in what format(s) and where the information will be kept.	Research data, consent forms and administrative records relevant to this study will be retained for up to three years after the completion of my PhD (e.g. until September 2018). Participants' anonymised personal information and transcripts from interviews and FGDs will be stored on my personal laptop and backed-up onto an external hard drive (password protected in both cases). Paper copies of signed consent forms, questionnaires and participant diaries will be stored in a locked filing cabinet, to which the researcher will have
>> C.6 Other Ethical Clearances and Permissions	
26. Are any other ethical clearances or permissions required?	No
26a. If yes, please give further details including the name and address of the organisation. If other ethical approval has already been received please attach evidence of approval, otherwise you will need to supply it when ready.	



**Appendix 2a: Information sheet for student participants**

## **INFORMATION SHEET: STUDENTS**

*You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.*

### **Study Title**

“Going to school in Delhi: Young people’s experiences”

### **What is the purpose of the study?**

This study aims to learn more about Class XI students’ experiences of going to school in Delhi. The study is taking place in three schools in Dwarka, and focuses on how girls’ and boys’ experiences of going to school may be different, and also how students learn about certain health issues at school. The research also aims to explore students’ and teachers’ opinions on issues relating to health and well-being (including relationships, marriage, and family).

### **Why have I been invited to participate?**

You have been asked to participate because you are a Class XI student at one of the schools focused upon in this study. As a Class XI student, you have been at school for a long time now, so you will be able to share lots of experiences of going to school. Additionally, you may be thinking ahead to your life beyond school. You are therefore in a good position to reflect upon your past and current experiences of going to school, and also talk about your hopes and expectations for the future.

### **Do I have to take part?**

It is your choice to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you, are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. This applies even after you have taken part in the research – if you contact the researcher before 28th February 2014 and inform her that you have decided that you would like to withdraw from the study, your material will not be included in the study.

Taking part in this study will **not** give you any academic credits, and will **not** contribute to your overall grades at school.

### **What will happen to me if I take part?**

There are several stages of the research process. The researcher will be spending time in your school, getting to know your classmates and the informal school environment, and spending time in the classroom during your lessons. You will also be asked to fill in a questionnaire - this will take around 1 hour, and will include questions about your experiences of going to school, how you learn about your health at school, your life outside school and your future hopes and expectations.

After this, you will have the opportunity to take part in two further stages of the research: two focus group discussions, each lasting around 1 hour, and an interview with the researcher or the research assistant, lasting around 30 minutes (you can either take part in a one-to-one interview with the researcher/research assistant, or

you can choose a friend to be interviewed at the same time). It is expected that you will only be asked to take part in one interview, but a brief follow-up interview may be required for clarification at a later stage of the research process.

#### **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

You will not directly benefit from participating in this study, although it is hoped that you will enjoy the process of talking about yourself and your experiences. It is hoped that this study will eventually help to improve understandings of how schools can tackle gender inequalities. It is also hoped that the study will contribute to interventions aimed at improving students' health and well-being at other schools in Delhi, and perhaps all over the country.

#### **Will what I say in this study be kept confidential?**

All information collected about individuals will be kept strictly confidential. During interviews, participants' privacy and ability to talk freely without being overheard will be ensured, and during the collection, storage and publication of data, names will not be included. During focus group discussions, 'ground rules' will be established to ensure that all participants understand the importance of respecting each other's privacy; all participants must agree to treat anything discussed within research spaces as completely confidential.

#### **What should I do if I want to take part?**

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, the researcher would be happy to answer any questions you might have. Once you indicate that you are interested in participating in the study, you will be provided with a consent form in order to confirm that you are willing to take part. You can withdraw your consent at any time.

#### **What will happen with the results of the research study?**

The findings of this research will be used in the researcher's thesis for a PhD in International Education at the University of Sussex. This thesis will enter the public domain once it is submitted to the University in September 2015. If you are interested in finding out more about the research once it has been completed, the researcher would be happy to provide you with a summary of the research findings. Please contact the researcher directly (email address below) or via a member of staff at your school if you would like to be sent this.

#### **Who is organising and funding the research?**

The research is being conducted through the School of Education and Social Work at the University of Sussex. The research is fully funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

#### **Who has reviewed the study?**

The Social Sciences and Arts Cross-Schools Ethics Committee (SSARTS C-REC), University of Sussex.

#### **Contact for Further Information**

For further information, please contact Padmini at [pi34@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:pi34@sussex.ac.uk).

**Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.**

## INFORMATION SHEET: TEACHERS

*You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.*

### Study Title

“Going to school in Delhi: Young people’s experiences”

### What is the purpose of the study?

This study aims to learn more about Class XI students’ experiences of going to school in Delhi. The study is taking place in three schools in Dwarka, and focuses on how girls’ and boys’ experiences of going to school may be different, and also how students learn about certain health issues at school. The research also aims to explore students’ and teachers’ opinions on issues relating to health and well-being (including relationships, marriage, and family).

### Why have I been invited to participate?

You have been asked to participate because you are a teacher or member of staff at one of the schools focused upon in this study. Teachers and other members of school staff play an important role in students’ lives, and I am interested in gaining your perspective on students’ experiences at your school (e.g. any challenges they face at school and at home, how girls and boys may have different advantages and challenges at school and at home).

### Do I have to take part?

It is your choice to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. This applies even after you have taken part in the research – if you contact the researcher before 28th February 2014 and inform her that you have decided that you would like to withdraw from the study, your material will not be included in the study.

### What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be asked to participate in a focus group discussion, lasting around 1 hour, and a one-to-one interview with the researcher, lasting around 30 minutes. It is expected that you will only be asked to take part in one interview, but a brief follow-up interview may be required for clarification at a later stage of the research process. The researcher will also be spending time in your school, attending classes with your students and also spending time with students outside the classroom.

### What are the possible benefits of taking part?

You will not directly benefit from participating in this study, although it is hoped that you will enjoy the process of talking about yourself and your experiences. It is hoped that this study will eventually help to improve understanding of how schools can tackle gender inequalities. It is also hoped that the study will contribute to



interventions aimed at improving students' health and well-being at other schools in Delhi, and perhaps all over the country.

**Will what I say in this study be kept confidential?**

Yes - all information collected about individuals will be kept strictly confidential. During interviews, participants' privacy and ability to talk freely without being overheard will be ensured, and during the collection, storage and publication of data, names will not be included. During focus group discussions, 'ground rules' will be established to ensure that all participants understand the importance of respecting each other's privacy; all participants must agree to treat anything discussed within research spaces as completely confidential.

**What should I do if I want to take part?**

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, the researcher would be happy to answer any questions you might have. Once you indicate that you are interested in participating in the study, you will be provided with a consent form in order to confirm that you are willing to take part. You can withdraw your consent at any time.

**What will happen with the results of the research study?**

The findings of this research will be used in the researcher's thesis for a PhD in International Education at the University of Sussex. This thesis will enter the public domain once it is submitted to the University in September 2015. If you are interested in finding out more about the research once it has been completed, the researcher would be happy to provide you with a summary of the research findings. Please contact the researcher directly (email address below) or via the head teacher at your school if you would like to be sent this.

**Who is organising and funding the research?**

The research is being conducted through the School of Education and Social Work at the University of Sussex. The research is fully funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

**Who has reviewed the study?**

The Social Sciences and Arts Cross-Schools Ethics Committee (SSARTS C-REC), University of Sussex.

**Contact for Further Information**

For further information, please contact Padmini at [pi34@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:pi34@sussex.ac.uk).

**Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.**

Appendix 2c: Consent form for all participants



## CONSENT FORM

**Project Title:** "Going to school in Delhi: Young people's experiences"

	<i>Please tick box</i>	
	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research process.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I agree to take part in the above study.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I understand that the researcher will be carrying out observations within the school, and I give my consent to the use of anonymised data collected during these observations which relate to me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I agree to the interview / focus group being audio recorded.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Date	Signature

_____	_____	_____
Name of Researcher	Date	Signature

Appendix 3: Student questionnaire
-----------------------------------

Questionnaire ID:.....

**Going to school in Delhi: Young people's experiences*****About the research***

This research aims to learn more about girls' and boys' experiences of going to school in Delhi, with a particular interest in how you learn about your health at school. I am also interested in learning more about your life outside school, and your future hopes and expectations. It is hoped that the findings of this research can help to improve young people's experiences of going to school in the future.

Padmini is the lead researcher on this study, and she is currently in the second year of her PhD in International Education at the University of Sussex in the UK. She is also affiliated with the Tata Institute for Social Sciences in Mumbai. Padmini will be carrying out her research in Delhi from August to December 2013.

If you have any questions about the research, you can contact Padmini via her email address: [pi34@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:pi34@sussex.ac.uk). She will also be in your school for the next few months, so feel free to approach her in person too.

***About this questionnaire***

This questionnaire will be totally confidential – this means that your teachers, parents and other students will **not** see what you write. The lead researcher and the research assistant are the only people who will read your questionnaire, so please fill it in as honestly as you can. This is **NOT** an exam or a test, and there are **no** right or wrong answers!

***How to fill in this questionnaire***

Some answers will ask you to tick a box.

Other questions will ask you to write your answer in the space given. Please give as much detail as you can for these questions.

The questions are in English – but you can write your answers in Hindi if you want to.

Please ask for help if you are unsure about any of the questions!

## Section 1: At School

1. Which stream are you in?

a. Commerce	<input type="checkbox"/>	c. Humanities	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Science	<input type="checkbox"/>	d. Other (please explain:)	<input type="checkbox"/>
		.....	
		.....	
		.....	
		.....	

2. Why did you choose this stream?

.....

.....

.....

.....

3. Think about your experiences with teachers in the classroom. During lessons, do teachers usually...

	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Don't know</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>
a. Give more attention to girls	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Give the same amount of attention to girls and boys	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Give more attention to boys	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. Please explain your answer to question 3 (e.g. provide an example of when this happened)

.....

.....

.....

.....

## 5. I think that...

	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Don't know</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>
<b>a.</b> Girls are better students than boys	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>b.</b> Boys are better students than girls	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>c.</b> Girls and boys are equally good students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## 6. Please explain your answer to question 5.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

## 7. I think that...

	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Don't know</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>
<b>a.</b> Girls have more challenges than boys at school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>b.</b> Boys have more challenges than girls at school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>c.</b> Girls and boys have similar challenges at school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**8.** Please explain your answer to question 7 (*e.g., what challenges do you think boys and/or girls have at school?*)

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

**9.** Think about your friends at school. Are they...

- |  |                          |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| <b>a.</b> All girls  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>d.</b> Mostly boys                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>b.</b> Mostly girls                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>e.</b> All boys                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>c.</b> Approximately the same<br>number of boys and girls | <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>f.</b> I don't spend time with<br>friends at school | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**10.** Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your life at school?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

## Section 2: Learning about your Health

Sometimes, young people are taught about their health at school.

