



UNIVERSIDAD DE MURCIA
DEPARTAMENTO DE FILOLOGÍA INGLESA

Exploring Englishnesses through Representations found in
Contemporary English Comedies set in the Educational
Context

Identities Inglesas a través de Representaciones
Contemporáneas en Comedias Televisivas basadas en el
Contexto Educativo

D^a Margarita Navarro Pérez

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Tesis Doctoral

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Director: David Alan Walton

2015

DEDICATION

To my parents, for teaching me the most important things in life; for being just the way they are and making me the way I am; for their constant support, but above all, for their way of facing life, their love for laughter and their desire to be happy.

A mis padres, por enseñarme lo más importante en la vida; por ser como son y hacerme como soy; por sus ánimos constantes, pero sobre todo, por contagiarme el amor por la risa y las ganas de ser feliz, que es el motor principal de esta tesis.

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Identidades inglesas a través de representaciones contemporáneas en comedias televisivas basadas en el contexto educativo

En esta tesis realizo un análisis del término *Englishness*, entendido como la esencia inglesa, la identidad del individuo como ciudadano inglés, que ayuda a comprender el concepto de identidad británica, pero sobre todo de identidad inglesa, así como de su evolución. Asimismo, en este estudio analizo cuáles son las posibles similitudes o desemejanzas que se encuentran entre el concepto de «identidad inglesa» de nuestro siglo y el de siglos pasados, qué factores han intervenido en este proceso de evolución y cómo estos interaccionan entre sí.

Este estudio conlleva cierta profundización en la cultura británica. Parto del concepto de cultura como modo de vida propuesto por Raymond Williams, que fue influenciado más tarde por Stuart Hall y el *Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies*, extendiéndolo a cultura como modos de vida. Así mismo, enfoco mi estudio desde la perspectiva de la tradición de los estudios culturales tal y como se vienen desarrollando en Gran Bretaña.

Partiendo de esta base, este no es un estudio de la cultura británica tomándola como una categoría única y globalizadora bajo la que agrupar a una comunidad(es), sino que presto especial atención a aquellos aspectos de la misma que son motivo de diversidad y divergencia. De este modo, en lugar de centrar mi atención en una percepción general y al mismo tiempo superficial y reduccionista de *Englishness*, mi propósito no es otro sino el de profundizar en las particularidades de la identidad inglesa a nivel individual. Este planteamiento me lleva a un enfoque del estudio de la identidad en el que esta última se presenta como una entidad postmoderna. Así mismo se pueden comparar identidad y postmodernidad debido a su complejidad y el modo en que ambas se componen de elementos y categorías que se superponen para su formación.

El «ser inglés» no es una noción simple o de fácil descripción. Aspectos tales como diferencias de clase, género, sexualidad, raza, religión, acento, regionalismo e incluso el mero hecho de pertenecer a un determinado colectivo o no son elementos determinantes en la percepción y formación de la identidad inglesa en la actualidad. Todos ellos son aspectos que se combinan de diferente forma en cada individuo. Se trata de elementos que se mezclan y combinan entre sí para dar lugar a una nueva y

heterogénea noción de *Englishness*, que deja de lado la estereotipada idea del individuo inglés como blanco anglosajón y protestante.

En los últimos siglos Gran Bretaña ha sido testigo de importantes cambios en su población. Gran número de inmigrantes de diferentes razas, pueblos, creencias y culturas han convergido en tierras británicas. Esto ha dado lugar a la existencia de muchas y variadas formas culturales que han interactuado con las gentes y la cultura de la comunidad de acogida, adaptando aspectos de la misma para sí en algunos casos y en otros modificándola. De este modo, mi proyecto ofrece un análisis en profundidad de la cultura de la Gran Bretaña multicultural contemporánea. Sin embargo, es precisamente la «amenaza» de este cambio la que parece generar cierto «miedo» y «ansiedad» en cuanto al futuro de la nación se refiere, y esto se observa en ciertos fenómenos académicos y sociales en Gran Bretaña. Por un lado, parece resurgir una necesidad por redefinirse a uno mismo y a la identidad nacional, que también parece conllevar un resurgimiento de fuerzas políticas nacionalistas populistas. En las últimas elecciones en Gran Bretaña se puede observar un leve resurgimiento de la extrema derecha, que si bien no aparece bajo el nombre del Partido Nacionalista Británico (conocido en inglés como BNP), viene de la mano de partidos con ideales similares como el Partido Independentista del Reino Unido (conocido como UKIP).

Esta «preocupación» por la identidad nacional y su posible pérdida o distorsión también se ve reflejada en el mundo académico, donde existen una gran variedad de trabajos cuyo objetivo es la identificación de *Englishness*, que como explico terminan ofreciendo al lector una variedad de *Englishnesses*, es decir, una pluralidad de versiones de un mismo objeto de estudio.

Por otro lado, y de acuerdo con la naturaleza del estudio, en esta tesis he recurrido a diversas fuentes de información. La literatura, el cine, la televisión y la prensa son mis principales fuentes, lo que facilita una visión más global y actualizada de las experiencias del «ser inglés» en Gran Bretaña. Pongo especial énfasis en la comedia televisiva británica contemporánea ya que, desde mi punto de vista, en ella se reflejan gran parte de las experiencias, intereses y modos de representación e interpretación de su cultura y constituye una eficaz herramienta para estudiar la realidad social de la comunidad. También hago referencia a la comedia en su forma literaria, y a diversas fuentes de información como YouTube, podcasts y páginas web cuyo contenido está relacionado con los temas tratados, con el fin de explorar e indagar en estos temas y profundizar en ellos de una manera lo más completa posible.

En este estudio dedico especial atención a comedias contemporáneas televisivas, por su alto contenido de imágenes y comentarios irónicos y sarcásticos, además del uso de imágenes estereotipadas de individuos en la sociedad que ofrece a mi parecer un instrumento idóneo para explorar tipos e identidades en la sociedad. En especial me centro en aquellas comedias contemporáneas basadas en un contexto educativo, por diferentes motivos. En primer lugar creo que esta es una etapa muy significativa en la formación de la identidad del individuo. Aparte de la vida familiar, en el ámbito educativo es donde el individuo pasa un gran número de horas al día.

Sin embargo, si esto se podría decir que es cierto de la mayoría de los países Europeos, yo diría que es aún más relevante en un sistema educativo como el británico, en el que las diferencias entre los distintos tipos de instituciones educativas y lo que ofrecen tienen desde mi punto de vista un impacto considerable en lo que a la formación de identidad se refiere. Como explico en este estudio, se podría decir que el sistema educativo británico enfatiza la brecha existente entre individuos de contextos socio-económicos distintos (Ball, 1993; Archer, Hutchings, & Ross, 2005; Ball, Davies, David, & Reay, 2002; Archer, DeWitt, & Wong, 2014). Asimismo, las comedias analizadas engloban distintas instituciones educativas. Por ejemplo, *Fresh Meat* nos presenta el mundo universitario en una universidad ficticia llamada *Manchester Medlock*, en la que confluyen individuos de todos los contextos educativos, desde ex alumnos de centros estatales y gratuitos hasta alumnos de colegios «públicos», entendidos en el contexto inglés como colegios internos cuya matrícula puede ser superior a las 30.000 libras por curso académico. Por ejemplo, las series *Teachers* y *The Inbetweeners* muestran un contexto educativo que se engloba dentro de la educación pública que en Inglaterra se conoce como «estatal», pero en distinto rango de calidad educativa. Por otro lado, *Bromwell High* nos muestra también un centro educativo público en el sentido real de la palabra, pero en el que ni la educación ni el bienestar de la comunidad educativa se presentan como una prioridad.

Teniendo en cuenta lo mencionado anteriormente, y dentro del contexto analizado, presto especial atención al *gag* (momento en el que se invita a la risa) ya que esta es una manera bastante inusual de estudiar comedia. A menudo, el estudio de la comedia televisiva disecciona su objeto de análisis en elementos léxicos y gramaticales (Quaglio, 2009), personajes, contextos, juegos de palabras, etc., eliminando el aspecto cómico (Dynel, 2011). Esto es solo un ejemplo de cómo generalmente el estudio de la comedia no suele centrarse en la comedia en sí. Si bien es cierto que, a veces, la

comedia ha sido criticada como objeto de estudio debido a su lugar en la sociedad como medio de entretenimiento y por su falta de seriedad, también es cierto que no siempre es fácil determinar cuándo se supone que encontramos el chiste o cuando se nos invita a reír. Además, este aspecto cobra aún más relevancia si tenemos en cuenta los nuevos formatos de comedias televisivas donde se omite la risa enlatada y ya no se invita al espectador a unirse a la risa, sino que se deja a elección personal. Es precisamente en estos momentos cuando de alguna manera consentimos y permitimos algo que en otro contexto sería inaceptable o sería tachado de ser políticamente incorrecto. Asimismo, es en estos momentos donde podemos analizar las suposiciones y creencias que informan el texto.

Con el fin de definir el concepto de *Englishness*, en el tercer capítulo parto de aquellos estudios académicos que se «venden» a sí mismos como estudios de *Englishness*. Así, centro mi atención en trabajos dedicados al estudio de identidades británicas, pero sobre todo inglesas, donde las palabras *English* o *Englishness* aparecen en el título, o que se presentan a sí mismos como estudios de alguna de las categorías mencionadas, y que prestan especial atención al/los individuo/os ingleses. En ocasiones, y como ya he mencionado, se hace alusión a trabajos literarios. Sin embargo, no llevo a cabo un estudio detallado de estos ya que esto me desviaría del principal objetivo de esta tesis: el análisis de la identidad inglesa y del «ser inglés» a través de las comedias televisivas contemporáneas populares. No obstante, soy consciente de la gran cantidad de trabajos literarios que existen centrados en el «ser inglés» y en su modo de vida (Bryson, 1991, 1996; Barnes, 1998; Bainbridge, 1999; Gill, 2005; Luddington, 2014; Moore, 2015; Paxman, 2007, 2006, 2012). Estos trabajos tienen un gran potencial de análisis en lo que a mi objeto de estudio se refiere, aunque he decidido no centrarme en ellos con el fin de concretar el estudio.

Como se puede observar en mi tesis, recurro en gran medida al uso de juegos de palabras para los títulos de las secciones. El motivo de utilizar este lenguaje llamativo radica en que no sólo me da pie a exponer mis ideas, sino que también a que el lector no se deje llevar por el texto y no caiga en la trampa contra la que luchó en este trabajo: la mitificación de *Englishness*. Además, esta es mi manera de brindar homenaje a mi fuente principal de estudio: la comedia inglesa y el juego de palabras, uno de sus recursos lingüísticos.

Tras considerar las distintas versiones de *Englishness* que ofrecen los trabajos escritos estudiados, en los capítulos cuatro, cinco, seis, siete y ocho llevo a cabo el

análisis de las comedias prestando especial atención a los «tipos» de individuos que aparecen en las series. Cada comedia se analiza de manera individual, ya que están basadas en contextos educativos diferentes y por tanto los individuos que en ellas aparecen son considerablemente distintos. No obstante, es importante mencionar que en algunas ocasiones existe cierta similitud y correlación entre los «tipos» presentados en las distintas series, en cuyo caso hago referencia a la tipología, relacionando a individuos bajo la idea de un mismo «tipo».

Las comedias analizadas muestran un contexto educativo que parece estar íntimamente ligado a las clases sociales y a la construcción de identidad del individuo. Esta división se muestra en forma de una categoría tripartita que sigue la estructura de clase trabajadora, clase media y clase alta, pero cuya descripción o percepción depende del punto de vista del que se mire. La serie *Bromwell High* presenta claramente un contexto de alumnado de clase trabajadora, mientras *The Inbetweeners* muestra a un alumnado de clase media. En la serie *Teachers*, como el título de la misma indica, el centro de atención es el profesorado, pero en términos generales se podría decir que el alumnado se parece más al tipo de individuo que iría a un colegio como *Bromwell High*. Sin embargo, las denominaciones y las representaciones de las distintas clases sociales que aparecen en las series varían considerablemente de una serie a otra. Por ejemplo, en *The Inbetweeners* se hace referencia en ocasiones a un aterrador o deprimente contexto social de la clase trabajadora, mientras que en *Fresh Meat* los individuos que habían recibido una educación «pública», en el sentido inglés de educación privada, no parecían contemplar otra distinción que la de lo que quiera que fueran ellos y la de los *muggles*¹ o «normales».

En cualquier caso, las comedias nos presentan una sociedad que si bien no se puede decir que esté supeditada a las diferencias sociales, sí que entiende los matices expuestos en las comedias sobre las mismas, que presentan una sociedad en la que aquellos que provienen de un contexto socio-económico más favorecido reciben una educación de mayor calidad y aumentan así sus posibilidades de éxito en el futuro (Reay & Ball, 1997; Reay, David & Ball, 2001).

Por otro lado, teniendo en cuenta las representaciones de *Englishness* estudiadas en el ámbito académico, y tras el análisis de las distintas identidades inglesas que aparecen en las comedias mencionadas anteriormente, es posible afirmar que distintos

¹ En Harry Potter de J.K. Rowling, *muggles* son aquellos individuos que no tienen magia.

individuos parecen adherirse a distintas *Englishnesses*, o a distintos aspectos de distintas *Englishnesses*, confirmando así la idea de que no se puede estudiar el «ser inglés» y su identidad como un único ente, sino que es necesario centrar la atención en una multiplicidad de identidades inglesas. Asimismo, el análisis de las comedias ha dejado entrever una cierta reticencia a la hora de representar identidades que den cabida a la variedad étnica y multicultural existente en Inglaterra en la actualidad. Es por ello que considero que a la hora de estudiar y representar *Englishnesses* es necesario tener en cuenta esta heterogeneidad, ya que todos somos iguales en nuestras diferencias, como los personajes de las series estudiadas. Después de todo, todos somos migrantes en este planeta llamado Tierra.

ABSTRACT

In this thesis I aim to study the concept of Englishness(es), which will imply a better understanding of the idea of ‘English identities’ and their evolution. Thus, I shall analyse what possible similarities and differences can be found between the contemporary idea of ‘English identity/ies’ as presented in contemporary English comedies and its/their definition according to some academic works, and how they interrelate. For this I propose to study English culture in depth, focusing mainly on contemporary² English comedies set within the educational context.³ My starting point will be Raymond Williams’s concept of culture as a whole way of life (Williams, 1958/2011), which later influenced Stuart Hall (Hall, 1992) and the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. Therefore, I shall focus my study from the perspective of the tradition of Cultural Studies as developed in Britain. Comedies will provide an ideal tool to focus on characters’ habits, customs, needs, likes and dislikes to give samples, albeit exaggerated at times, of how individuals relate to each other and express their fears, interests, worries and passions.

In the last few centuries Great Britain has been witness to important changes in its population. A large number of immigrants of different races, countries, beliefs and cultures have converged on British soil. This has resulted in the existence of many different ways of life that have interacted with the host culture, with the different cultures adapting and modifying one another. In line with this, there has been a growing interest in the delimitation, definition and assertion of both Britishness and Englishness, although my study is centred on the latter. For this reason there exists a lot of controversy and divergence in the definition of this concept. Different studies focus on different aspects of England, and as a result they come up with different versions of Englishness.

Englishness is not seen throughout this study as something simple or even something that can easily be described. Aspects such as differences of class, sex, sexuality, race, religion, accent, region, including the simple fact of belonging to a given club or not, are determining factors in the perception and formation of contemporary English identities. All these things are intertwined to give a new, heterogeneous notion of Englishness that rejects the stereotypical idea of Englishness

² The comedies selected have been aired between the years 2001 to 2013.

³ The reasons for choosing the educational context will be specified further on in this study.

associated with a white, protestant and Anglo Saxon individual. In this way, my ultimate aim is that of carrying out a profound analysis of some academic works on the matter, and compare these images with those presented by contemporary twenty-first century television comedy, in order to try and reach a better understanding of today's multicultural Britain.

In agreement with the nature of the study, I plan to draw on diverse sources of information. Literature, cinema, television, the world wide web and the press will be the main sources, which will provide a wider and more up to date view of the experiences of Englishness in Britain. I shall put special emphasis on English comedy because, it seems to me, that it reflects a great many experiences, interests and forms of representation and interpretation of culture. In my opinion, it constitutes an effective tool to study the social reality of the community, which on the other hand has not been exploited for this purpose. In doing so, I will focus on comedies set within the educational system, given that I believe these will reveal a great deal about the English and their sense of identity, as I will explain in the following section. Therefore, I will be looking at comedies set within secondary education schools, namely those of *Bromwell High*, *The Inbetweeners*, *Teachers* and some scenes of *Little Britain*, together with the comedy series *Fresh Meat*, which is set in a university.

CHAPTER 1. RIGHTING/(WRITING) THE RIGHT/(RITE): AN INTRODUCTION

If England was what England seems
And not the England of our dreams
If she was putty, brass and paint
'Ow quick we'd drop her... but she ain't.
(Kipling in Duffy 2001:245)

...Or is she? And has she been dropped already? But first of all, what is England? And what is Englishness? These are some of the questions I will be looking at throughout this thesis. These inquiries about identity and nationhood are questions that have been and, perhaps now more than ever, are being widely discussed, not only in England or even Britain but in many other countries around the world. The “dangers” of economic and above all cultural globalization and the “fear” of the loss of identity that are on many occasions associated to even the loss of history, have brought these and other similar issues into the public arena all around the world. The changes in population that societies experience as a consequence of immigration and asylum seeking, the rise of crime (which tends to be associated to the aforementioned change in population), the growth of a global economy and the influence of the United States’ economy and cultural forms (through media, film, television and fast food chains, to mention just a few), the European Union and the economic unification of the majority of its members which even share the same currency, the euro – excluding Britain of course – to mention just some of the most discussed issues, are among some of the reasons that provoke this “anxiety”. These feelings of “fear” and “danger” of the decline of the nation-state seem to urge countries to reinforce their feelings of identity as a nation or perhaps just their need to (re)define themselves as such. As a consequence, populist nationalism seems to have become a significant electoral force, basing its appeal on these fears.⁴

Interestingly, when I tried to pursue this issue further in Britain through the press, I found contradictory information on something that should not give way to ambiguity; the number of seats that National Parties hold in Britain. Whereas *The*

⁴ Examples of this phenomenon are increasing appeal of the National Front in France [this is out of date – his daughter is now the head of the NF in France. He has started another party. You might say ‘the increasing appeal of the National Front in France’], Jörg Haider’s in Austria, Pauline Hanson’s in Australia, the Nationalist Party True Finns in Finland which won 39 seats in Parliament in 2011, the third position obtained by the Neo-Nazi party (the anti-immigrant Golden Dawn party) in the 2015 elections in Greece and the increasing popularity of the British National Party (BNP) in England. In fact, in the local elections that took place on May 2003, the BNP won 16 council seats and became the second largest party in Burnley, arriving at its peak in 2009 when the BNP won two seats in the European Parliament, and in 2010 it held twelve councillors in Barking.

Guardian paints a very bleak picture of National Parties in the local elections held in 2012 (Maynard),⁵ many of the comments left on the page contested this pessimistic view, explaining how the Scottish National Party (SNP) had in fact gained a considerable amount of votes. On the other hand, the BBC announces its coverage of the results of the local elections with the following headline: ‘Elections in England, Wales and Scotland: As it happened’ (BBC News, 2012).⁶ According to this webpage, Labour seems to make improvements, whereas the SNP becomes the largest party in the Scottish council elections to the detriment of Labour. Thus, despite the effort on the part of some media to present an ‘airbrushed’ image of politics in Britain, there seems to be a resurgence of the far right, not only in Britain but also in Europe, albeit the fact that the last elections might have shown a decline on the votes for the BNP. Many have discussed this rise and appeal to the BNP (Han 2013, Trilling 2012, Collins 2012, Goodwin 2011, Copey & Macklin 2011, Ali 2010, Eatwell & Godwin 2010, Copey 2008). Moreover, we can now talk about the appearance of political parties such as the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), which drew on nationalistic propaganda in its 2015 manifesto.⁷ In this respect Nick Ryan, in his book *Homeland: Into a World of Hate* (2003), argues that this appeal of the far right is connected with a search for identity in a confusing world.

However, this definition of identity might in fact become a *redefinition*. In an attempt to define a country’s essence a new definition is being created, which will in turn influence perceptions and interpretations of nationhood. These attempts at *redefining* Englishness are coupled with a growing awareness of multiculturalism. This consciousness makes itself present not only through the written works of fiction or non-fiction writers, but also, and more so from my point of view, in the media with the development of series such as *Goodness Gracious Me* and *Ali G Innit*, and television programmes such as *Asian Guild* and *Ethnic Multicultural Media Academy* awards (EMMA)⁸, in which it is precisely this multicultural awareness that is being awarded, which can in turn be argued to have its downsides, as I will argue later on in this study.

There exist many and very varied studies in Britain that deal with the issue of the definition of England and English identities throughout the times, from Orwell’s *The*

⁵ Retrieved from: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/audio/2012/may/05/politics-weekly-podcast-local-elections>

⁶ ‘Elections in England, Wales and Scotland: As it happened’. Retrieved from: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-17824250>.

⁷ For more information on this issue go to: http://www.ukip.org/ukip_manifesto_summary.

⁸ Only held from 2000 to 2004.

English People written in 1944, to Alibhai-Brown's *Who Do We Think We Are? Imagining the New Britain* written in 2000. Throughout this amalgam of attempts to define the identity of England, some portray a rather stereotypical image of England and the English individual, grounding their research, either in a mainly historical perspective (Matless, 1998; Langford, 2001; Powell, 2002; Colls, 2002; Kumar, 2003; Colley, 2005), or from the point of view of literature (Light, 2013; Easthope, 2000:152). Others, offer a more alternative view in which issues of class, and gender are also mixed with those of multiculturalism and therefore seem to engage with a more recent and up-to-date version of England (Ramdin, 1999; Alibhai-Brown, 2000; Nayak 2003; Gilroy, 2002).

Similarly, my concern in this study is that of studying the concepts of England and Englishness(es) and their development in the United Kingdom and more specifically in England, paying special attention to television. In doing so, I will start by looking at different portrayals of Englishness(es) including the more stereotypical ones together with the more alternative ones. However, and despite the fact that there exist a considerable number of studies on this subject matter, there does not seem to exist much in the area to do with this analysis of *Englishness* through audio visual comic works, partly for reasons that I will discuss later on in this thesis. Therefore, and as I have already mentioned briefly, my aim in this thesis is that of, first of all trying to arrive at an understanding of what is England and Englishness according the academic works selected here, to later on compare this re-presentations of Englishness(es) with those put forward in the television comedies selected. This will aid me in my attempt to arrive at a more holistic idea of Englishness(es). This will help me to understand to what extent these written representations of Englishness resemble or not contemporary media representations, and on this basis I will consider to what extent, one, or the other or a mixture of the two can be said to represent the England of today.

Although as I have already mentioned I will, initially, comment on written work, I aim to focus my attention, on representations of Englishness(es) put forward in audio-visual comic works,⁹ the reason for this being the way in which television has proven to be a much more effective way to reach society in general. It is not rare to find people on the streets using catchphrases that come from a comedy series, as I have in fact seen and done myself during my stays in England. I will also be referring to the media and the

⁹ I use comic works as a source in which to find representations of Englishness and English identity, focusing mainly on jokes but also looking at the work as a whole.

way they represent and portray some of the works that will be analysed throughout this study. On occasions I have also used the media to find out about what are the most popular works in an attempt at making this study as relevant and representative as possible. I also refer to comments or remarks made by the public sector that I consider to be relevant to the study.