**11.** At **your school**, have you ever been given information on the following issues? Please tick all that apply.

- |                        |                          |                           |                          |
|------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. Smoking cigarettes  | <input type="checkbox"/> | f. Keeping fit            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. Healthy eating      | <input type="checkbox"/> | g. Puberty and growing up | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. Drinking alcohol    | <input type="checkbox"/> | h. Relationships          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. Dealing with stress | <input type="checkbox"/> | i. Malaria                | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e. Taking drugs        | <input type="checkbox"/> | j. HIV/AIDS               | <input type="checkbox"/> |

*If you ticked any boxes for question 11, please keep on answering. If you did **not** tick any boxes for question 11, please go on to question 14.*

**12.** Where were these health issues discussed? (e.g. in the classroom, in an assembly, or somewhere else).

.....

.....

.....

**13.** Who talked to you about these health issues? (e.g. a particular teacher, a nurse, or someone else).

.....

.....

.....

**14.** Are there any health issues which you have **not** learned about in school, but you would like more information on?

.....

.....

**15.** If you wanted to find out more about any of the health issues listed in question 11, who would you ask / where would you look? Please tick all that apply.

- |                   |                          |  |                          |
|-------------------|--------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| <b>a.</b> Teacher | <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>g.</b> Internet                         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>b.</b> Friend  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>h.</b> Magazine                         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>c.</b> Mother  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>i.</b> TV programme                     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>d.</b> Father  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>j.</b> Telephone helpline               | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>e.</b> Doctor  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>k.</b> Book                             | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>f.</b> Nurse   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>l.</b> Other ( <i>please explain:</i> ) | <input type="checkbox"/> |

.....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....

**16.** Is there anything else you would like to say on learning about health issues? These could be the health issues listed in question 11, or any other health issues.

.....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....



### Section 3: Life outside school

#### 17. When I'm not at school, I...

	<i>Never</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>All the time</i>
<b>a.</b> Spend time with my friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>b.</b> Do my schoolwork	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>c.</b> Spend time with my family	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>d.</b> Go to the mall	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>e.</b> Watch TV	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>f.</b> Read books	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>g.</b> Play computer games	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>h.</b> Surf the internet	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>i.</b> Talk on the phone / send SMS	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>j.</b> Go to bars / clubs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>k.</b> Go to temple / mosque / gurdwara / church	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>l.</b> Play sports (what sports do you play?) ..... ..... ..... .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>m.</b> Do housework / chores (what housework / chores do you do? ) ..... .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	<i>Never</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>All the time</i>
<b>n. Go to tuition</b> <i>(how often do you go to tuition?)</i> ..... ..... ..... .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>o. Look after people</b> <i>(who do you look after?)</i> ..... ..... ..... .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>p. Do voluntary work</b> <i>(what voluntary work do you do?)</i> ..... ..... ..... .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>q. Other</b> <i>(please explain)</i> ..... ..... ..... .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

18. Who do you live with at home? Please tick all that apply.

a. Mother	<input type="checkbox"/>	f. Uncle(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Father	<input type="checkbox"/>	g. Cousin(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Brother(s)		h. Grandfather	<input type="checkbox"/>
How many brothers do you have?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
.....		i. Grandmother	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Sister(s)		j. Other	<input type="checkbox"/>
How many sisters do you have?	<input type="checkbox"/>	(please explain)	
.....		.....	
		.....	
		.....	
e. Aunt(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	.....	
		.....	

19. Including yourself, how many people live at your home?

.....

20. Think about your friends **outside** school. Are these friends...

a. All girls	<input type="checkbox"/>	d. Mostly boys	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Mostly girls	<input type="checkbox"/>	e. All boys	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Approximately the same number of boys and girls	<input type="checkbox"/>	f. I don't spend time with friends outside school	<input type="checkbox"/>

**21. I think that...**

	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Don't know</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>
<b>a.</b> Girls have more challenges than boys outside school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>b.</b> Boys have more challenges than girls outside school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>c.</b> Girls and boys have similar challenges outside school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**22. Please explain your answer to question 21 (e.g., what challenges do you think boys and/or girls have outside school?)**

.....

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.....

.....

**Your safety outside school****23. Do you feel safe when you are walking or travelling around outside school?**

Yes ☐ No ☐

**24. Please explain your answer to question 23.**

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

25. Do you think it is...

	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Don't know</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>
a. More dangerous for boys to travel on their own	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. More dangerous for girls to travel on their own	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Equally dangerous for girls and boys to travel on their own	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

26. Please explain your answer to question 25.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

27. You may remember that in December last year, a young woman (known as *Damini* or *Nirbhaya*) was attacked and killed by a group of men on a bus one night. What was your reaction to this news?

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**28.** Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your life outside school?

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## Section 4: Your future

29. What would you like to do after you finish Class 12? Please be as detailed as you can.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

30. Would you like to get married in the future?

Yes ☐ No ☐

31. If you answered 'yes' to question 30, do you think you will have:

	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Don't know</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>
<b>a.</b> An arranged marriage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>b.</b> A love marriage (e.g. choose your wife / husband yourself)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>c.</b> Other (please explain)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

.....

.....

.....

.....

32. If you answered 'no' to question 30, please explain your answer.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

**33.** Imagine that it's 2023 (ten years from now). Describe your ideal life (e.g. where are you living, who are you living with, do you have a job... and anything else!)

[illegible]

34. Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about the topics covered in this questionnaire (your experiences at school, learning about your health, your life outside school, your hopes for the future, yourself), or any other topics which haven't been covered?

[illegible]



## Section 5: About you

35. Are you:

Female ☐

Male ☐

36. How old are you? ..... years Date of birth (dd/mm/yyyy): .....

37. Are you:

a. Hindu ☐

e. Buddhist ☐

b. Muslim ☐

f. Atheist ☐

c. Sikh ☐

g. No religion ☐

d. Christian ☐

h. Other (*please explain*) ☐

.....

.....

.....

38. a. Does your father have a job?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Don't know ☐

b. If you answered 'yes', what is your father's current job?

.....

.....

39. What is your father's **highest** level of education? Please tick **one** box.

a. Didn't go to school ☐

d. Started secondary education (Class 9 – 10) ☐

g. Completed higher secondary education (Class 11 – 12) ☐

b. Started primary education (Class 1 – Class 8) ☐

e. Completed secondary education (Class 9 – 10) ☐

h. Completed university education (bachelor's degree) ☐

c. Completed primary education (Class 1 – Class 8) ☐

f. Started higher secondary education (Class 11 – 12) ☐

i. Completed postgraduate education (master's degree or higher) ☐

j. Don't know ☐

40. a. Does your mother have a job?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know ☐

b. If you answered 'yes', what is your mother's current job?

.....

.....

41. What is your mother's **highest** level of education? Please tick **one** box.

- |  |                          |   |                          |   |                          |
|--|--------------------------|---|--------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| a. Didn't go to school                             | <input type="checkbox"/> | d. Started secondary education (Class 9 – 10)         | <input type="checkbox"/> | g. Completed higher secondary education (Class 11 – 12)         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. Started primary education (Class 1 – Class 8)   | <input type="checkbox"/> | e. Completed secondary education (Class 9 – 10)       | <input type="checkbox"/> | h. Completed university education (bachelor's degree)           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. Completed primary education (Class 1 – Class 8) | <input type="checkbox"/> | f. Started higher secondary education (Class 11 – 12) | <input type="checkbox"/> | i. Completed postgraduate education (master's degree or higher) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|  |                          |   |                          | j. Don't know   | <input type="checkbox"/> |

42. What is your home address?

.....

.....

.....

.....

## Thank you for taking the time to fill in this questionnaire!

This research study will continue in your school until mid-December 2013. The researcher is looking for students to take part in two more stages of research:

1. Two focus group discussions (with six students, lasting approx. 1 hour each)
2. An individual interview (lasting 30-45 minutes).

**If you would like to volunteer to take part in these following stages of the research, please write your name and class here, and the researcher will get in touch with you soon.**

Name: .....

Class: .....

If you do take part in the next stage of the research, it may be possible to take part in focus group discussions with some of your friends, or in an interview with one of your friends.

Please list up to **six** friends from Class 11 who you would like to participate with you in a focus group discussion and / or in an interview with you. Please include their full names and class details (e.g. 11A).

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

*Please note: we will try to arrange focus group discussions and interviews around friendship groups whenever possible. However, if the friends you have listed are not interested in taking part in the next stages of the study, then they will not be present during group discussions or interviews.*

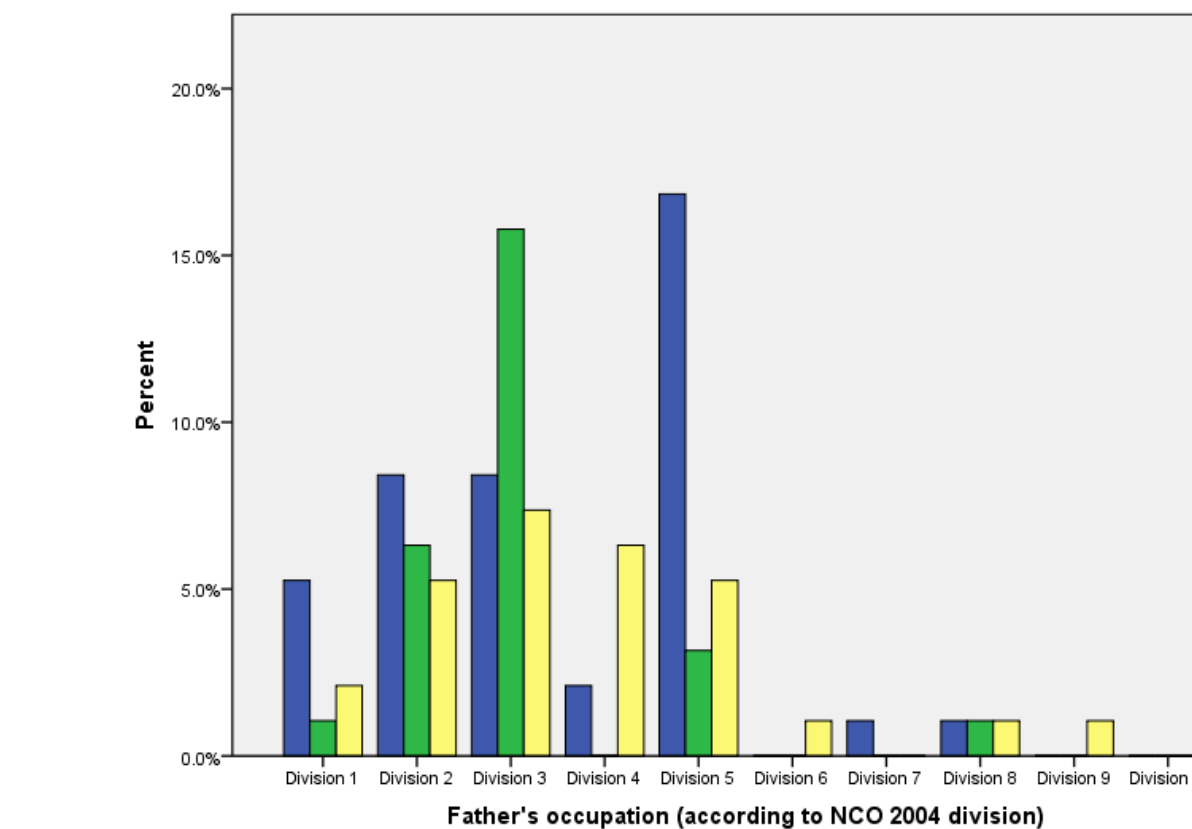
<b>Appendix 4a: Student demographics – parents’ current occupations</b>
---