Throughout my research, I have come to realize that in this search for Englishness(es) several intertwining processes are involved, namely those of *righting/(writing) the right/(rite)*. In the first place, some of the literature I have looked at seems to be *writing the right*, that is, it gives the impression that what is being read is in fact a text that clearly and neatly expresses the essence of the English. It is undeniably true though, that when a writer writes on many occasions she/he puts forward that which he/she believes to be *right*. However, in this search for the *right* some of these propositions are taking a step further and are put forth as some sort of sacred reality. Some of the interpretations of England I have come across seem to be very stereotypical and they seem to be repeated without any questioning just like a *rite*, thus this process of *writing the right* would convert itself into a process of *writing of the rite*. Thus, with this thesis my aim is that of identifying them and in some way *righting the rite*. I will look at these rite-like versions of Englishness, which partially due to their almost sacred status are on many occasions unquestioned versions or representations of England, and I will question them in order to arrive at what I believe is a more appropriate or might I say *right* version or image of England in an attempt also of *writing the right*. However, in doing so I will also be *righting the right*, that is, I will be putting forward my own view, without forgetting that mine is also my personal view; thus, trying always not to fall in the trap of mystifying it and converting it into the very thing I am trying to demystify, a *rite*. Also in an attempt to distance the reader and myself from the text and emphasize the very fact that what is being offered is *one* view, I try to use a very playful language.¹⁰ Notwithstanding my intention to shed light on the issue of the perception and representation of Englishness, I acknowledge the fact that it is my personal view and I do not intend to claim to have arrived at the ultimate truth, one that is as well informed and documented as possible within the limits of this study, and that despite the limitations it invariably has shed some light on the topic of study.

¹⁰ For a more detail explanation on the uses of the playfulness of language in academic writing see Walton's 'Creative-criticle Acts' in Walton & Scheu 195f.

As I mentioned earlier I will take as one of my main sources of information a number of contemporary television comedies, which have been selected according to specific criteria, which will be explained in more detail further on in this thesis, and are set within the educational system. Therefore I will be looking at representations of English individuals of different ages: teenagers, young adults studying at university and teachers.

The reasons for choosing comedies set in the educational context being many. First of all, I believe the time a human being spends during his/her education at school or university is very significant to the forming of his/her identity as an individual in society. Apart from the family environment, this is the place where an individual spends many of the hours of his/her early life. However, if this could be said to be true for most Europeans, I would say it is more so for an educational system such as the British. The British educational system, and the existing differences between the various kinds of educational institutions and what they offer, I believe has a considerable impact on the individual and his/her identity formation. As we will see throughout this thesis, schooling in Britain can be said to sustain and generate a system which further separates individuals according to their socio-economic status, as some argue (Ball, 1993; Archer, Hutchings, & Ross, 2005; Ball, Davies, David, & Reay, 2002; Archer, DeWitt, & Wong, 2014).

One thing is clear: not all schools offer the same standard of education, as the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) reports show on a yearly basis, where schools are listed from top to bottom, according to their students' results. These results will invariably condition, which university a student can apply to, in turn, job prospects will also depend on the university the individual has had the chance of going to. Consequently, it seems one is to have different expectations from the different types of educational institutions, and hence of the individuals coming out of them.

Bearing in mind all the aforementioned, I have structured this thesis according to nine chapters, including this one. As I have already mentioned, whenever possible, I have tried to use puns as the titles of the sections, not only for the reason I mentioned above, but also as tribute to my object of study, English comedy; always trying to unite the different interpretations of the pun with the development of my argument. In chapter 2, I will begin by explaining the reasons that have led me to choose contemporary television comedy as my main source of information. In this same section, I will also

explain how I will carry out the analysis of the comedies selected, and the criteria followed for their selection.

In order to have a point of reference of what Englishness and England are, I will begin the analysis with a selection of academic works that provide the starting point of this thesis. Thus, in chapter 3, I will analyse a variety of works devoted to the study of English and British identity together with nationalism, paying special attention to those academic productions which present themselves as studies of Englishness, where either English or Englishness are to be found in the title, or that present themselves as the study of any of the two, but above all, that focus on the English people. I will on occasions mention some literary works. Nonetheless, I will not carry out a detailed study of those, given that I do not want to deviate from the main objective of this thesis. Moreover, I am aware of the fact that there are many non-academic works devoted to the study of the English and their ways (Bryson, 1991, 1996; Barnes, 1998; Bainbridge, 1999; Gill, 2005; Paxman, 2007, 2006, 2012; Luddington, 2014 and Moore, 2015), that as cultural products would deserve their place in the study of Englishness, but which I have decided not to concentrate on for this thesis, in order to focus and delimit the scope of the present study. However, I am aware of their potential and I, on occasions mention some, at times even together with academic works, because I believe they, although perhaps not written with the same “seriousness”¹¹ than academic works, also provide images and stereotypes of the English, which feed into and from the society they have been created from and/or of.

After considering the different written works selected, chapters 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8, will be devoted to the analysis of the comedies and the different images or types of individuals portrayed in them. Each comedy will be analysed separately, given that they are set in different contexts, albeit I may at times discuss the existing relations between images from different comedies. However, before concentrating on each of the television comedies, I will briefly consider the different types of educational institutions presented and the distinctive images of each one of those, as presented by the comedies and the media, in order to help the reader contextualise characters within the specific context they are presented. It is important to consider the expectations created by the

¹¹ By no means I am intending to say that they have not been written with rigour and seriousness, hence the inverted commas, what I mean is that in more than one occasion they are written with wit, using irony and sarcasm which add to work a certain comic impetus.

media about the different kinds of educational institutions, even if these are, at times, presented in an exaggerated and of-the-wall manner in order to create a comic effect.

For this reason, in the next section I will very briefly talk about the different kinds of schools, so as to provide some basic information about the English educational system. As the following section proves, terminology when referring to English schools is not always as straightforward as it may seem.

The last chapter of this thesis, chapter 9, will be devoted to some considerations about the possible existing contradictions or points in common to be found in both the academic world and the television comedies studied, in terms of the (re)definitions of Englishness(es), in order to try to arrive to some kind of consensus, if it were possible, about what England and Englishness(es) are. I will also discuss to what extent these representations fit and cater for the needs of contemporary English society, and the possible consequences derived from this.

1.1. Education: terms, definitions and the deceptiveness of it all

Before I go on any further, it is of paramount importance to clarify how some terms, which I will be using, specially when I begin the analysis of the comedies, are understood within the educational context in Britain, given that otherwise there may be room for some confusion. The purpose of this section is not only to deal with definitions, but also to better understand how the different kinds of schools can, and in fact do, come up with such disparity of educational standards and results on the part of their students.

When talking about schools, in England, the term ‘public’ is usually understood as referring to a school which is in effect public, but as long as the very high school fees can be afforded, which is in fact the same as saying that it is private. Not only this, but in some cases there are also some academic standards that need to be reached before being able to enter a ‘public’ school. There are several options open to candidates, either by taking and passing an entrance test or by coming from a ‘feeder’ institution. ‘Feeder’ pre-primary, primary and secondary education schools are institutions that provide and ensure the academic excellence of their students, so that they can enter other educational institutions that require said standards.

Nonetheless, the term private school can also be used to describe a different type of fee-paying school. The difference between ‘private’ and ‘public’ schools is that the

latter tend to be boarding schools; with much higher tuition fees (over 30.000 per academic year for a boarding student) and they tended to be ‘boys’ or ‘girls’ schools, although these days most of them are mixed schools. All fee paying schools describe themselves however as ‘independent schools’. Therefore, when I refer to schools I will use the terms ‘public’, private or state/comprehensive according to the above-mentioned definitions, being the latter the state funded truly public schools in the literal meaning of the word public. It is for this reason that I will always use the inverted commas when I refer to fee paying ‘public’ schools, thus disengaging the word public from its meaning as an institution/service owned by the government, not by a private company and strictly referring to the way the term ‘public’ school is understood in England. Therefore, when referring to truly public schools I will refer to them as state/comprehensive schools.

There exists a further type of school known as grammar school. This is a state funded institution, which selects its students on the basis of academic ability. Despite it being public, only the brightest or the best prepared can attend these schools. Consequently, and as many argue, children whose parents can afford private tuition to prepare them for the exams are more likely to enter a grammar school. Taking into consideration that the schools mentioned so far are meant to offer and provide the best standards of education, it could be said this educational institutions reinforce a class system in which only those financially more able can afford a better education, to then opt for the better universities and consequently better jobs. On the other hand, normal state/comprehensive schools are also likely to be liable to maintaining and supporting the class system. As Jessica Shepherd, education correspondent for the Guardian, puts it ‘the pushy middle classes’ buy houses near top performing state schools, this raises the house prices, which in turns prevents others less financially advantaged from living in this area (Vasagar, 2012).

Together with the aforementioned schools, there is a relatively new type of school, which is becoming more and more popular in England: the academy. Academies are state-maintained independent schools that are set up thanks to the help of outside sponsors. Academies were first established in the UK in 2000, in an attempt to raise standards by replacing failing schools with these new institutions which, despite following the national curriculum, plan their teaching programme focusing on fitting in to its individual community and circumstances. However, this type of educational institution is not featured in any of the comedies studied here, or indeed in any of the

existing comedies at the moment. Nonetheless, academies have been featured in several documentaries aired by Channel 4, *Educating Essex*, *Educating Yorkshire*, and *Educating the West End*.¹² The schools presented in these documentaries present us with underperforming schools, with an ethnically diverse population of students, who are not easy to work with, and where educational standards leave much to be desired, but which nonetheless seem to manage some improvement with some of the most difficult students.

The comedies studied in this thesis offer different and very varied images of English individuals, whether they are teenagers (in *The Inbetweeners*, *Bromwell High* and some sketches of *Little Britain* and *Goodness Gracious Me*) or adults (in *Teachers* and *Bromwell High*). The protagonists being either teachers or students, or both in different types of schools from different areas, and whose students come from very different backgrounds: ‘public’, private and comprehensive/state funded. The difference between the education received in one or the other, as well as in the types of individuals coming out of them, is abysmal.

The images presented in the university scenario seem to be a continuation in many ways of the types observed in secondary education. However, if we are likely to find a homogenous type of individual at a specific primary or secondary education context,¹³ at university it is more likely to find very different types. Despite the fact that some high schools are feeders of some prestigious universities, the variety of students attending the latter is considerably different. British universities take students from all around Britain as long as they have the required grades, thus, the variety of students is much greater at university than it was at school.

Once I have established the basic premises necessary for the understanding of the terminology related to schools, I will discuss the reasons for choosing television comedy as my main source of information.

¹² These documentaries were broadcast in 2011, 2013 and 2014 respectively.

¹³ If you go to a state school, you will go the local state school, if you go to an independent school, you will go to a school where the most students have similar socio-economic backgrounds, not many can afford to pay those fees.

CHAPTER 2. ARE YOU HAVING A LAUGH? IS HE HAVING A LAUGH?

2.1. Comedy is an ideal source of information

Before presenting the reasons why I believe comedy is an ideal medium for the study of questions of identity and its (re)presentations, I will stop for a moment to comment on the nature of the materials I have selected for study here. Using Mills' words (2009:5), I will be focusing on those television productions with a 'comic impetus' whose main aim is to be funny, despite the fact that they may do other things as well. This way, for example, a television programme described as a comedy drama would be liable for study in this thesis. Together with this, on some occasions, I will not be making a distinction between the terms 'sitcom' and 'comedy'. Notwithstanding the fact that, as Walton (2010) and Mills (2005) point out, there exists some wariness within the entertainment television industry to use the term sitcom, due to the limitations associated with it. Walton also points out the fact that the industry itself does not seem to be consistent in terms of the labelling of programmes as sitcoms or comedies.

Moreover, the sitcom has developed considerably since its beginnings. Wagg (1998: 3) suggests that sitcoms first grew out of the BBC Radio light entertainment provided in the 1930s, which, influenced by music hall and sketches, gave way to the sitcom. Since then, and in accordance with innovations and changes in society and broadcasting, it has been incorporating topics and techniques which traditionally were associated to other genres, giving way to what could be said to be a reinvention of the genre. As a matter of fact, some of the characteristics which have traditionally been associated to the sitcom, such as its theatricality and the laugh track, would not be found in a considerable number of contemporary English television sitcoms/comedies. In fact, the sitcom *Extras*,¹⁴ which inspires the title of this section, could be said to be one of the best examples of this, if not the best, as well as one of the pioneers of this evolution. As Walton points out *Extras* has stretched the limits of sitcom to create an 'intra-diegetic fiction within a fiction' (Walton 2010:131), where, from the first scene of the series, spectators are tricked into believing they are watching a film. These limits are stretched

¹⁴ Ricky Gervais' sitcom, first broadcast on BBC in 2005.

even further in the second series when Andy Millman (Ricky Gervais) is involved in the writing and filming of his own sitcom, where the catch phrase ‘Are you having a laugh? Is he having a laugh?’ becomes the epitome of the creation, rise and fall of Millman’s mediocre and old-fashioned sitcom. Millman wants to create a new kind of sitcom, which he hopes will become a hit. However, the producers bully him into being the protagonist of what he himself calls a ‘shit-com’, due to its too traditional and old fashioned format: the canned laughter, the catchphrase, the sexual innuendos, the theatricality of its actors, etc. In fact, *Extras* is the proof of the way in which sitcoms are changing and developing, moving away from the format traditionally associated with them.

For this reason, I will not occupy myself with the definition and evolution of the term sitcom¹⁵, nor will I go into arguing whether sitcoms are to be discussed within the parameters of genre (Walton, 2010), given that, despite the obvious relevance of these topics within the study of television comedy, it would take me into digressions which would not benefit the main aim of this study, which is to explore questions of representation and interpretation of types of English individuals, and to discuss to what extent these can be considered a reflection of the society the comedies have been created within and for.

The study of comic audiovisual texts is not something new, many have studied comic works. However, these studies tend not to focus on comedy itself, leaving funniness to one side and choosing to focus on comedy’s more formal aspects. Quaglio explores the American sitcom *Friends* from a lexico-grammatical point of view, where transcripts of episodes are analysed and compared with a large corpus of face-to-face everyday conversations (2009). Tueth analyses popular American television programmes examining the relationship between politics and comedy (2008). Krutnik and Neale focus on the complexity of the intertwining political relations which inform the reception and production of comedies (2001). In *The Pragmatics of Humour Across Discourse Domains* different authors dissect the different parts of humour, puns, irony, jokes, etc. stripping comedy of its comic aspect (Dynel, 2011). In *Beyond Sitcom*, Savorelli carries out a structuralist method of semiotic textual analysis (2010). All these studies look at different aspects of comic works but do not focus on comedy. This may be due to the devaluation comedy sometimes undergoes.

¹⁵ For more information on this topic see Wagg 1998 and Mills 2005 & 2009.

Despite comedy's importance in English society, it has often been considered an area not worthy of academic attention and thus not an object of study, given that comedy is commonly associated with leisure, unthreatening entertainment, play and lack of seriousness rather than as an object liable to undergo serious analysis (Mills 2005: 22, Savoreli 2010, Kamm & Neumann, 2015). For this reason, as Medhurst points out, 'popular comedy has been woefully neglected in recent debates about what England and Englishness can or might mean' (Medhurst, 2007: 206). Comedy's apparent simplicity, due to format constraints (which may and are nonetheless challenged at times), gives the appearance of being simple, when in reality it is 'highly complex' (Mills, 2009: 4).

In the area of cultural studies, Mills argues that comedy has also had a history of neglect, which he attributes to two possible reasons: the fact that society in general may not take these studies seriously, given that comedy does not tend to be taken seriously, or the way in which talking seriously about something funny would imply taking away the funniness. On the one hand, it is true that comedy and sitcoms tend to be associated to leisure and entertainment, given that in fact that is one of its main aims. For this reason, comedy is generally perceived as something associated to play rather than for studying. It is precisely for this reason that I believe more serious investigation needs to be done using comedy as a source of research, given that a study of the comic pleasures of the English will give away many of the assumptions existing in society.

Therefore, I believe comedy is a very valuable tool for the study of Englishness(es) for various reasons. First of all, and using Mills' words, situation comedy is 'not only representative of a culture's identity and ideology, it also becomes one of the ways in which that culture defines itself' (2005: 9). Mills also views comedy as a way to present culture to outsiders, and he exemplifies this by referring to Britain in the 1980s and its fixation with political correctness, arguing that the reason why political correctness seemed to be so important was because Britain did not want to be associated with being racist or sexist.

Secondly, comedy can be said to be an important part of everyday life in England. As Stephen Wagg points out, 'situation comedies (sitcoms) are a staple of British broadcasting' (Wagg, 1998: 1). He argues that sitcoms can be found in television programmes of any given week in the major television channels as well as in other free

view channels and sky television¹⁶. He estimates that there are between 50 and 60 sitcoms being offered on television in Britain in any given week (Wagg, 1998:3), which in fact seems a little short nowadays. Just to give an example to illustrate this, in the television guide for the third week of July 2012, there were more than 60 comedies/sitcoms on offer only on Saturday, added to which, there is always some choice on both free and sky television for comedy throughout the rest of the week.

Furthermore, the British, pride themselves in their sense of humour and it is presented as an identifiable positive asset in their character (Easthope, 2000; Mills, 2005 and Medhurst, 2007), it is central to both social and cultural interactions within the realm of Britishness and British national identity, and consequently to Englishness (Fox, 2004 and Mills, 2009).

This understanding of comedy and humour as an important part of life in England is not something new. Way back in 1946, George Mikes remarked on the importance of the English sense of humour when comparing the Continent with England, and described Continental people as ‘sensitive and touchy’, whereas the English on the other hand were said to ‘take everything with an exquisite sense of humour’, a people who would only be ‘offended if you tell them that they have no sense of humour’ (1966: 16).

This importance of humour for the British is often expressed not only in academic works but also in the press. The British sense of humour is described as ‘one of the strengths of the British character’ in *The Guardian* in 2005 (Jeffries). Three years later *The Independent* published an article in which the ‘taste for satire and withering on-liners’ are presented as a defining British characteristic linked to genes (Dobson, 2008).

Along very similar lines, Fox in *Watching the English* (2004:375), remarks on the importance of humour, and describes humour as a ‘vital social organ’ for the English:

Humour is such an essential, hard-wired element of the English character that forbidding (or severely restricting) its use is the psychological equivalent of amputating our toes – we simply cannot function socially without humour. (2004:375)

¹⁶ In free television, E4 and Dave are channels which offer a considerable number of sitcoms and comedy chat shows. In sky television there are channels, which specialize in comedy, namely *UK Gold* (where it is often the case that British Sitcoms are repeated) and *Paramount Comedy* (where a range of American and British sitcoms are offered).

So far, it is possible to see how humour and comedy are a very important part of British society, as presented in different spheres of life, namely the media and the academic world.

Another reason for choosing comedy as my main object of study is that, as Mills argues, it is necessary ‘to see the sitcom as coming out of a broad set of social concerns, influences and debates’ (2005: 42). This idea of comedy, as something which implies a considerable awareness of many aspects of society, has been put forth by many (Tueth, 2008: 2; Doyle, 2008; Krutnik & Neale, 2001; Marc, 1989; Savoreli, 2010). Krutnik and Neale point out that comedy is not only a source of entertainment traditionally perceived as amusing and light-hearted, but that it is marked ‘by its concern with the representation of ‘everyday life’’ (2001: 11). As Kamm & Neumann point out, ‘TV comedy is a particularly productive space for exploring the complex interrelation of performativity and identification through exaggerated, farcical deconstructions of social norms and transgressive performances’ (2015:10).

Therefore in order to be able to enjoy the pleasures of comedy, it is necessary to have a deep understanding of the generic rules and complex social conventions governing the society comedy has been created in and for. A proof of this could be said to be the fact that certain comedies need to be adapted and changed for audiences, so that they can be better understood and enjoyed, namely, and to mention a comedy I have already referred to, *The Office*. This comedy was first broadcast in the UK in 2001. In 2005 its American remake was broadcast where, as Ricky Gervais himself acknowledges (The Independent, 2009), not only characters were changed, but also their attitudes and ambitions, in order to better fit US audiences.

It is undeniable then, that comedy is created by and for a specific social, historical and cultural context, and therefore it can be considered a reflection of it. As Medhurst puts it:

Comedy, after all, is a cultural and social practice that is both shaped by and contributes to historical conjunctures; it pivots on contested and ambivalent relationships of power; it constitutes a repository of symbols that can be drawn on to indicate how, where and why people place themselves; it is a prime testing ground for ideas about belonging and exclusion. (2007:39)

As Medhurst points out, comedy offers a snapshot into the workings of a society, its history, the existing relations of power and also questions of belonging and identity. This is achieved not only through the images presented in the comedies, but also

through the exclusion of others. Images which are familiar to audiences and they can be related to, whether it may be to identify with or against. This is also something comedy relies on, recognition. For something to be funny it needs to be recognized, which implies that images put forward in comedy will be familiar in one way or another.

Thus, my aim in this thesis is that of studying the types of Englishnesses presented in comedies, given that as Cook points out in *Television Sitcoms*:

In sitcom, stereotyping is a device for fixing characters in roles – it enables viewers to ‘know’ the characters better than they ‘know’ themselves so that their passage through the narrative is loaded with irony. Stereotyping as an activity by comic actors generates the comic effect of accurate, simplified observation. (1982: 8)

For this reason I believe comedy is a very useful tool in my study, given that one of my aims is that of finding and analysing ‘types’. Thus, comedy seems to me to be a useful asset in the search for these types, a search in which I will not be only looking at comic instances but the comic work as a whole. Situation comedies offer a semi realistic view of society as the basics for the excess of comedy. By means of this reality, they can express and say things about the ‘real’ world, and through the observations, insights and self-realizations, viewers can relate the characters to their own experiences.

Although it is also the case that, once characters are created, they can be taken as the point of reference against which to compare people on the streets. Such has been the case with Vicky Pollard, a character out of *Little Britain*, a very popular sitcom in Britain, and the object of many awards. Often people on the streets have been called or compared to this fictitious character. This is something which will be explored in more detail later in this study, in section 5.4. where I analyse the ‘chav’.

2.2. Criterion for the selection and use of the comedies

In order to select the television material to be analysed here, I have mainly looked at those comedies which seem to be or have been popular. In my quest for popular comedies I have opted for different criteria. On the one hand, I understand that those comedies, which have produced more than a series, have been popular and have been watched enough for producers to be willing to make further series. Similarly, I have also decided to analyse some of the comedies which have been awarded, notwithstanding the fact that I am aware prizes and popularity do not go hand in hand. However, I understand that when a comedy series is awarded it is after a process by

which critics/public or a mixture of both have voted or decided on the superiority of a comedy series over another.

My intention is that of studying comedy focusing on the comic moment in an attempt at exploring the ways in which audiences relate the audio-visual text to their own life, due to the way in which familiarity is inexorably part of comedy. On many occasions I will be exemplifying my arguments through the gag, which tends to be a moment of relaxation, when despite political incorrectness and with full knowledge of this, spectators allow and permit certain excesses they probably would not in other situations in life. In some ways, comedy is an instrument to 'accept' or 'tolerate' that, which outside the comedy context, would be unacceptable. However, and although I will seek the comic moment, I am aware of the difficulty of accurately always pinpointing the 'right' moment, given that laughter is very subjective. Added to this is the fact that in comedies, it is often hard to discern when it is intended for spectators to laugh, and whether they are meant to laugh at a character or with him/her, especially in contemporary comedies, when even the moment to laugh is camouflaged under the non-existence of the canned laughter, where comedies often assimilate the documentary format becoming mockumentaries. Therefore, I will focus on the social situation exposed and the 'types' presented in relation to their defining characteristics. Moreover, as a text, comedy is liable to different interpretations. I am aware of the fact that some academics, like Ben Jonson, do not identify laughter as either central or characteristic of comedies (Krutnik & Neale, 2001), whereas others do not believe there is comedy without provoking laughter (Ryan, 2007).