Students’ responses to Q38b and Q40b were coded from 1-10 according to the following NCO (National Classification of Occupations, 2004) divisions:

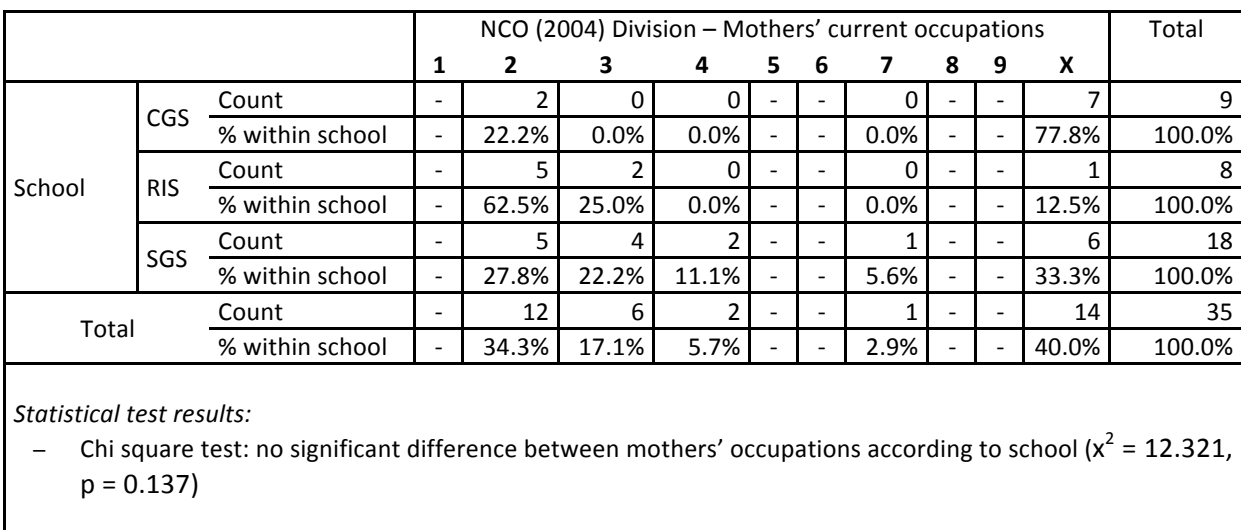
- Division 1: Legislators, Senior Officials and Managers
- Division 2: Professionals
- Division 3: Technicians and Associate Professionals
- Division 4: Clerks
- Division 5: Service Workers, Shop and Market Sales Workers
- Division 6: Skilled Agricultural and Fishery Workers
- Division 7: Craft and Related Trades Workers
- Division 8: Plant and Machine Operators and Assemblers
- Division 9: Elementary Occupations
- Division X: Workers Not Classified by Occupations

Missing responses were coded as ‘66’ if there was insufficient information to categorize an occupation (e.g. ‘government job’), ‘88’ if the question was not applicable (e.g. if students had answered ‘no’ to Q38a or Q40a), and ‘99’ if students had ticked ‘yes’ for Q38a or Q40a, but had not answered Q38b or Q40b. 14 students responded that their mothers were housewives, and these responses were coded as Division X, as this seems to fit the ‘Workers Not Classified by Occupation’ definition of this category. ‘No job’ responses were not coded as ‘Division X’ as it was not possible to determine whether parents without jobs should be classified as e.g. seeking work, long-term unemployed, and so on.

*Fathers' current occupations (according to NCO 2004 division)*

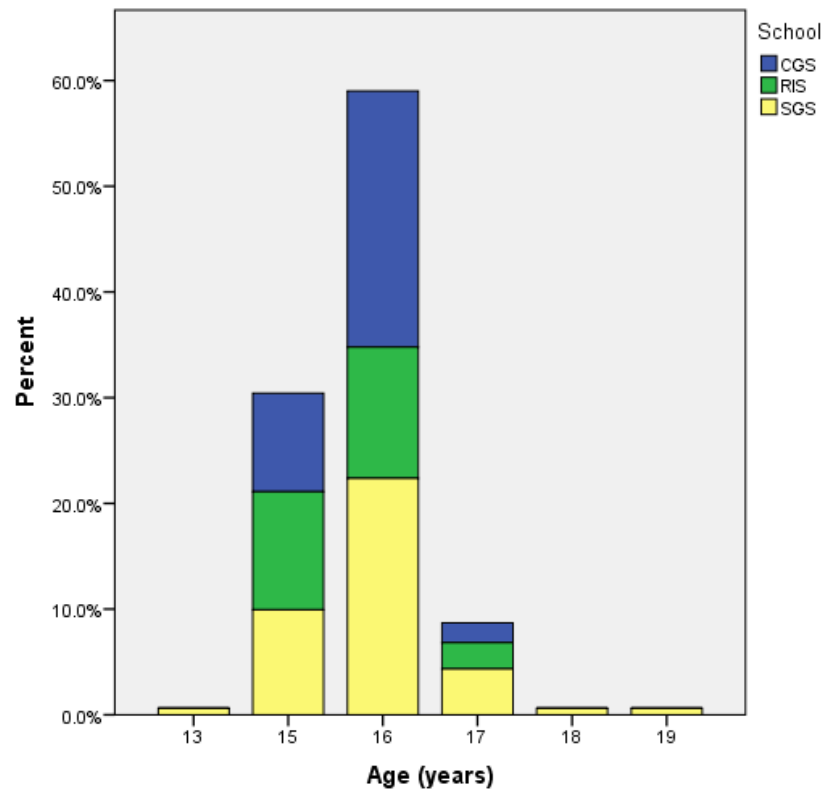


			NCO (2004) Division – Fathers’ current occupations									Total
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
School	CGS	Count	5	8	8	2	16	0	1	1	0	41
		% within school	12.2%	19.5%	19.5%	4.9%	39.0%	0.0%	2.4%	2.4%	0.0%	100.0%
	RIS	Count	1	6	15	0	3	0	0	1	0	26
		% within school	3.8%	23.1%	57.7%	0.0%	11.5%	0.0%	0.0%	3.8%	0.0%	100.0%
	SGS	Count	2	5	7	6	5	1	0	1	1	28
		% within school	7.1%	17.9%	25.0%	21.4%	17.9%	3.6%	0.0%	3.6%	3.6%	100.0%
Total	Count	8	19	30	8	24	1	1	3	1	95	
	% within school	8.4%	20.0%	31.6%	8.4%	25.3%	1.1%	1.1%	3.2%	1.1%	100.0%	
Statistical test results:												
– Chi square test: significant difference between fathers’ occupations according to school ( $\chi^2 = 29.745, p = 0.019$ )												

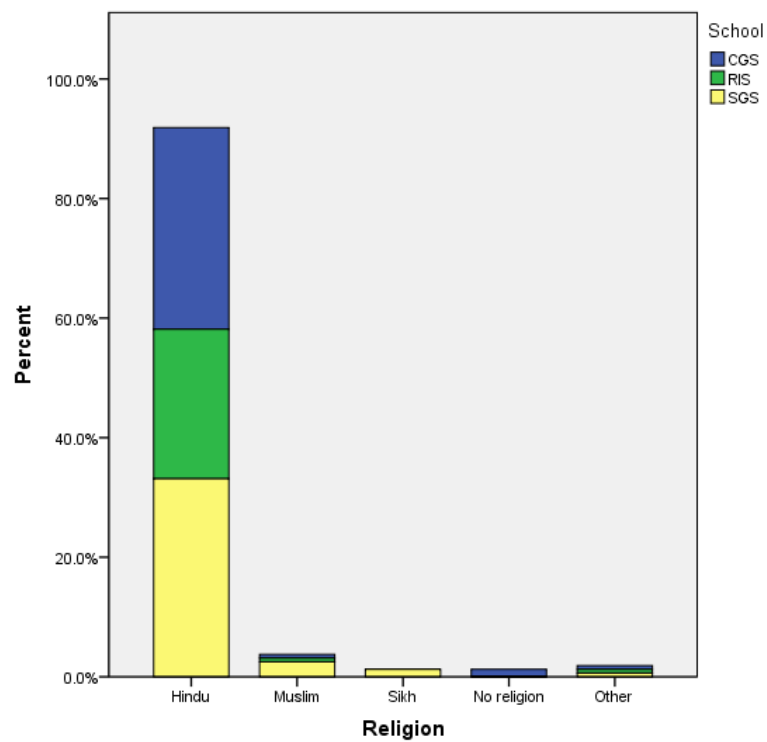


**Appendix 4b: Student demographics – students' age and religion**

*Students' age (based on questionnaire responses to Q36)*

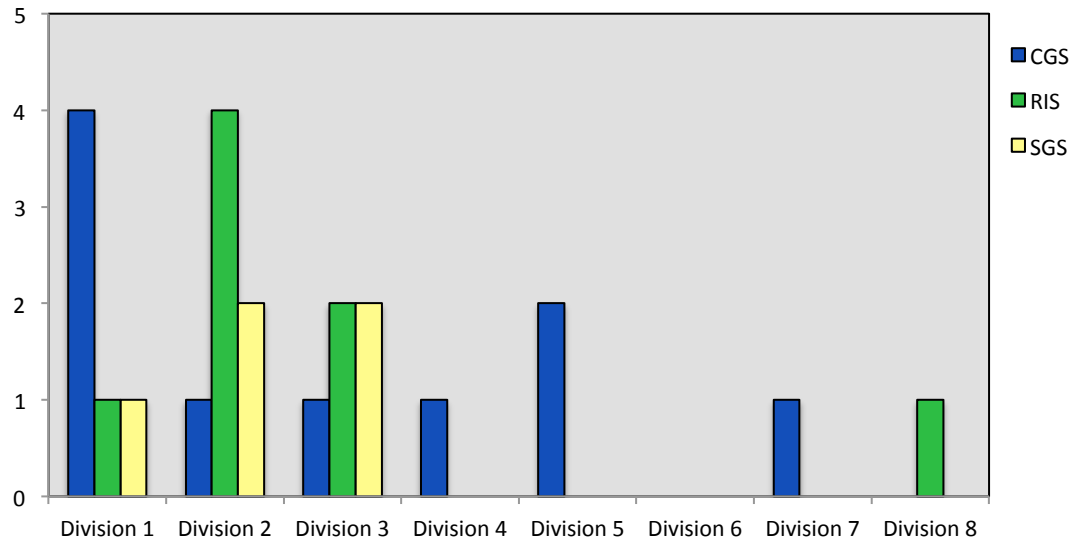


*Students' religion (based on questionnaire responses to Q37)*



**Appendix 4c: Student demographics – Stage 2 and 3 participants**

*Parents' occupations, single-income families (according to NCO 2004 division) – Stage 2 and 3 participants*