Going back to the idea of the new format in most modern comedy, where canned laughter is not included, it is important to point out the now new responsibility of the spectator. With the laugh track it is clear when spectators are meant to laugh, and there also exists a sense of sharing, that is, audiences are invited to laugh with the rest of spectators. Without the laugh track spectators laugh alone, they are more than before made aware of the fact that they are laughing at some character's misfortunes or characteristics. This 'nuances' the enjoyment, audiences are now made to be responsible for their actions because they laugh alone, they are not pulled with the flow of already existing laughter, and thus, if they laugh it is more evident it is 'their' own reaction.

CHAPTER 3. QUESTIONS OF IDENTITY: ENGLISHNESS(ES) (UN)IDENTIFIED

Blacks, Asians and whites in Britain have been influencing each other for centuries, and this legacy is reflected in the hybridised lifestyles of Britain's black and Asian British youth. British History should no longer be written from the point of view of English nostalgia. Rather it needs to reflect multiculturalism, for this has been Britain's identity for centuries. (Ramdin 1999: x)

This quotation is an ideal prelude for what is to come in this section of my thesis. First of all, I will occupy myself with the definition and delimitation of identity and Englishness, this will be coupled with an exploration of how English and British are, as it is the case in this quotation, categories which are often used overlapping each other, when in reality they can also be completely different things. And finally in this section I would like to reflect on how, as Ramdin writes, multiculturalism is the way forwards, not only to a better understanding of contemporary societies but also as a more tolerant, all inclusive way of seeing the world and promoting understanding.

3.1. Identity and the (Un)Identification of Englishness(es): the power of double-think

Before I go on any further, I would like to define some of the terms which I have already used, and I will be referring to throughout this study, namely Englishness and English identity. Thus, first of all I will look at the definition of identity and more specifically of national identity. For this reason, I will focus on the definition of identity to explain later what I understand by nation and therefore national identity.

The term identity is defined by the *Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary Online* as both 'the characteristics, feelings or beliefs that distinguish people from others' and 'the state or feeling of being very similar to and able to understand somebody/something' (2013). In this thesis in particular, the study of identity focuses on the study of national identity. If we look the term 'nation' up in the same dictionary, the definition given is the following: 'a country considered as a group of people with the same language, culture and history, who live in a particular area under one government' (2013).

Taking this as the basis of my own definition, I will add Easthope's idea of the nation as the 'real' and nation as the 'spirit' (1999: 18). If the 'real' is understood as

something concrete that can be defined and delimited in a more or less objective way, there's no doubt that 'nation' is partially a product of institutions, traditions and practices that can be observed and described. On the other hand, the spiritual sense of the nation derives, according to Easthope, from the ways in which it is reproduced through discourses and narratives. However, this does not just remain as an abstraction of culture, as the instigating engine of a certain discourse, since discourses do materialize themselves in different ways of representing, perceiving and interpreting, i.e.: clothes, music, distinctive words or expressions and attitudes. Nor is it that discourse is in itself an abstraction, because any recorded discourse is something material that can be experienced, but language enables the expression of abstractions. Having said this, I am very aware of the fact that meaning does not always manifest itself explicitly. Many times language or any other explicit manifested statement¹⁷ might hide behind it a whole series of, perhaps not easily noticeable, implications.

A perfect complement, in my opinion, to Easthope's 'spirit' is Anderson's understanding of nation-ness and nationality as an 'imagined community':

It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. (2006:6).

It is also imagined as a *community* given that despite existing inequalities, it is usually perceived and represented in a kind of 'horizontal comradeship', a *community* where all its members are perceived as 'equal' in so far as they are members of the same nation. Here, I would also like to add the idea of community as a group of individuals who share similar interests or origins whether these are based on racial, ethnic, religious, sexual or class grounds.

This mixture of the 'real' and the 'spirit' as the 'imagined community' and the materialization of the latter in visible and explicit assertions is what I understand and study as the tale-telling signs of national identity. When an individual lives in a nation (according to the definition of nation just given above) and feels her/himself identified as a member of a wider group, where there exists an unwritten understanding of the sharing of values, where its members are perceived as equal, in so far as they are members of that community, that is when the individual manifests his/her national

¹⁷ There exist non-linguistic statements, namely our choice of clothes, hairdos etc, which can be a statement of a certain ideology or belief. In short, individuals specific ways of life are involved in these manifestations,

identity. This 'imagined community' in the 'spirit' does not have to be exclusive of the nation, any individual can identify within the margins of a region, a village, a town or even a street (Medhurst 2007; Balibar 1991). This, some have argued, exceeds the apparent differences between generic races. As Colls explains, '[w]hat appears to matter more is the self and ability to draw on history and culture in order to discover that self, and other selves, and the interactions between them' (2002: 181).

This implies a sense of shared history and culture where a myriad of selves can and, according to Colls, do interact in order to form an individual's identity. As he himself explains '... the idea that the state stands for a homogeneous nation is no longer credible' (2002: 379). Thus, this sense of identity invariably includes within itself many different identities, namely regional, sexual, ethnic and religious, to just mention a few, at the same time as belonging or not to the same national identity. On the other hand, if one considers the 'real' part of nation-ness, all those individuals who live within the physical limits of the nation, and who may or may not identify themselves with that nation, are an undisputable part of it and must, in my opinion, be included in the definition of the said nation.

Moreover, this sense of belonging and this identification with the 'nation' is not the same for each community within the same nation, and even for each individual within one community, since the same individual might identify him/herself with different communities, or different elements of different communities at the same time, which in turn may differ throughout her/his life. This brings me to Hall's understanding of the process of identification as 'a construction, a process never completed' (1996:2), which as a signifying process works across difference, and consequently it relies on discourse to create and maintain its symbolic boundaries.

Accordingly, it constantly relies on what it *is*, as much as on what it *is not* in order to define its forever negotiated boundaries and identity, where inexorably, different categories wrestle in a hegemonic struggle where only the strongest prevail, and others are relegated to a subjugated coexistence. These categories are in their majority inherited, that is, individuals adhere to them, or parts of them, without being completely aware of it. They are often passed on from one generation to another, or from peers, friends or clubs, in short, any social circle. Nonetheless, some identities can also be constructed or forged with a specific purpose at a specific moment in time. As Gat suggests when talking about how at times the illiterate masses have been induced to

form an identity on the basis of public readings, something which, he argues, is usually controlled by the powerful and influential (2013).

Throughout history we find that nationhood and a sense of identity has been reinforced by politicians and civilians alike during times of difficulty such as a war, where nationalistic propaganda is used to bond and unite the masses against the enemy/ies. As some point out, already way back in the early 1700s print-based media started promoting an image of Britain as a constitutional, freedom-loving and Protestant country as opposed to a tyrannical Catholic Europe (Curran 2003: 26, Jones 2003: xiii), enhancing a 'Protestant sense of destiny' which unified Britons against others. Very recently, Rogalty and Taylor note in their book *Moving Histories of Class and Community*, that many of the people they interviewed talked about a Christian Britain in an attempt at describing the threat posed to their national identity by the incoming Muslim groups (2011). Thus, a sense of identity develops and morphs throughout history with time and in specific directions.

The construction of a sense of identity is a narrative in constant change and is therefore as much about 'routes' as it is about 'roots' (Storey 2010b:13): it has to do with history, where it comes from, the way it changes and develops towards a different phase/face. Therefore, English identity has been through different phases, consequently showing many different faces, which as some argue can consequently be taken up and appropriated for future presentation.

Added to which, it is also important to bear in mind that, as Stephenson points out, 'a nation's sense of identity is inevitably entangled with images it has to adopt in presenting itself to the outside world' (2004: 47). Thus, there is room for dualities within an individual's sense of identity: what each individual identifies with at a specific point in his/her life, and what they portray as their identity for others to see. Within the parameters of this thesis I will mainly focus on the latter, the image of identity presented to the world through comedy, notwithstanding the fact that I am aware of this duality and the danger existing in only focusing on one side of the coin. However, I believe this to be a very valuable aspect of identity given that it is the one 'on offer' for people to identify with or not, as it is presented through media, an all-encompassing medium in western societies today. In this case, my object of study which is television comedy has an added value I believe, given that not only is it presented using such a powerful medium as television, but comedy is also a very popular genre in England, which implies that the identities put forward in the series studied are likely to

be watched and known by many, given comedies' impact on society, as it has already been mentioned.

Going back to the idea of nation as the originating source of national identity, Edensor states that 'the nation persists as a pre-eminent constituent of identity and society at theoretical and popular levels' (2002:1). It is important to consider how closely related to culture, nation and national identity are. Identity is intimately and irrevocably related to culture, and the performance of that culture. As Colls acknowledges:

[...] heavily interactionist interpretations of culture can lead not so much to whole knowledge of the self as to knowledge of just the manifestations of the variety of selves a person can take up – manifestations which can be taken up and *performed*. (2002:181)

Colls appreciation only makes the whole concept of culture and identity even more slippery and complicated given that, not only is identity multifaceted but it is also recursive, where identities are put forward, taken up and re-produced.

As Storey points out in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern British Culture*, '[n]ationality is a fundamental part of the networks of signification we call culture' (2010b:16). In addition, Anderson demonstrates that nation-ness is built through cultural artefacts, by showing the intimate relation between nationalism and the cultural system, which precedes the nation and against which this is created (2006). It is therefore an undeniable fact that identity is a cultural construct. It is bred and fed on the specific circumstances of a specific community, and its development is intimately related to the development of the culture it is linked to. As Langford remarks in *Englishness Identified*, the creation of an individual's sense of national character is not only a construct but also an artefact, which implies that any attempt at defining or identifying it 'is at best selecting, sifting, suppressing, in the search for what is taken to be representative' (Langford, 2001: 1).

The idea of nation and consequently nationalism is expressed not only through language but also in many other implicit ways. Billig portrays national identity as not only a state of mind, but also as a 'form of life, which is daily lived in the world of nation-states' (2001:68), which is to be found in the 'embodied habits of social life' (p.8). Accordingly, I believe that due to its discursive nature, identity holds many of the characteristics of culture itself. Culture understood as a way of life, as a means by which

to express meanings and values, a system by which sharing and contesting meaning within a community and as ‘a realised signifying system’ (Storey, 2010a:4) fits in many ways with the idea of identity presented above. As members of an *imagined community*, those who believe themselves to be part of the English tribe(s) share ways of representing and understanding themselves in relation to and as opposed to others, and the world around them. In order to better understand these representations it is necessary to share the same identity to be able to communicate more efficiently. As Storey points out sharing a national culture ‘is to interpret the world, to make it meaningful and to experience it as meaningful in recognisably similar ways’ (2010b: 17). Similarly, taking Storey’s argument of culture as ‘fundamental to the shaping and holding together of *all ways of life*’ (2010a: 2) (italics in the original), I argue that identity can also be considered to be fundamental to the shaping and holding together of a specific way of life which a specific identity is attached to.

In addition, I would also apply Storey’s characteristics of culture as a signifying system of meanings, which are not only shared but which are also contested, to identity. Consequently, in the formation of Englishness(es), meanings are not only common/shared within the same *community*, but they are also negotiated in a hegemonic play not only amongst the members of the tribe to form a ‘common’ identity, but also at an individual level too. These meanings, which are also contested, are presented and perceived as opposed to the ‘others’. As I will argue in this thesis, Englishness is too often presented to the world in a way that conveniently excludes some parts of English society, which are chosen to be presented as not belonging to Englishness. This hegemonic gesture demonstrates the attempt at imposing a particular image of Englishness to the detriment of others, in an effort to provide meanings which rest on dominance and subordination.

The constant negotiation of meanings involved in the formation of an individual’s identity makes it impossible to talk about identities as something absolute and fixed. This gives individuals a certain amount of freedom and room for manoeuvre according to particular interests or needs in specific circumstances. Nonetheless, as Colls argues, people need to make up ‘who they are *in sum*’ (italics in the original) (2002:174). According to him this construction is fostered by three elements. Firstly, he identifies the state, which possesses the institutional stamina and has the strong drive to have individuals identifying with it. Secondly, Colls talks about political processes, which he argues ‘force choices upon people’ (2002:174), which implies a simplification

of individuals' identity, a process in which people do not always feel they are completely in command of all the information needed in order to be able to make the choice. And last, 'people's own practical need for recognition' (2002:174) which is influenced by society and by the individual's possible pleasure derived from this identification.

However, and as Colls argues, this identification is not always possible, as Meera Syal's *Anita and Me* shows, where the main character, an English born girl whose parents had moved from Pakistan, could not identify with any of the identities around her. Meena did not feel she belonged with the English, but she did not feel she could fit in with the more traditional side of her Pakistani family and their traditions. Another example of this is offered in the film *East is East* where the children of an English woman and a Pakistani father also feel torn between the two parental cultures. Although most of the couple's children identified more with an English identity, society did not seem to welcome them. This exclusion is visible in the neighbourhood, with Powellite¹⁸ neighbours making them feel as outsiders. Hence these characters are presented alongside their constant search for identity and belonging, constantly manoeuvring and negotiating their personal identity.

Identities are thus perceived and presented as unfinished, mobile, fluid and always in constant change. This makes of the idea of nation and identity a very wide and complex term in which there exist overlapping and sometimes even antagonising categories. The idea of nation or identity cannot from my point of view be understood as a monolithic but rather as a heterogeneous entity. The same individual then could identify with different categories and could combine them at her/his pleasure. Thus, the essence of an individual's identity would consist of an amalgam of categories. This brings me to the idea of postmodernity, given that identity can also metaphorically bear some resemblance with a member of the postmodern 'clan':

[...] the members of the postmodern clan resemble each other in the overlapping way that family members do; two members may share the same eye colour, one of these may have the same ears as a third, the third may have the same hair colour as a fourth, and so on and so forth. (Cahoon 1996: 1)

¹⁸ Supporters of Enoch Powell.

Cahoon's description of the postmodern thinker fits in with the characteristics of the members of a same group identity. Whereas a group of people may share the same national identity, there will be many small differences amongst the various individuals.

Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that there exists some discrepancy about what the postmodern is. However, there are certain postmodern traits that are associated with descriptions of postmodernity in general terms. Thematically, postmodernists tend to favour 'representation' and 'construction' rather than 'presentation' or 'presence', 'phenomena' as opposed to 'origin', 'plurality' against 'unity' and the 'immanence' of norms rather than their 'transcendence' (Cahoon 1996: 14). This commonality – and being too simplistic given that the wide range of postmodernist approaches that there exist makes it almost impossible to come up with a satisfactory description that would fit them all – comes according to Cahoon from:

[...] a recognition of pluralism an indeterminacy in the world [...] a new focus on representation or images or information or cultural signs as occupying a dominant position in social life; and an acceptance of play and fictionalization in cultural fields that had earlier sought a serious, realist truth. (1996: 4)

This rebellion against modernism that sought for an objective truthful analysis of the world through sciences is not however a negation of all constructive positive thought on the part of postmodernism, and an attempt to reject Western civilization completely. This is a stance that postmodernists inherited and adapted from structuralists and that is only held in such a strong way by some postmodernist thinkers. More relevant to this interpretation would be the type of postmodernism, which according to Cahoon, is known as methodological postmodernism,¹⁹ which completely defeats any possibility of the existence of any foundations of any valid knowledge as far as reality is concerned, a kind of knowledge that would contain the truth of its object.

Even though from a postmodern perspective, I do not attempt to carry out a methodological postmodern analysis of Englishness, that is, I do not attempt to merely show the inadequacy or indeed problematic nature of putting forward any kind of representation(s). Nevertheless, I am undoubtedly interested in the problematic involved in the blind acceptance of a too simplistic and essentialist perception and representation of Englishness. My aim is that of analysing such representations applying postmodern themes in my analysis so as to offer a renewed postmodern vision or understanding of

¹⁹ Cahoon talks about three main types of postmodernism, *historical*, *methodological*, and *positive postmodernism*.

the subject matter in question. In doing so, I will now turn my attention towards Stuart Hall and how he describes identity, using Derrida's terminology and ideas, as a term 'under erasure', which works in 'a sort of double writing' where essentialist terminology is used, given the lack of better terms, albeit dispossessed of 'the paradigm in which they were originally generated' (Hall 2000: 16).

Identity is a term which cannot be used with its old traditional meaning, associated to the straight forward monolithic meaning which has often been used throughout history as a unifying force/cause, but which at the same time is necessary in order to understand some key question about nationalism and Englishness. This idea of 'double writing' brings me to Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and a very similar idea, that of 'doublethink', or as it is described in the novel 'the labyrinthine world of doublethink' (Orwell 2000:37). 'Doublethink' is the strategy used by 'the party' to deceive, to tell lies and believing in them when specific facts are inconvenient and need to be erased or modified. In fact, Winston's job (the main character) is that of changing/erasing history in every single existing archive when required. The description of 'doublethink' in the novel is as follows:

To know and not to know, to be conscious of complete truthfulness while telling carefully-constructed lies, to hold simultaneously two opinions which cancelled out, knowing them to be contradictory and believing in both of them; to use logic, [...] to forget whatever it was necessary to forget, then to draw it back into memory again at the moment when it was needed, and then promptly to forget it again: and above all, to apply the same process to the process itself. (Orwell 2000:37)

Being able to master 'doublethink' means being able to 'understand' that if the party says so, two plus two equals five, that black is white, or that 'WAR IS PEACE' (as one of the slogans of 'the party' runs), just to mention a few examples. This implies purposefully and consciously making use of 'doublethink' to change or modify a fact to later erase this fact itself, so that the end result is an honest, heart in hand 'two plus two equals five'. Similarly talking of Englishness from an essentialist standpoint is to make use of a kind of 'doublethink', whereby the fact that those White-Anglo-Saxons who proclaim themselves to be a pure race are negating the very fact that Anglo-Saxon means Anglos and Saxons 'mixed' together. It is to forget about history and the way different races and cultures have mixed in the past to have a heterogeneous people and rich culture, and it is to negate all those new changes taking place in England and which are and will keep changing the face of Englishnesses. Whether this is the result of

ignorance or a conscious effort does not change matters, given that, as it is the case in Orwell's novel, not everyone is aware or reflects on this matter.

Thus, from a non-essentialist point of view, I will be talking about Englishnesses, that is, different versions of English identity, all of which are valid and worthy of consideration. This will in turn entail the identification of Englishnesses to the detriment of Englishness, in what will become the latter's no identification or de-identification. As I have already mentioned, identity or rather the process of creating an identity is constructed upon, and dependent on, the exclusion of others, namely, Scottish, Welsh, Irish, Europeans, Americans, South Africans, Australians, Canadians, Asians, etc. However, in this process of exclusion many who live and are in fact part of what makes England 'England' are left out. English society nowadays is undoubtedly multicultural and multi-ethnic, and this is a fact that should not be filtered through 'doublethink', but that should be acknowledged when talking about Englishnesses.

Similarly, notwithstanding the fact that I want to emphasize the individualistic character of identities, in certain cases I feel it necessary to refer in more general terms to different communities as a set of categories, all of them under the main category of 'English', thus I will be referring to 'Asian-English', 'Caribbean-English', 'English Northerner' etc. all in quotation marks due to the fact that these are not absolute closed categories but points of reference in my study, given that intermarriage/coupling has contributed to the blurring of their boundaries (Twine, 2010; Okitikpi, 2009; Ziv, 2006; Kennedy, 2003). I will also at times refer to 'black English', 'white English' and 'mixed-race English', not as a description of individuals' complexion but as another category that individuals might or might not identify with. However, I will not use these terms to describe homogeneous groups of individuals since these categories mingle and coexist in different individuals in many different ways and degrees. Black here is considered a '*political* colour' associated to identity, which comes into existence in a white English world (Mehmood 5:2008). The use of inverted commas is purposeful, and they must be understood as scare quotes, given that I am aware of the dangers of labelling, which reduce complex individuals to reductionist stereotypes.

Some references will also be made to gender and to sexuality as different categories. Gender as the physical characteristic human beings are born with, and sexuality as the social construction which humans develop, and that comes to show in their sexual orientation (Spargo, 2000; Butler, 2004; Nigianni; Storr 2009). I will be making reference to sexual identities using the umbrella term 'queer' to refer to

anything other than heteronormative identities (Freccer, 2011; Goldman, 1996). Nonetheless, I am aware of the fact that this term is not free from controversy given that many have argued its unsuitability and over-generalising character. However, I will not go into details in this aspect given that it would distract me from the main objective of this thesis.

3.2. The British-English Synonymy/Dichotomy: Choosing ‘Out’

When people say England, they sometimes mean Great Britain, sometimes the United Kingdom, sometimes the British Isles – but never England. (Mikes 1973:14)

This quotation from Georges Mikes’ *How to be an Alien* is a sample of the existing problematic with the terms ‘British’ and ‘English’. Though I have not mentioned it as a statement to be held as the ultimate truth, I believe its relevance comes from the questions readers are invited to make themselves about the way England, Great Britain and the United Kingdom are sometimes used inaccurately. So before I go on any further, I believe this to be a matter worthy of mention at this early stage of this study, and which at the same time is very telling about the idea of Englishness(es). As the title of this section describes, I have identified both a British-English synonymy and a British-English dichotomy. The British-English synonymy/dichotomy, brings me to two antagonistic and coexisting experiences of identity: the British-English synonymy where these two terms are in ‘convenient’ occasions confused and/or used interchangeably, and the British-English dichotomy where these two terms are presented and perceived as completely different and at times even opposed.

It is undeniable that there seems to exist a British-English synonymy, where both terms can be seen as one and the same thing, and can therefore be used interchangeably, a mishap which seems to be performed, more often than not, by the English and foreigners alike, as opposed to the rest of British people, (Langford 2001: 12). Therefore, it seems feasible to encounter an instance where an English individual would use the word ‘English’ when what he/she really refers to is ‘British’. This is what Kumar identifies as ‘England’s hegemony over the rest of the British Isles’ (Kumar 2003:1), a mistake that both English and outsiders seem to make according to him. In

fact, I myself have been witness to Spanish football commentators referring to the Scottish as English on Spanish national television.²⁰

Some examples of how writers seem to make this mistake, can be found in Paxman's *England, England* (2003) and according to Mergenthal in Aslet's *Anyone for England?* Similarly, whether it is a mistake or a very purposeful act, in *The English* Paxman seems to switch from 'British' to 'English' and vice-versa when apparently talking about the same event. For example, when talking about the Second World War, Paxman remarks on how the 'English' won the war against Hitler when he had originally started this argument by referring to the 'British'. He starts remarking on the way in which Churchill inspired patriotism by talking about Britain and the British Empire, mentioning values which Paxman identifies as 'values which the English liked to think were something which they had invented' (1999:2). In this instance, was he mixing them up? Or was he really trying to say that in order to motivate the British in general, Churchill used 'English' values to the detriment of 'British' ones? Or are they all believed to be the same? These are questions which lead to the realisation of the complexities involved in the definition, comparison and differentiation of those two terms. In this respect, Colls argues that '[...] up to very recent times, learning to be English and learning to be British were more or less taken for granted as being roughly the same thing' (2000: 377). As he implies, this similarity and almost synonymous relation between British and English is something of the past. Nowadays, I would say it is more accurate to talk about the British-English dichotomy.