### Appendix 5: Student and teacher participants

#### Student participants - focus groups and interviews (Stages 2 and 3)

School	Mixed FGDs		Single-sex FGDs	
	Group 1	Group 2	Girls	Boys
CGS	Khyati (11A) Harsha (11C) Aaliya (11C) Rapper (11B) Rocker (11A) Honey Singh (11A)	<b>Akira</b> (11A) Deepika (11B) Kamya (11B) Akash (11B) Rajiv (11B) Jai (11B)	<b>Khyati</b> (11A) <b>Harsha</b> (11C) <b>Aaliya</b> (11C) <b>Deepika</b> (11B) <b>Kamya</b> (11B) Jaya (11A)	<b>Rapper</b> (11B) <b>Rocker</b> (11A) <b>Honey Singh</b> (11A) <b>Akash</b> (11B) <b>Rajiv</b> (11B)
RIS	Jyoti (11B) Yasmin (11D) Sweety (11D) <b>Yash</b> (11F) Anil (11D) Divyanshu (11D)	Komal (11B) Violet (11B) Leela (11D) Tornado (11D) Aditya (11D) Keshar (11D)	<b>Violet</b> (11B) <b>Leela</b> (11D) <b>Jyoti</b> (11B) <b>Sweety</b> (11D) Archana (11B)	<b>Divyanshu</b> (11D) <b>Tornado</b> (11D) <b>Keshar</b> (11D) Hursh (11A) Salman (11A) James (11A)
SGS	Mala (11A) Rani (11A) Lionel (11A) Rocco (11A) Abby (11A)	Prachi (11B) Naina (11B) Lego (11A) Rajender (11C) Jonny (11C)	<b>Prachi</b> (11B) <b>Naina</b> (11B) <b>Mala</b> (11A) <b>Rani</b> (11A) <b>Priyanka</b> (11B)	<b>Lionel</b> (11A) <b>Rocco</b> (11A) <b>Abby</b> (11A) <b>Lego</b> (11A) <b>Rajender</b> (11C) <b>Jonny</b> (11C)

(Participants interviewed indicated in bold type)

#### Teacher participants

School	Teachers and members of staff	
	Female	Male
CGS	Vice Principal* Biology teacher* Chemistry (11A) teacher* Chemistry (11B) teacher Computer science teacher* School nurse	Principal English teacher*
RIS	Senior co-ordinator Biology teacher Computer science teacher English teacher Home Science teacher School counsellor	Vice Principal Commerce teacher Physics teacher Sports teacher
SGS	Principal Biology teacher English (11A) teacher English (11B) teacher History teacher Maths teacher	Geography teacher

\*Indicates teachers who participated in the CGS Teacher Focus Group

<b>Appendix 6a: Mixed student focus group guide</b>
---

**1. Introduction** [5 minutes]

- Re-explain research
- Personal introductions
- Ground rules for FGDs (*stick up on the wall*)
  - We will treat everything that is said in the group as confidential
  - We will give respect to each other by listening to what is being said
  - This is a safe space for all to share their views. Let's make it a non-judgemental space

**2. Show students eve-teasing pictures** [10 minutes]

- What's going on in these pictures? / What do you think about these pictures? [*prompt for definition of 'eve-teasing', if that's what they say*]
- What do you all think about eve-teasing?
- Have you ever experienced it?
  - [*girls: on the receiving end? boys: in a group where other boys have been doing this?*]
  - At school / outside school
- Do any boys in your school act like this? [*prompt for examples, experiences*]
- Why do you think boys / men behave like this?
- What do you all think could be done to stop eve-teasing? [*prompt for as many suggestions / explanations as possible*]

**3. The other way around...** [10 minutes]

- (first picture) Imagine that these are the girls, and these are the boys. Do girls ever behave like this?
  - Why / why not? [*prompt for examples, explanations*]
- Do you think that peer pressure is different for girls and boys?
  - Why / why not? [*prompt for as many suggestions / explanations as possible*]
  - What is peer pressure like in your school? Can you give us some examples?

**4. Brainstorming activity: 'act like a man'** [10 minutes]

- Any words, phrases, stories that this phrase makes you think of
- Compare / contrast what girls and boys have written; explain choices; discuss

**5. Brainstorming activity: 'be ladylike'** [10 minutes]

- Any words, phrases, stories that this phrase makes you think of
- Compare / contrast what girls and boys have written; explain choices; discuss

**6. Wrap up session** [5 minutes]

- Any other reflections, comments
- Confirm scheduling for next FGDs
- Re-iterate confidentiality
- Thank participants for their time

<b>Appendix 6b: Single-sex student focus group guide</b>
--

**1. Introduction [5 minutes]**

- Re-explain research:
  - Last time we spoke about gender issues, e.g. how men and women are expected to behave, eve-teasing and how to change people's attitudes about girls and boys
    - Is there anything else that you want to say about these issues?
  - This time: adolescent health issues, and how you learn about your bodies at school
- Ground rules for FGDs

**2. Are these issues taught at your school? (lay out cards on table / floor – ask students to arrange under 'yes' and 'no' cards. Make a note of their 'yes' and 'no' lists) [10 – 12 minutes]**

- |                     |                 |
|---------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Contraception    | 6. Menstruation |
| 2. Abortion         | 7. HIV & AIDS   |
| 3. Sexuality        | 8. Pregnancy    |
| 4. Hormonal changes | 9. Condoms      |
| 5. Reproduction     | 10. Nightfalls  |

- Yes pile:
  - When were these issues talked about?
  - Who talked to you about them?
  - Tell me about how they were discussed (*e.g. what was said, girls & boys together or separately*)
  - Do you get information on these topics outside the classroom? (*prompt for examples*)
- No pile: do you get information on these issues anywhere else? If so, where?

**3. "Sex education is against Indian culture... The younger generation should be taught about yoga, Indian culture and its values" (Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister, 2007) [10- 12 minutes]**

- What do you think about this statement?
- Do you think young people should be given sex education at school? [*prompts: why / why not; at what age; what should / should not be taught, how do you define 'sex education'*]
- How would you define "Indian culture and its values"?
  - Are you taught about "Indian culture and its values" at your school? [*prompt for examples, experiences, opinions – e.g. do you think this is important? Why / why not?*]

**4. "Mentality" about how girls and boys should behave [Brainstorming activity – 5-6 minutes writing, 5-6 minutes discussion – 10-12 minutes total]**

- This was mentioned in the last group discussions by a few people – e.g. that the 'mentality' (when it comes to attitudes towards women and men) needs to be changed
- Brainstorm: how would you define this mentality?
- Do you think it can be changed? How? (*e.g. in school, outside school*)
  - Is it particularly 'Indian' or do people in other countries have this mentality? [*explanations / examples*]

**5. Wrap up session [5 minutes]**

1. Any other reflections, comments, questions?
2. Mention individual interviews (after Dusshera holiday), and thank participants for their time

**Appendix 6c: Teacher focus group guide**
***Introduction***

- Re-introduce research
- Anonymity and confidentiality
- Personal introductions

***A) Adolescent (health) issues***

1. How do students learn about adolescent health issues at your school?
  - a. Covered for girls and boys separately or together?
  - b. Different issues for boys and girls?
2. What kinds of adolescent health issues do girls face at your school?
3. What kinds of adolescent health issues do boys face at your school?
4. What other challenges do you think students face at your school?
  - a. Different for girls and boys?
5. Do you think that students at other schools (e.g. KVs, DGS) face similar problems to your students?

***B) Teachers and parents***

1. How would you define the role of the teacher in the life of adolescent students at this school?
2. How would you describe the role of parents in the life of students from this school?
  - a. E.g. good influence, bad influence?
3. [Where do you think students learn 'good values'? Can you tell me what these 'good' values are?]

***C) Damini case***

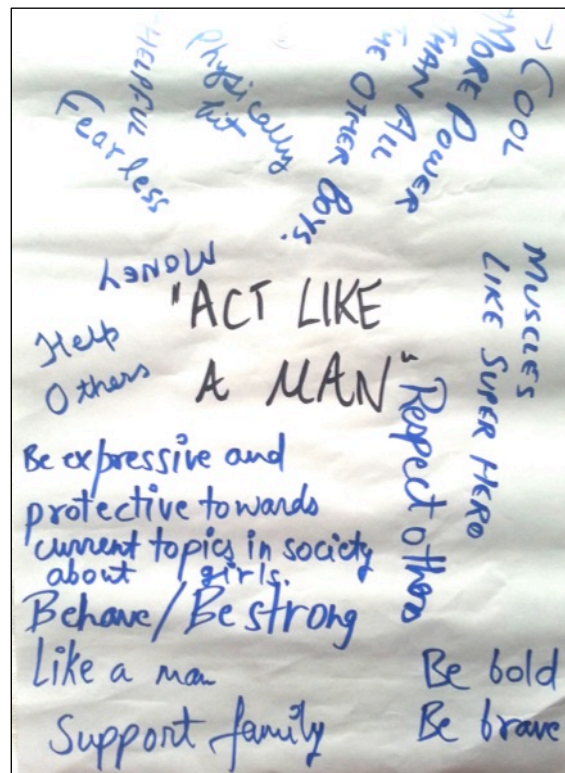
1. Was this discussed at your school?
2. So much debate on this case - why do you think this happened?
3. Is student safety an issue at your school?
4. One view is that negative gender attitudes can be challenged in schools.
  - a. What do you think about this?
  - b. How could it be done in your school? Is it already done (if so, how?)

***D) Positives / advantages of being an adolescent at this school?***
***Wrap-up***

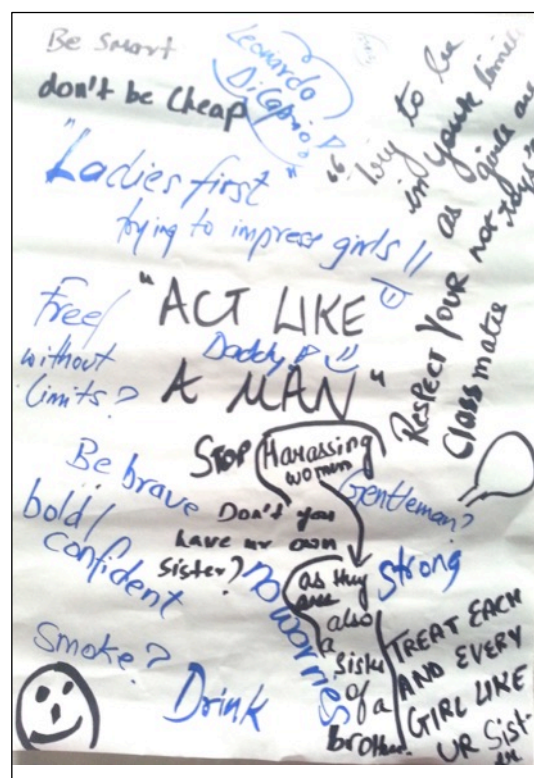
1. Is there anything you would like to discuss that we haven't covered?
2. Re-iterate anonymity and confidentiality
3. Individual interviews – mention potential scheduling
4. Thank yous!