When thinking about the British and/or English there are differing views regarding their meaning and relevance to society. Some argue one or the other is the prevailing one, the one associated to nationalism, or the one which incites tolerance, xenophobia, patriotism, inclusion, etc. Thus there already exists a certain disagreement. My argument however, is that not only are Britain and England completely different, but that at times they are presented and perceived as opposites. This dichotomy comes into existence from the way in which to those non-English individuals who can be labelled as British, these two are opposed terms which they will most probably never mix up or get confused (Langlands, 1999). In this way, I would say that it is very unlikely, not to say almost impossible, to find a Welsh, Scottish or Irish (Northern Ireland) individual calling him/herself English when what she/he means is British. A

²⁰ It was the year 1998, and I was watching the Scots play with some English friends, when the commentators labelling of the Scottish as English caused a bit of a stir.

feeling of Scottish, Welsh or Irish national identity tends to be presented and perceived as *not* English, in the same way as Scottish is *not* Welsh and *not* Irish, notwithstanding the fact that they can all be said to be British. In this way, some may prefer to describe themselves as English as opposed to British purposefully excluding themselves from this imagined community that is Britain (Duffy, 2001).

However, some argue that there are occasions in which English individuals would choose to call themselves British as opposed to English, in order to distance themselves from the image usually associated with Englishness. Mikes in his *How to Be an Alien* remarks on how foreigners are and will always be considered in England according to him, and says that '[a] foreigner cannot improve. Once a foreigner, always a foreigner. There is no way out for him. He may become British; he can never become English' (1966:12). This is something which today in the twenty first century, still seems to be of some relevance in England.

On the other hand, 'British' is often the chosen term to refer to individuals living in Britain who have non-English origins, due to its more inclusive nature (Fox 2004:17; Scruton 2000:4; Hundal 2010). A very recent real life example of this can be seen on the RSA (Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufacturers and Commerce) and the Samosa project launched in 2013, called *Pakistan Calling*. This web page sets out to provide a forum for young film-makers in Pakistan, and to offer a platform for constructive cross-cultural dialogue between Pakistan and Britain, in order to challenge perceptions of today's Pakistan. In this page there is a documentary about a twenty four year old London born and bred boy whose parents live now in Pakistan. This award-winning documentary²¹ is labelled 'Postcards from Lahore – A young British man's journey to the place of his origins', when in reality being a Londoner, he could have been described as English.²²

Too often *Englishness* has been associated to an ethnically pure and white image, that of 'a white community with an imagined 1,000 years of common history' (Denham 2012) and also to fascism and football hooliganism (Shields 2010). This understanding of the English identity does not allow for the inclusion of any ethnic diversity. In fact in a recent survey, when asked to choose between English or British, only fourteen per cent of Asians considered themselves 'hyphenated-English' or

²¹ It won an Honorable Mention Laurel in the Best Short Documentary category in Los Angeles Movie Awards, was directed by Aatif Nawaz and Sawas Papasawa, and produced by Aatif Nawaz.

²² Information retrieved from: <http://www.thersa.org/events/video/pkcalling-videos/pkcalling-videos/postcards-from-lahore-a-young-british-mans-journey-to-the-place-of-his-origins>.

English, rather than British.²³ Added to which, as Alibhai-Brown points out, this image of the predominantly white English also leaves some English individuals – independently of their ethnic origins – no option but to choose ‘out’, in fear of giving a parochial image of themselves, and in an attempt to detach themselves from the image of the neo-Powellite hooligan which is usually associated with English identity (Alibhai-Brown 2002: 47, Katwala 2012). Thus, in a gesture of domination and subordination, those who have been excluded from the English category would concede and choose to call themselves British.

Still on the topic of ‘choosing’ between the English or British label, in his book *The English: a Portrait of a People*, Paxman argues that ‘apart from at a few football and cricket matches, England scarcely exists as a country: nationalism was, and remains, a *British* thing’ (Paxman 1999:14). Although he seems to agree with the argument presented above whereby Englishness is sometimes neglected, given that people do not seem to choose to identify with it, his argument about the weakness of Englishness does not seem to correlate with the existing concern about the delimitation and definition of Englishness. Paxman argues that England as such is not associated to a strong feeling of national identity. It could be argued that the case is the exact opposite. Others put this rejection of the term English down to the fact that it is precisely the existing strong traditional nationalistic image associated to ‘England’ that prevents individuals from ethnic and anti-racist backgrounds from identifying with Englishness (Alibhai-Brown 2002; Shields 2010; Denham 2012). Consequently, they argue that when it comes to evoking more passions, the label ‘English’ will be more successful to the detriment of the term ‘British’.

As I remarked earlier, and I will invariably be mentioning it again, identity is formed through a process of inclusion, but also through exclusion in relation to the other and to what an individual/community is *not*. Arguably, I would contend that in general, say a Scottish individual’s sense of Scottish identity would most likely be stronger than his/her shared feeling of connection with a British individual from Northern Ireland, Wales and England, as it would be the case for the Northern Irish, Welsh and English themselves. Notwithstanding occasions like the 2012 Olympics where the British flag seemed to be a unifying icon in what became a very successful sports event for Britain, where thousands of individuals across the UK celebrated their victories together.

²³ *The Trust Fear and Hope Report*, carried out by the Searchlight Educational Trust in 2011.

Another argument which supports the idea of the British-English dichotomy can be found in Duffy's *England: the Making of the Myth from Stonehenge to Albert Square*. Duffy argues that one of the characteristics of English identity is precisely that it 'had first developed in opposition to the British' (2001: 33). Thus, this identity initially defines itself in a statement that is dependently related to the *other* and the identification with what the individual *is not*. This is therefore a starting point as an identity of exclusion that leaves out Wales, Scotland, Ireland and the colonies. Within this frame of thought, she gives an overview of her perception of England and its people that she delivers in the first person plural, including and identifying herself within the group of people she is describing. David Powell also acknowledges this tendency to exclusion in his book *Nationhood and Identity*. Powell gives an account of how, despite kings' and leaders' attempts to unify Great Britain, Britishness is very much associated with conflicting relations between England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland and the colonies (2002: 66). These conducts are a visible part of contemporary British society in the media.

Although some have remarked on the tendency to praise English patriotism, imperialism, royalism and even jingoism to the detriment of English nationalism, given the negative connotations associated to the latter (Newman, 1987 and Hastings, 1997), the feelings of belonging and pride towards one's nation associated to all these terms are very similar. Besides, as will be revealed throughout this study, expressions of identity can be found in the form of all the above-mentioned expressions of national 'pride'.

Whichever label is chosen to define different expressions of identity, what is remarkable is the fact that there has been a resurgence of English patriotism (Stapleton, 2005a and 2005b; Stone, 2003) with Saint George's flags being hung from windows or in pubs, which is not only visible in some areas of England, but it is something which newspapers have also reported, as the journalist Max Hastings affirms in 2006 in the *Mail Online*, in his article 'England Stirs...'. Often this English pride is associated to a non-inclusive version of England and some are reluctant to embrace it for this very reason. It is relevant to mention here that this newspaper has, on occasions, been described as not being very tolerant and inclusive towards ethnicities, as some academics argue (Gilroy, 1987; Alibhai-Brown, 2000). It is also possible to find in the media many examples of how the Saint George's flag is associated to racism, and there seems to be a tendency on the part of the English to try to avoid it, in order to distance

themselves from the racist pride the red cross flag seems to be associated with (Copping, 2012; Gosh, 2013; Benwell, 2014; Saint George's Day, 2015). Notwithstanding these existing associations, it is also possible to find examples in the media of how this is not always so, such is the case in football, when waving an England flag is an act performed when Danny Wellbeck or Daniel Sturridge²⁴ score a goal, while proudly wearing the red cross of St. George on their chests (Jeffries, 2014). This proves that reducing the English flag to a racist or intolerant act would be too simplistic an understanding of this symbol. Nonetheless, it is important to be aware of these different connotations associated to it.

For this reason, Ed Milliband himself, the ex-Minister of Parliament (MP) and leader of the labour party, in an interview to BBC News on 7th June 2012, talked about this resurgent patriotism and the constant association of racism to the flag of Saint George. He acknowledged this tendency towards this excluding nationalism and appealed for the English not to 'shudder' about getting the flag of St. George out, in an attempt to encourage English individuals from different ethnicities to embrace Englishness, leaving aside the idea of the non-inclusive, mostly white image of England (Mair, 2012). In fact, he started off his speech by talking about his Jewish origins and his Jewish-London identity.

Ed Milliband advocated for the possibility and the need to embrace English and British at the same time, in doing so he criticises the Scottish National Party's (SNP) attitude, which according to him encourages individuals to feel Scottish to the detriment of British, according to him the SNP's argument presents the dichotomy whereby being Scottish would imply a rejection of Britishness.

Having considered the problematic of the synonymy/dichotomy, it is also undeniable that one could use the term British when describing the English, given that the former is an all inclusive term in which the English are irrevocably included. In fact, I have encountered this throughout my research in more than one occasion, and it is something I myself 'imitate' sometimes for the purpose of citation and reference.

3.3. Englishness(es) (De)Identified

²⁴ Two black England-born football players. Wellbeck's parents are both from Ghana and Sturridge is from Jamaican descent.

Before analysing and studying Englishness I would like to focus briefly on its origins, which to my view is very telling of its development. First of all it is remarkable how for some it has to do with an event, an individual representative of a 'race', a mythical story, the development of the language, etc. Therefore as a starting point I must decide and *choose* which of these to rely on in order to explore the birth of Englishness. The difficulty of being able to put a date/name/event to the (re)creation of Englishness is quite clear.

Some argue that Englishness can be traced back to the sixth century when Pope Gregory, astounded by the beauty of the slaves he saw, called them the Angles. The Pope said their beauty was almost angelic and decided to send missionaries to convert those beautiful peoples (Hills, 2006: 14). Edwin Jones talks about Bede (673-735 AD) as the first 'great English' man (2003: 3), although he proves his awareness of the deficiencies of blindly believing and taking history as the basis of the imagined community's collective memory, given that he acknowledges that this can be manipulated for personal or state purposes (Jones 2003: xiii). The historian novelist Peter VanSittart in his *In Memory of England* (1998) offers an idealized version of England, which he argues goes back to the mythical land of Albion of King Arthur and Merlin. Colls states that England has existed ever since 937 AD, when Edmund and Aethelstan, Alfred's grandsons defeated the Northumbrians (2000: 380). Similarly, Sawyer suggests the beginning of English as intimately connected with religion, and more specifically with the English conversion to Christianity in the seventh century.

Others locate the birth of Englishness in the year 1066 with William the Conqueror's victory, an English king who never spoke English. Wood identifies the birth of the English State in the Early Middle Ages, in the ninth and tenth centuries, when some traits of English identity appear (2001: xi). In other cases a sense of 'pure' English identity is strongly linked to the Anglo-Saxon past (BBC 2004 "Birthplace of Englishness 'found'", 2004; Ackroyd, 2004; Langford 2001)²⁵ an already multi-ethnic hyphenated inclusive term in itself. However, focusing on the word itself, it could be argued that 'Englishness' is a relatively new invention as Langford puts forward. According to him, the term 'Englishness' dates back to 1805 when William Taylor of Norwich started using it. Ironically enough, Taylor seems to have been the one to coin this term, or so the records seem to suggest, when talking about his own 'un-

²⁵ When talking about the English manners and character, Langford refers to the 'Anglo-Saxon nature' (Langford, 2001: 313)

Englishness'. (Langford, 2001:1). Pinpointing the 'birth' of Englishness proves to be a pretty difficult task.