*CGS Mixed Focus Group (2) – boys' brainstorm (Jai, Rajiv, Akash)*



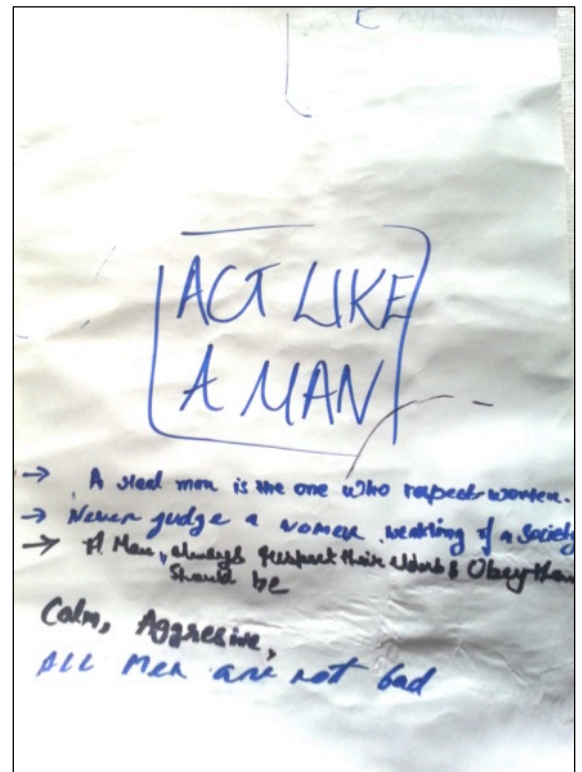
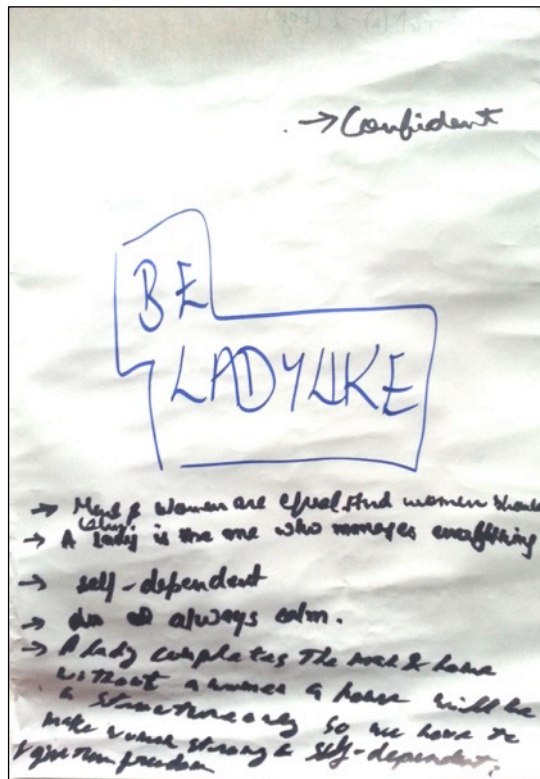
*CGS Mixed Focus Group (2) – girls' brainstorms (Akira, Deepika, Kamya)*



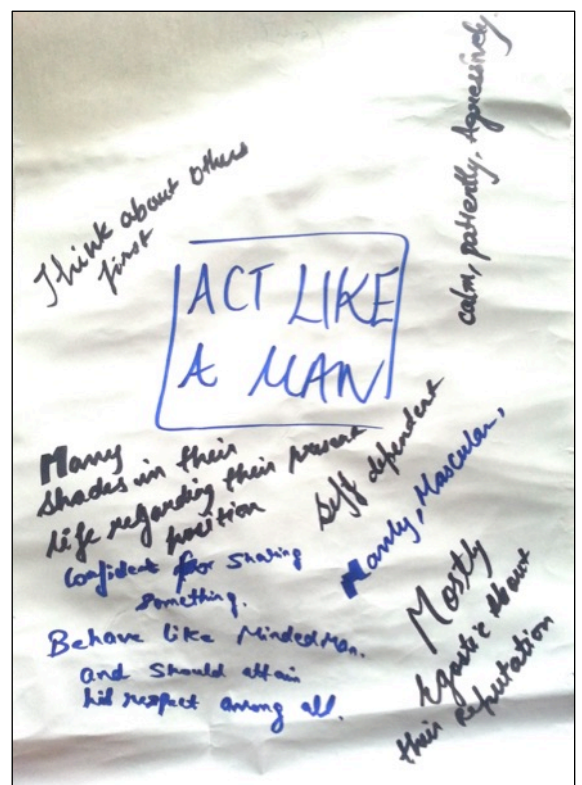
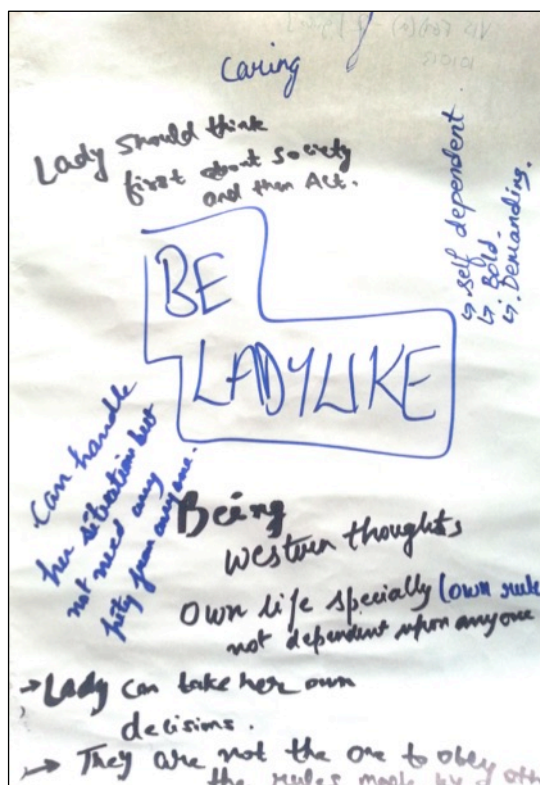


**Ramani International School**

RIS Mixed Focus Group (2) – boys' brainstorm (Tornado, Aditya, Keshar)



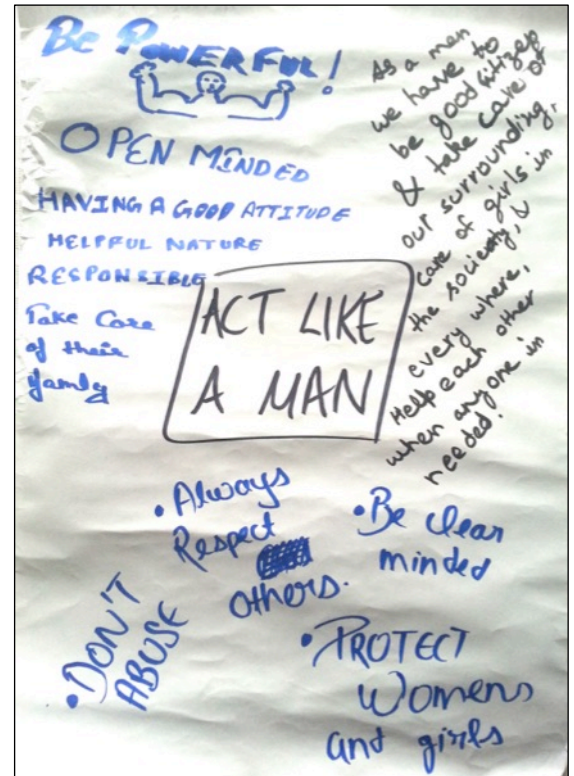
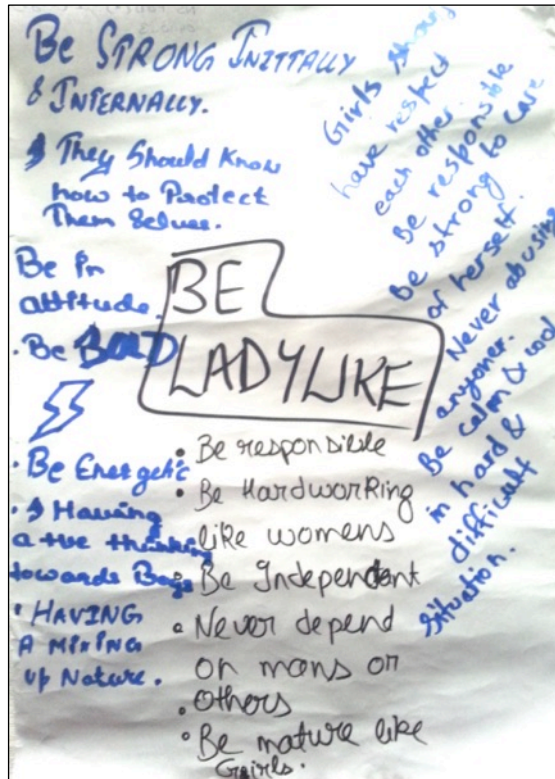
RIS Mixed Focus Group (2) – girls' brainstorm (Komal, Violet, Leela)



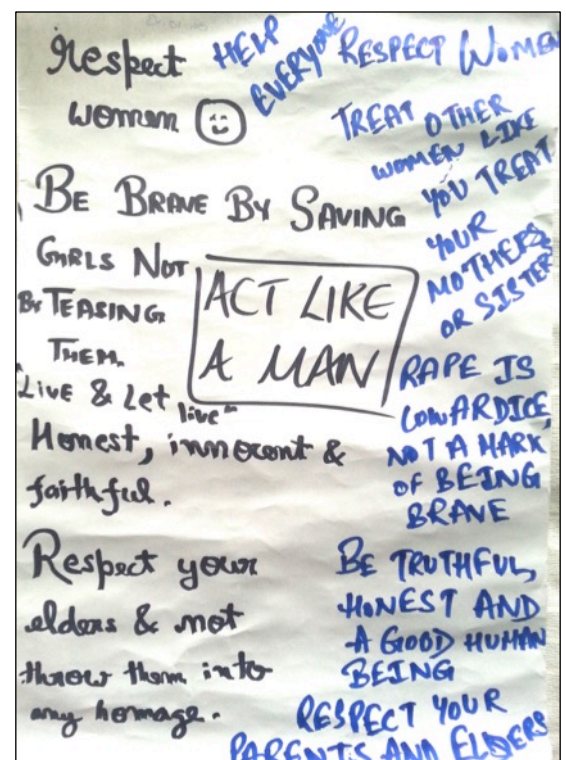
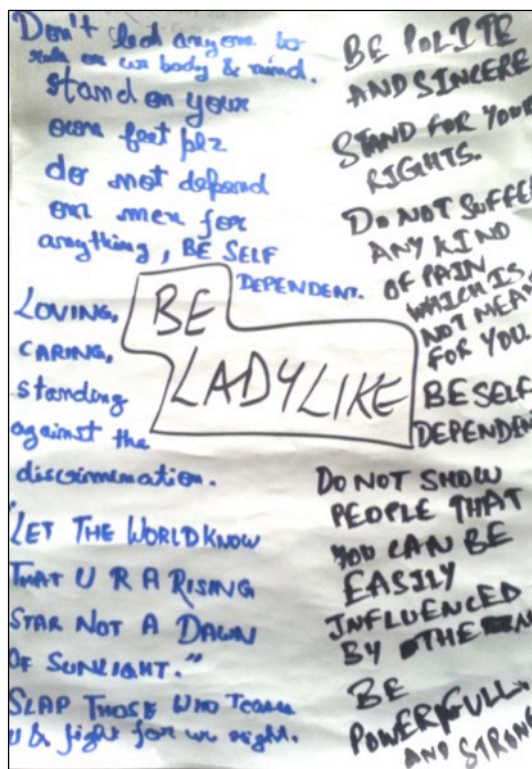


### State Government School

SGS Mixed Focus Group (1) – boys' brainstorm (Lionel, Rocco, Abby)



SGS Mixed Focus Group (1) – girls' brainstorm (Mala, Rani)



**Appendix 8a: Student semi-structured interview guide**
**Introduction** [2 -3 mins]

- Outline of interview: home life, school life, picking up on issues from FGDs (gender, sex education)
- Confidentiality / anonymity recap
- Alternative name? [*can think about it & decide at end of interview*]

**1. Life at home** [5 mins]

- So on your questionnaire you said you live at home with [ ]?
  - [*if they have brothers / sisters*] Are they elder or younger to you?
  - Are your parents strict with you, in general?
    - We talked about the 'Indian mentality' in the group discussions – do you think your parents have this 'Indian mentality'? [*explain / examples*]
  - Do you think that your parents treat you and your brothers / sisters the same? [*explain / examples*]
  - How important is religion in your family? [*explain / examples*]
  - Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about your family life?

**2. Life at school** [10 mins]

- What do you think about the teachers at your school?
  - Are they strict / friendly / approachable etc. ? [*explain / examples*]
  - If you had a personal problem [*e.g. not related to studies*], do you feel that you could go to any of your teachers or your principal for advice? [*explain / examples*]
    - Have you / any of your friends ever done this? [*explain / examples*]
  - Do you think that teachers treat boys and girls differently at your school? [*explain / examples*]
    - Is there a difference between the way female teachers and male teachers treat students? [*explain / examples*]
- In one of the group discussions, people said that boys should treat girls like their sisters
  - What do you think about this?
  - Do boys treat girls like sisters at your school? [*explain / examples*]
  - Do girls treat boys like brothers at your school? [*explain / examples*]
  - On your questionnaire, you mentioned that your friends at school are [*e.g. mostly girls / mostly boys*]. In general, do girls and boys mix at your school, or do they spend time in separate groups? [*explain / examples*]

**3. Sexuality** [10 mins]

- Do girls and boys also have girlfriend-boyfriend relationships at your school?
  - If yes:
    - What do you think about this?
    - Do any of your friends have boyfriends / girlfriends?
    - [*ask this if appropriate, based on answers to the two previous questions*] – Do you have, or have you ever had a boyfriend / girlfriend?
  - If not at their school:
    - Does this happen at other schools [*what kind of schools*]? Or outside schools?



- What would you think if one of your friends told you that s/he had a girlfriend/boyfriend?
- Do students have 'intimate' relationships at your school? *[explain as 'physical' or 'sexual' if necessary]*
  - What do you think about this?
  - If not at school, do any students have this kind of relationship outside school?
  - *[try and probe what 'kind' of girls and boys engage in 'intimate' relationships, and what the student thinks about this; e.g. what do they think about sex before marriage? Do they always associate sex with reproduction?]*
- On your questionnaire, you mentioned that you would [like to get married / not like to get married / have an arranged/love marriage] in the future
  - Why would you prefer this?
  - Is it important to get married to someone from the same family background to you (e.g. religion, caste)? Why / why not? *[expand / examples]*
- Are you familiar with the concept of 'being gay'? *[explain if not]*
  - Imagine that one of your friends is gay – e.g. attracted to someone of the same gender. What would you think / do?
- We also talked about sex education during the last group discussion...
  - Just to recap, do you think sex education should be taught at school?
    - *If so*: what should be taught about during sex education?
    - *If not*: why do you think this?
    - Do you feel that you have been taught enough about sex education at school?
    - Is there anything that should *not* be included in sex education?

#### **Wrap-up interview** [5 mins]

- Is there anything else that you'd like to talk about?
- Any questions for me?
- Thank you for participating!

**Appendix 8b: Teacher semi-structured interview guide**
**1. Introduction**

- Re-explain research
- [Re-cap FGD]

**2. The teachers and the school [5 minutes]**

- Tell me about your role at the school [*prompts: subject taught, any co-curricular activities, any pastoral roles; how long have you been at this school, where did you teach before here...*]

**3. Class 11 students [10 minutes]**

- Tell me about your Class 11 students
  - What kinds of family background do your students come from? [*e.g. parents' occupation, class background*]
- Tell me about the boys in Class 11
  - *What are they like; do you think they face any particular problems or challenges; do you think they have any particular strengths or advantages?*
- Tell me about the girls in Class 11
  - *What are they like; do you think they face any particular problems or challenges; do you think they have any particular strengths or advantages?*
- How would you describe the role of the teacher in the life of Class 11 students?
  - Compared to the role of parents? [*examples/stories*]
  - Do Class 11 students come to you for guidance or advice? [*examples/stories*]

**4. Adolescence education [10 minutes]**

- Do students have girlfriend-boyfriend relationships at your school?
  - What would you do if you found out that two students were in a girlfriend-boyfriend relationship? [*examples/stories*]
- How do students learn about adolescent health issues, sex education at your school?
  - What do you think about young people learning about these issues at school?
  - [*If supportive*] Why do you think adolescent health / sex education should be taught?
    - What do you think they should be taught about?
    - When / how do you think this should happen?
  - [*If not*] Why do you think adolescent health / sex education shouldn't be taught?
- How do [you think] students learn about adolescent health, sex education beyond the classroom / outside school?

**5. Damini case [3 minutes]**

- Did teachers discuss this with students at your school?
- How did students react to this case?
- Did the case affect students' behaviour / freedom of movement?

**6. Wrap-up interview [2 minutes]**

- Is there anything else you'd like to talk about which we haven't discussed?
- Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix 9a: School observation schedule (adapted from Dunne et al 2013)
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## School observation schedule

School name:	
--------------	--

Following observation around the school and prompted by the questions below, write a few sentences in each box.

### D1 Location and infrastructure

Is the school near a road, bus stop or market?

Is the school compound fenced? Is there a school gate?

Is the compound clean and tidy? Is it decorated?

What is the general condition of the rooms (walls, doors, windows?)

Is there water on the school compound?

Is there electricity on the compound? How constant is the supply?

Is there teacher / other staff housing on the compound? How many? Who lives in them?

Are there any other buildings or resources on the school site?

### D2 Social interactions

What goes on in the school compound during lesson time? Are there many students or teachers out of class during lesson time? What are they doing?

Do students leave the compound during school hours (e.g. at break)? Where do they go?

How do the students use the compound at break time? What kinds of activities do the students do?

What kinds of students group together? What groups of students stay away from each other?

Do different students do different kinds of activities? Do they occupy different places and amounts of space in the compound?

Are there any signs of teasing / bullying or fighting? Who appear to be the bullies / victims?

Is there any intervention by teachers, senior students or other students?

Where do teachers go at break times? Do they interact with the students? What kinds of interactions?

How do the teachers use the staff room? How do the teachers use the compound?

How do teachers relate to each other? Where do teachers go if they are not teaching during lesson time?

Do students have specific duties / jobs to do in and around the school compound? Are their particular duties carried out by specific kinds of students?

Do teachers have specific duties / jobs to do around the school compound (*supervision, discipline, sports*)? Are there particular duties carried out by specific kinds of teachers?

Apart from teachers and students, who is allowed into the compound? What kinds of people are they?

Is there a controlled school gate? Who controls it? What time does it open and close?

What happens if a student comes late to school?

Are there many parents or community members on the school compound at any time? When? Why are they there? What are they doing?

Does anyone else spend time around / outside the school gates? Who are they?

What kinds of interactions do these visitors / passers-by have with the teachers? Students?

Have you observed any critical incidents in and around the school?

## School and community profile

### E1 Basic school information

Name of school:	
Foundation of school (when, by whom):	
School fees / charges / contributions:	
Curriculum subjects taught:	
Extra-curricular activities (sports teams, clubs):	

### E2 Infrastructure

General condition of school buildings and grounds:	
Administration block / offices / room (number of rooms & condition):	
Number of classrooms and condition:	
Classroom furniture:	
Toilet facilities (numbers, gender- segregated or communal, separate for teachers and students?, condition):	
Sports facilities:	
Staffroom (size, furniture):	
Other facilities (prayer rooms, hall, computer room, library):	

**E4 School policies**

Note the main features of these policies, particularly with regard to differentiation by gender or other social category.

Admission and readmission policy for students:	
Code of conduct for staff:	
Disciplinary action against staff:	
School regulations for students ( <i>absenteeism, punctuality, behaviour in and out of class</i> )	
Disciplinary practices on students	
Procedures for allocating school tasks	
School uniform ( <i>note gender differences</i> )	
Guidelines for parents ( <i>e.g. financial and other contributions to school, uniforms etc.</i> )	

**E5 Principal**

Name:	Female / Male	Religion	Caste
Number of years in current school:			
Previous school?			

**E5 Teachers & pastoral staff**

Number of teachers:	Female:	Male:	TOTAL:
Number of (separate) pastoral staff	Female:	Male:	TOTAL:

<b>Appendix 9b: Classroom observation schedule (adapted from Dunne et al 2013)</b>
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### Classroom observation schedule

School:	Class:	Date:
Subject:	Topic:	
Time:	Duration of lesson:	
Teacher:	Female / male:	
Number of students:		
Number of girls:	Number of boys:	

**A1** Classroom (*Location? Size? Condition? Black / whiteboard? Furniture? Windows? What's on the wall?*)

**A2** Seating arrangements (*How many students to a desk / bench? Note isolated students or crowded desks / benches*)

**A3** Student grouping (*according to gender or other social groups? Who sits at the front, back, and side?*)

**A4** Textbooks and other materials such as pencils, bags (*Number? Who has/ has not and who shares?*)

**A5** Student preparation (*appearance, possession of pencils / pens, exercise books etc.*)

**A6** Draw classroom (*including student and teacher positions, white / blackboard, windows, door...*)

**B1** During the lesson, note the teacher and student activities (and their timings), making comments in the third column, about the research issues noted below:

Note also **critical incidents** (examples of particular incidences of gendered expectations – e.g. ‘real men act like this’, or particular ways that girls/women or boys/men are discussed in the course of the lesson – language, disciplinary practices...) and relevant **quotes**, and **questions raised** to ask about later.

Mins	T (teacher) activity	S (student) activity	Comments / quotes

**After the lesson write up a paragraph (or more) on these same issues based on your overall impression of the lesson.**

#### **C1 Teacher activity**

Main language of instruction (*and other languages*)

Main teaching activities (*whole-class question and answer, individual questions, choral repetition*)

Position in the classroom (*fixed or moving around*)

Physical position in relation to students and mannerisms (*intimidation, supportive*)

Teacher voice (*loud/soft, audible to all students, use of language, abusive language, tone, content*)

Feedback to students (*correction, praise, responding to or ignoring contributions, correction of homework*)

Use of questions (*types of questions – closed or open, yes / no or what/where/why/how, to whom, how often; pointing to students/naming/shouting out*)

Amount of teacher talk (*monologue or more interactive*)

Use of teaching aids (*visual aids, textbooks*)



Discipline (*who did the teacher discipline and how?*)  
 Teacher response to student bullying, discrimination?  
 Class management (*moving students, grouping students etc.*)

### **C2 Student activity (in relation to the teacher)**

Teacher – student interaction (*characterise – positive, negative, cooperative – give examples*)  
 Student behaviour (*if 'bad', which students and in what ways?*)  
 Student participation (*to what degree were students engaged, who participated verbally*)  
 Teacher response to student questions according to gender (*or other social groups*)  
 Student grouping (*whole class, individual or in groups – if so, what kind of groupings?*)  
 Student tasks (*answering questions, repeating, writing, reading, group work*)  
 Students asking teacher questions? (*how often? Which students?*)

### **C3 Student-student interaction**

Interactions between boys and girls (*Do girls and boys get on, or not? Give examples*)  
 Interactions between other social groups (*is age, religion, caste, ethnicity, social background a factor in student interactions? Give examples*)  
 Teasing / bullying (*within gender groups and/or across? Verbal, emotional, physical?*)  
 Student interruption in class (*do any students interrupt others in class? Who interrupts who?*)

## Appendix 10: Example of data analysis and translation

### Transcript extract: Rocco, 11A, SGS – individual interview

- Neeraj: So but, do you think so that in your school that boys actually treat girls like your sisters?
- Rocco: **No**
- Neeraj: No?
- Rocco: **Almost no one!** They treat like they're – ah, girlfriends and - girlfriends vagarah **bahut couples** hai vahan pe, **bahut couples** hai, **bahut** hai [*girlfriends and all, there are a lot of couples, a lot of couples, there are a lot*]
- Neeraj: Tell me about – tell me more about the couple thing.
- Rocco: Ah – example do? [*give an example?*] Hursh and Preeti. Hursh is our class, and Preeti was in 10<sup>th</sup> I think. So, they were – ajeeb se couple hai [*they are an awkward couple*] They walk like, ah! Kahin bhi chipak jaate hai, like gale milna hugging karna [*they cling to each other wherever they are, like necking, hugging*] – not kissing. Not kissing! [*laughs*] So, that types of things. In the recess **bahut saare couple** milte rehte hai yahan pe [*you'll find a lot of couples over here*], specially on the back.
- Neeraj: Kisses bhi? [*Kisses and all? – i.e., do couples kiss as well?*]
- Rocco: Kisses. **One boy of 12<sup>th</sup>, and one girl of our, my class – matlab 12<sup>th</sup> se fail hoke 11<sup>th</sup> mein hai voh** [*I mean she failed 12<sup>th</sup>, now she's in 11<sup>th</sup>*]. So, they sex, they had a sex, and their parents also know, so that types of. There's **only one** couple do sex also.
- Neeraj: Hmm. So all intimate, physical relationships are there at your school?
- Rocco: But sex, ah! **Ek hi** aajtak incident dekha hai maine sex ka **bas** [*I've only seen one incident of sex so far, that's all*]
- Neeraj: But you, ah! Okay, us time sex bhi hua thha [*this time there was sex as well*]?]
- Rocco: Ravi, the 12<sup>th</sup> boy – and our Sonya
- Neeraj: Okay, that 12<sup>th</sup> boy, okay that – **failure girl** right?
- Rocco: The **failure girl**
- Neeraj: So you saw it?
- Rocco: **Humein bahut sunne mein aaya thha, uske parents, uska operation bhi hua thha pet ka, ladki ka operation hua thha. Pata nahin kya thha usse, parents ne itna bataya nahin aise sabko. Parents se pooch lenge uske. Matlab pakde gaye thhe voh karte hue, matlab ah! There a hotel in, ah – metro station hai na uske paas hotel hai vahan pe** [*We heard a lot, her parents – there was an operation on her stomach as well, an operation for the girl. I don't know what it was, her parents didn't tell everyone that much. We'd have to ask her parents. I mean, they were caught doing, I mean – ah! There's a hotel in, ah – the metro station, there's a hotel near there*]
- Neeraj: Ah, so what do you think about all this relationship things?
- Rocco: It wasn't right, ah – before 18. Ah, before 18 and – like, couples are alright, **not kissing** each other on the school also, in the school also. That was their fault.
- Neeraj: And do you think doing outside school it's fine?
- Rocco: Outside – after school it's fine, ah, those boys are, matlab [*I mean*], some boys are, all this type – so they are alright. After 18 tho theek hai [*so it's okay*], no sexual contact – ah! Sexual contact sahi hai [*is right*], after 18 it's okay.

#### Author

**Comment [1]:** \*Emphasis on the high volume of couples – repetition of 'bahut' ('a lot') x3 to describe 'couples' – to strongly refute idea of brother-sister relationships at his school (cf. Abby, Priyanka, Jonny, Rani, Mala at SGS).  
\*NB choice of English words 'couples' and 'girlfriends' – 'Western' ideas?

#### Author

**Comment [2]:** \*Mixing Hindi slang and English to describe physical relationship – 'chipak jaate hai' (they cling [to each other]), 'gale milna' ('necking'), 'hugging'.  
\*Implicit disapproval of couple's public displays of affection? Describes as 'ajeeb' ('awkward'), their physical intimacy 'kahin bhi' ('wherever'/'anywhere') – this plus catalogue of physical intimacy → Rocco's sense that their physical displays are excessive? But also emphasizes physical limits of their (public) r/ship through repetition of 'not kissing'.  
\*Seeking out liminal spaces for intimacy – couples 'on the back', e.g. at the back of the school (cf. Priyanka (SGS) on couples behind the school and Jonny (SGS) on couples using the empty top floor of the school); Keshar (RIS) and Akash (CGS) on couples in empty classrooms

#### Author

**Comment [3]:** \*NB implicit link between sexual relationship and (the girl's) academic failure

#### Author

**Comment [4]:** \*Emphasis on **rarity of sexual relationships** (to his knowledge) – 'only one' above, and 'ek hi' ('only one'), 'bas' ('that's all') here – in contrast to his emphasis on **how common girlfriend-boyfriend relationships are in the school**.  
\*Compare with **rarity of brother-sister relationships** above – romantic relationships within physical limits of hugging / kissing = the norm within SGS peer cultures, platonic rakhi relationships & sexual relationships = rare?

#### Author

**Comment [5]:** \*Contrast catalogue of physical actions to describe non-sexual relationship of school couple Rocco has seen (above), and gaps, silences in this re-telling of a story he has heard about a school couple who have had sex.  
\*May reflect gaps in his knowledge? NB abortion described as 'operation on her stomach' & his own uncertainty about what this meant; silence & hesitation around actual sexual act 'they were caught doing...' – cf. Harsha's hotel room story (CGS).

#### Author

**Comment [6]:** \*Moral drawn by Rocco – romantic non-physical relationships (or at least, not physical in school) are acceptable before 18, sexual relationships are acceptable (NB 'sahi' lit. = 'correct') after 18

# Appendix 11a: Flash cards with preliminary findings and recommendations

## Preliminary findings:

Most teachers treat girls and boys equally in the school

Some teachers are too strict, and don't allow girls and boys to talk to each other, or sit next to each other in class

Eve-teasing is a problem at school, with some boys harassing girls and passing comments

Girls have more problems at school – e.g. they do not have the same opportunities to play sports as boys, or they are not encouraged to go for higher education

Teachers are more strict with boys, and punish them more often

Boys are often involved in fights at school, even if they don't want to get involved

Sex education should be taught to help young people set limits and avoid physical relationships until they are older

Sex education should be taught because not knowing about these issues can lead to negative consequences for young people

Sex education should be taught because other sources (e.g. internet, TV, friends) are not always reliable

## Recommendations:

Class debates on topics like women's movements and feminist in India, or assumptions about men boys and violence

Teachers should treat girls and boys in the same way (including how they scold / punish them). Teachers should also be more relaxed about allowing girls and boys to mix at schools

A school counsellor could talk to girls and boys separately about sex education, from Class 8 onwards

Your school could keep sex education materials in the school library, so students could access information on their own

## Appendix 11b: Summaries of preliminary research findings

## Gender and adolescence at school: Young people's experiences in Delhi

Padmini Iyer, University of Sussex

**About the research**

Padmini Iyer is in the third year of her PhD in International Education at the University of Sussex, UK. She is funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). Padmini's PhD research focuses on young people's experiences of going to school in Delhi, with a particular focus on experiences relating to gender and adolescence. The aims of the research include: to understand how young people learn about adolescent health at schools, to explore how girls' and boys' experiences at school might differ according to gender, and to establish how schools can actively promote adolescent health and gender equality.

From August – December 2013, Padmini carried out mixed-methods research with Class 11 students and their teachers in three Delhi schools: one private school, one Kendriya Vidyalaya, and one NDMC school. Across the three schools, 164 students completed questionnaires (67 girls, 97 boys); 34 students took part in 12 focus group discussions (16 girls, 18 boys); 30 students (15 girls, 15 boys) took part in individual interviews; and 25 teachers took part in individual interviews.

Only **41%** of students said that they had learned about **puberty and growing up** at school; **34%** said that they had learned about **relationships**; and **33%** said that they had learned about **HIV & AIDS**.

*Questionnaire data  
(N = 164)*

**Adolescent health at school: a brief introduction**

Talking to young people about adolescent health in schools has proved controversial in India over recent years, with prominent politicians arguing that it is 'against Indian culture' to provide adolescence education at school. However, both in India and internationally, it is widely argued that young people must learn about adolescent health issues in order to fulfil their fundamental human rights (e.g. TARSHI 2008), to protect them against the spread of HIV & AIDS (e.g. National AIDS Control Organisation 2007) and for the 'future social, economic and political progress and stability' of the nation (World Health Organisation 2006).

**"Giving adolescence education in India is like a taboo. So the – all the children are being very shy. They take the help of the internet, and gain knowledge from there – which I think is not right"**

*Class 11 boy*

**How do young people learn about adolescent health at school?**

In the three study schools, students were formally taught about adolescent health issues in the Class 8 and Class 10 CBSE Science curriculum, during the 'Reproduction' chapter. Topics in the Class 10 chapter included changes during puberty, reproductive organs, STIs, and methods of contraception. However, students in the Private School and the NDMC School said that the topics in this chapter were not fully explained. Their teachers seemed uncomfortable with the topics and rushed through the chapter. However, students at the Kendriya Vidyalaya commented that their Class 10 Science teacher went through all the topics thoroughly, and covered the Reproduction chapter over a period of three months.

There are several other ways in which the schools provided information on adolescent health. At the Private School, separate **adolescence education workshops** for girls and boys in Classes 9 and 10 were being introduced by the school counsellor, while **workshops on menstruation** for girls in Classes 7 and 8 were run by Stayfree and Whisper (sanitary pad companies). At the Kendriya Vidyalaya, visiting organisations occasionally talked about **HIV & AIDS in assemblies**. At the NDMC school, the Art of Living held a **lecture on relationships** for Class 10 students, and workshops for girls in Classes 6 – 8 were also run by Stayfree and Whisper at this school.

Apart from school, students' main sources on adolescent health issues included the internet, friends, and TV programmes. Several teachers said that there was no need for students to learn about adolescent health issues at school, because they learned 'everything' through the media. However, **students indicated that they wanted to learn more about adolescent health issues at school**, particularly since they did not always view other sources as reliable.



### What do young people think about adolescence education?

Girls and boys in all the schools said that they thought it was important to learn about adolescent health issues so that young people could better **understand how their bodies work**, learn how to **protect themselves from STIs** in future relationships, and understand **family planning methods** for later in life. Only three students (two boys in the NDMC School, one boy in the Private School) thought that adolescence education should not be taught at school.

Many students expressed concerns that **ignorance about adolescent health** could lead to **negative consequences for young people**, particularly those who got involved in relationships while still at school. Several students also suggested that adolescence education could help young people **resist peer pressure to form romantic relationships** while still in school, and help them to make **informed decisions about such relationships**.

Students had differing opinions on when adolescence education should start; some suggested from Classes 8 or 9 (ages 12-14), while others felt that they should learn about adolescent health issues in detail in Classes 11 and 12 (ages 15-17).

### How can schools improve young people's experiences of learning about adolescent health?

Findings from this study indicate that students do want to learn about adolescent health issues at school. Below are some suggestions for how this might be done.

**School counsellors:** At the Private School, the school counsellor has started running adolescence education workshops for Class 9 and 10 students. These workshops are **single sex**, and allow students to **ask questions, express concerns** and discuss adolescent health issues in a **safe, non-judgemental context**. Private schools evidently have more resources to employ school counsellors; however, the Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan made commitments in 2013 to provide each KV with a school counsellor, and the NDMC Principal also mentioned that a part-time counsellor or social worker would be of great benefit to her students. Advantages of providing adolescence education through school counsellors include:

- ♦ *Qualified to talk about sensitive issues, and comfortable doing so:* Many students indicated that teachers felt uncomfortable talking about adolescent health issues.
- ♦ *Not a teacher:* Many students also said that they did not feel that they could confide in their teachers about personal issues. Additionally, this would mean that adolescent education would not become a further burden on teachers' workloads.

**Adolescence education materials:** Schools could keep materials such as the **TARSHI Blue Book** in their libraries for senior students to access. This would provide **accurate** and **age-appropriate** information which students could seek **independently** if they do not feel comfortable talking about adolescent health issues with teachers or counsellors.

### What do teachers think about adolescence education?

Almost all the teachers who participated in the study stated that they thought **adolescence education should be provided for students**. The principal of the NDMC School said that having a social worker who came to the school regularly to talk to students about these issues would be extremely beneficial. She felt that this support should be provided for both girls and boys, particularly since there were no provisions for boys to talk about adolescent health issues at the NDMC School.

Other teachers felt that adolescence education was important in order to help young people **understand the changes that occur in their bodies**, to address attitudes that might lead to violent behaviour, particularly among boys, and to **discourage them from forming romantic relationships** while at school. Teachers also felt that **parents** should make more time to talk to students about adolescent health issues at home.

**"It's important for us to know about all this. The younger children, they can be aware and take precautions, spread the knowledge among their peers and all. So I think if I know what is good for me and what is bad for me, so I can teach younger children, and my peer group too"**

*Class 11 girl*

*For more information, please contact the researcher:  
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## Gender and adolescence at school: Young people's experiences in Delhi

Padmini Iyer, University of Sussex

### Gender and education: a brief introduction

Achieving gender equality through education does not just mean ensuring that girls can go to school, or achieving gender parity in school enrolment figures. The direct and indirect ways that young people learn about gender in schools can lead to schools reproducing negative gender norms which fuel inequality in wider society (Nayak & Kehilly 2008). The Justice Verma Commission called for schools to 'act as counter-socialisers to tackle gender bias and discrimination' (Verma et al 2013). In order to achieve this, it is crucial to understand how young people's experiences of school are affected by gender.

### Girls and boys being treated equally at school

Teachers at all the study schools emphasised that there was no gender discrimination at their schools, and in some respects, students agreed. **88% of students supported the statement, 'during lessons, teachers give the same amount of attention to girls and boys'** (Student questionnaire, N = 176). In particular, students at the Kendriya Vidyalaya mentioned that teachers involved girls and boys equally in the classroom, and assigned marks according to academic ability and not gender.

**"If the girls or boys are talking to each other, we have an eye on them. How they are behaving, how they are talking"**

*Class 11 teacher*

### Anxieties relating to co-education

There were concerns about allowing girls and boys to interact freely both inside and outside the classroom, particularly at the Kendriya Vidyalaya and the Private School. Observations revealed that **girls and boys usually sat in separate rows in the classroom**; several girls feared that they would be judged negatively by their peers if they sat next to the boys in class.

Several **students complained that teachers monitored girl-boy interactions too closely**, and again, this was most common in the Kendriya Vidyalaya and the Private School. One girl reported that if a girl and boy were seen talking in a school corridor, a teacher would immediately separate them, and teachers also emphasized the **importance of always 'keeping a close eye' on girls and boys**.

Students did report **romantic 'girlfriend-boyfriend' relationships** developing at all three schools, although **platonic friendships between girls and boys seemed more common**. Most of the students stated that 'girlfriend – boyfriend' relationships were not physical relationships. They emphasized the **importance of establishing 'limits'** within romantic relationships, and maintaining a focus on academic work. Several teachers also agreed that such relationships could be a **positive source of emotional support for students**.

### About the research

Padmini Iyer is in the third year of her PhD in International Education at the University of Sussex, UK. She is funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). Padmini's PhD research focuses on young people's experiences of going to school in Delhi, with a particular focus on experiences relating to gender and adolescence. The aims of the research include: to understand how young people learn about adolescent health at schools, to explore how girls' and boys' experiences at school might differ according to gender, and to establish how schools can actively promote adolescent health and gender equality.

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**"Some teachers are there that say, 'Don't talk to boys', and all that. I don't think it's like – you're just talking, you're not doing anything wrong"**

*Class 11 girl*

### Challenges faced by boys

Many boys and girls reported that **teachers punished boys more often than girls**. This seemed to be the case even when girls had been 'breaking rules' in the same way as boys (e.g. not completing homework, talking in class). Additionally, teachers seemed to reserve **much harsher punishments for boys**, which several students felt was unfair.

Teachers and students reported that **physical fights between boys were common at all the schools**. This seemed to be a way of 'proving' masculinity, but many boys indicated that it was **hard to avoid this culture of fighting even if they didn't want to get involved**. It was notable that many teachers and students described such fights as almost inevitable – this seemed to reinforce assumptions that it is 'acceptable' for boys to behave in a physical and violent manner.

**"If a girl doesn't do her homework, she doesn't get any punishment. But boys, boys are always punished. We're told to sit on the floor, get out of the class, like that"**

*Class 11 boy*

**"Not only the girls should be taught about behaving properly in front of boys. Boys should also be taught about all this, like respecting girls – this is one way the mentality can be changed. If the boys will change, they will respect the girls"**

*Class 11 girl*

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### Challenges faced by girls

When responding to the questionnaire, **65% of girls supported the statement, 'girls have more challenges than boys at school'**. Nearly one third of these girls explained that this was due to gender discrimination, for example: not being given the same sports opportunities as boys, not being encouraged to aim for higher education, or being scolded for their appearance (i.e. how they wore uniforms or their hair) more than boys.

Several girls mentioned the problem of harassment from male students. Girls and boys at the Private School and the Kendriya Vidyalaya talked about **'eve-teasing' taking place at the schools** – i.e., boys verbally harassing girls. Girls sometimes complained to teachers about this, who then reprimanded the boys in question. It is important to note that not all boys behaved like this; girls, boys and teachers at all the schools emphasized that it was only certain boys who harassed girls.

Personal safety outside school was also a concern for girls, with **61% of girls stating that they did not feel safe travelling alone** – just under half of these girls indicated that they did not feel safe because of the threat of sexual harassment or sexual assault. The vast majority of students (both girls and boys) felt that a lack of safety was a problem for girls, with **90% stating that it was more dangerous for girls to travel alone**.

### Overcoming negative gender norms at school

Many students were already questioning restrictive gender norms at school. For example, many students argued that **girls and women must fight for their rights in order to have equal opportunities in society**, and in order to challenge gender discrimination. Girls and boys alike expressed anger at what they described as a **failure to ensure women's safety in India**. Students also felt that **education could play a key role in gender equality**; however, students from all three schools said that they do not get opportunities to discuss such issues at school.

Schools should support young people in **learning about gender inequalities** and **questioning negative gender norms**. This could be done in several ways:

- ♦ *Class debates:* These could explore topical issues such as female foeticide and violence against women, and would encourage students to carry out independent research. Such debates could also meet the speaking assessment requirements under the CCE pattern.
- ♦ *Questioning gender stereotypes:* The CBSE Life Skills syllabus for Classes 9 – 10 includes an activity encouraging students to think about why different types of behaviour are considered 'appropriate' for men and women. This kind of activity could encourage students to adopt a more critical view of gender stereotypes.
- ♦ *Teachers' attitudes:* These play an important role in students' lives. Teachers should adopt an equal approach to disciplining girls and boys, to set the same standards of behaviour for all students regardless of gender. Schools should also adopt a more relaxed approach and allow girls and boys to socialize at school, as this will help to decrease the sense of 'difference' between them.