When it comes to the understanding and description of Englishness, there exist, as I have already mentioned, many interpretations, which translate into an array of Englishnesses resulting in the 'de-identification' of Englishness and the identification of Englishnesses. English national identity can be associated and presented in relation to a wide range of aspects varying from language to schooling, politics, regionalism, cinema, poetry etc, as Higgins shows in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern British Cultures* (2010). Similarly, English essence is and has been associated with one thing or another using as a point of reference a range of objects as varied as beef, landscape or the personality of the English people.

Ben Rogers associates Englishness with beef in his book: *Beef and Liberty: Roast Beef, John Bull and the English Nation*. He talks about how in the eighteenth century beef eating became an infallible sign of Englishness, something which he believes dates as far back as the sixteenth century. An example of this can be seen according to him in Shakespeare's *Henry V*. He argues that it was while James I was on the throne that the Yeomen of the Guard became known as Beefeaters, due to the large rations of beef allotted to them. It was during the eighteenth century when French travellers named the English *les rosbifs*. Others associate *Englishness* with water, whether it is from the sky, from the Thames or from the sea. Such is the case in Stephen Croad's *Liquid History: The Thames Through Time*, and Peter Unwin's *The Narrow Sea: Barrier, Bridge and Gateway to the World – The History of the English Channel*.

Englishness is often associated to landscape and more specifically to the countryside, as Hitchens points out in *The Abolition of Britain* (1999: 104). With regard to this feeling of grievance, some mourn its disappearance or deterioration. In a melancholic view of the English, Harvey mourns the disappearance of the countryside, which for him also implies the death of part of English culture, in *The Killing of the Countryside* (1996). Staying with the feeling of sorrow, John Redwood grieves over a loss of political independence in Britain in his *The Death of Britain?* (1999).

On other occasions class divisions and Englishness are often linked. Charles Jennings in *People Like Us* gives a detailed image of the essence of the English upper classes, where people were classified according to schools, and accents (1998). David Cannidine, too, identifies social class as an important part of society in his *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, where he mourns the death of the class system

(1990). In his *Class in Britain*, Cannadine goes as far as affirming that it is ‘a generally held belief, not just in Britain, but around the world, that class, like the weather and the monarchy, is a peculiarly and particularly British preoccupation’ (2000:1).

Some even associate Englishness with some kind of supernatural condition; in his *The English: Are they Human?* G. J. Renier comes to the conclusion that they are not, specially the upper classes (1931). Others focus on language and its evolution like Melvyn Bragg in *The Adventure of English* (2003) and David Crystal in *The Stories of English* (2004).

So far, a sense of melancholy has made itself present in relation to certain descriptions of Englishnesses, where a sense of loss is emphasized. Similarly, many have mourned, and still today grieve for the death of England in the new changing world, where a sense of Englishness has disappeared or is perishing (Scruton, 2000; VanSittart, 1998; Proud, 1994; Daudy, 1991; Harvey, 1998; Redwood, 1999; Aslett, 1997; Barnes, 1998; Davies, 2007; Cannadine, 1990 and 2000). This pessimistic vision of Englishness seems to take for granted that Englishness existed as something pure, something good that time and people have spoiled, where an idealized past takes the leading role in this peculiar (re)presentation of England. These representations tend to favour a past which was always better. This takes me to what I call the mo(u)ning of Englishness. Where through mourning the past, an idealized version of Englishness is put forth, which is in turn a new version of Englishness, whereby we could say ‘morning!’ to Englishness, given that a new re-presentation is welcomed.

All in all, the study of England and the English is very prolific, proved by the many existing accounts on Englishness. One of the earlier accounts of Englishness I will refer to was written back in the early 1940s, and was entitled *The English People*, where Orwell put forward his perception of these, his people. He gave a list of what according to him were eight national characteristics. These characteristics were: a lack of interest in the arts, a capacity for gentleness, a respect towards law, a suspicion about foreigners, a love for animals to the point of hypocrisy, hypocrisy itself also listed as one of the characteristics, the way in which the English seemed to be riddled by class divisions, and their appeal to games, in particular football (Orwell, 1947). Orwell also identified a tendency towards a fall of the birth rate, which was to change England in a few years to come.

Only some time later in 1948, the *Empire Windrush* arrived from Jamaica bringing with it the first major wave of immigrants, which was to be the beginning of

the flow of post-war immigration coming from the colonies. This immigration was partially the result of the ageing of society and the consequent urge for a bigger labour force. Albeit the change that immigration had on the English population and keeps having nowadays, still today it is possible to find recent publications which offer a rather simplistic and oversimplifying view of England not far from that given by Orwell, one that does not account for variety, difference and multiculturalism, a contemporary characteristic of many places in England. This shows a tendency to cling on to the past, where everything was 'simpler', idealising it in an almost chivalric version of itself.

As Gervais argues in his study of Englishness through literary writings, there exist different versions of Englishness in which the 'private country of the mind and the real country are split' (1996: 270). Often, writers and academics alike tend to focus on one or the other, the mind, which could also be described as the 'spirit/ imagined' community or the 'real'. These two are often very different and at times even antagonistic. Thus, it is important to never lose sight of both these views, in order to better understand and comprehend more accurately the *real* state of Englishness. And by *real* I mean a more accurate, closer to today's England. This *real* state would imply a combination of the imagined and the actual situation the country is in, to cater for multiculturalism and ethnicities, as well as considering their influence on Englishness.

3.4. The (Re)-creation of a Nation: Mo(u)rning England

As I have already mentioned the re-creation of England leads towards a creation of different versions of England. In this section I will look at some of these recreations. The material selected here has been chosen on the basis that the works studied, overtly and explicitly, set out to describe Englishness. As seen from the title these recreations involve a process of mo(u)rning of England. As we have already seen many have and still mourn the death or disappearance of a better long-gone England. This process implies the action of (re)-creating. An idealised dying or deceased version is recreated in what invariably is a re-creation of England, given that it is a creation of an ideal or myth, which as a representation of a nation was created in the first place. Thus it would be a recreation of a creation, a creation which is intimately related to the 'spirit/imagined' community.

When it comes to looking at the nation as the ‘spirit/imagined’ community, we often end up with an idealized almost mythical view. In fact, many have linked Englishness to myth, whether it is implicitly or explicitly (Porter, 1992; VanSittart, 1998; Duffy, 2001; Wood, 2001; Morton, 2002). In *Myths of the English*, Porter devotes the first part of his book to explore the ways in which English ideas on identity, communal experience and history are transmitted through myth (1992). After all, it is undeniable that myth plays an important part in the formation of identity. In his *In Search of England* Wood states that ‘myth plays just as important a part in the construction of identity as does historical fact’ (2001: xxii), so much so that he believes it is often not an easy task to tell them apart. However, when it comes to English myths Wood seems a little sceptical when he says:

Unlike the Celts, the Irish and the Welsh, one might suspect that the English have not real myths. There is, after all, no ‘English mythology’ section in bookshops [...] The so-called myths of the English, in fact, are really about the English State and Englishness itself: kings and queens, the Mother of Parliaments, the Tower and Beefeaters, Merrie England, and so on. (1992: 43)

Wood reflects on the lack of ‘English mythology’ at the time he states its presence in so many spheres of English life. In this case, England/Englishness and myth would be intimately related. This is a vision of nation which has often been put forth with relation to English identity.

Maureen Duffy, uses myths as her principal point of reference in her *England: the Making of the Myth from Stonehenge to Albert Square*. She offers an image of England based on myth and on the idea that ‘the myths we tell ourselves are as important as the facts’ (Duffy, 2001: xiii), facts that, she argues, together with fiction ‘interweave to give us the stuff of our dreams’ (Duffy, 2001: 20). Therefore, if facts are history or more precisely historical facts, these mix with our fiction or myths in order to provide us with an ideal, another myth. Thus, according to Duffy, the myth of England is the product of both, a set of historic events and a set of conventions or ideals that individuals create.

One of the characteristics of the English identity is, she argues, that it ‘had first developed in opposition to the British’ (Duffy, 2001: 33). Thus, and as it has already been mentioned earlier in this thesis, this identity initially defines itself in a statement that is dependently related to the *other* and the identification with what the individual *is not*. This is therefore a starting point as an identity of exclusion that excludes Wales,

Scotland, Ireland and the colonies. Within this frame of thought, she gives an overview of her perception of England and its people that she delivers in the first person plural including and identifying herself within the group of people she's describing.

Duffy, like many others, (Orwell and E. M. Forster to just mention a couple) seems to identify in the English character a certain inhibition towards physical contact and the expression of feelings when she says: 'we are the least touchy-feely of people' (Duffy 2001: 252), which in general terms seems to include men and women. She restates this coldness in the male English character when she lists what she calls the 'supposed virtues of an English gentleman', which she identifies with: '... good manners, aloofness combined with clubableness, the restrained exercise of power, a disinclination to sex and an ambiguous defeat from which he pulls a kind of victory' (2001: 20). Thus the English male individual is not only polite, distant and passion does not seem to be one of his assets, but he is also disengaged. A man not inclined to abuse his power, with an irrepressible drive to move forwards from adversity.

Added to this, Duffy also identifies the English as people who would nonetheless attribute themselves with the creation of something that is in reality a development of somebody else's invention. This plays an important role in the reconstruction of Englishness. According to her, the English credit themselves with the reinvention of democracy with Parliament and the Magna Carta, although it was in fact the Greeks who invented them (Duffy, 2001: 70).

This image of the English gentleman seems to me to be very much like that of Orwell and Forster, who identify the English male with that of the male colonial individual, which to my understanding seems to be a bit simplistic and an over generalizing way of describing the English males. On the other hand, this depiction of the Englishman seems to focus on a specific social class, that of the upper echelons of society.²⁶ In her description there does not seem to be any acknowledgement of the ethnic variety that now is such an important part of the male landscape in England. However, this does not seem to be the same for English women.

When describing the female counterpart, albeit initially giving a generalized physical description of English women as the pale Anglo-Saxon type, she acknowledges ethnic diversity when she says: 'Most of us are as the cartoonists show us: short, pale and lumpy, only recently bettered by the addition of African or Asian Genes and an

²⁶ I will deal with the existence or not of social classes and their description further on in this thesis.

improved lifestyle' (Duffy, 2001: 207). Here she states that the majority of English women comply with the physical description of a white English woman, though she acknowledges the existence of other ethnic *minorities'* genes. I want to stress the fact that she refers here to a minority given that in her description she explicitly refers to a majority of the women. Later on she refers to the globalizing images of women and the expectations they create on females all around the world. In her book, by the end of the section that she dedicates to English women entitled *Sugar and Spice*, she playfully says that the majority of women want to be like Naomi Campbell, to then add that, to the impossibility of achieving such a thing they have to suffice themselves with:

[...] at least aspire to be a long-stemmed English rose: blonde, peach-complexioned, 'with legs that start under her armpits'; even against the looking-glass reality that the average English woman's height is 5 feet and 5 inches and her average clothes size is 14. (2001: 209)

In this later statement she seems to disregard the acknowledgement of the *other* and she adheres to her own personal identity and physical appearance, which, albeit in a jokingly way, remains mainly white.

Another unifying factor, which adds to the ones already mentioned, in the reconstruction of the English myth is, according to her, the need that people experiment at times to come together, and she gives a list of those reasons which according to her unify the English. She says:

It can be a war, a disaster, or simply a community of experience which may express itself as a regiment, a leek-growing club or the annual service of Remembrance at the Cenotaph. We have to communicate through practical channels. A dose of alcohol in a pub or club traditionally oils the wheels. (Duffy, 2001: 161).

It is remarkable how alcohol is referred to here as a useful aid when it comes to socialising, a recurring theme in this thesis as we will see. But going back to the reason to be united, basically these reasons, although having a different nature, can be grouped in two categories; some of them are ludicrous, whereas the others are about survival, that of unifying strengths in order to overcome difficulties easier. Others have also commented on how war is a unifying force (Chesshyre, 2012: 8). David Powell also remarks on this tendency towards unification in relation to World War I, although he refers to the unity it conferred to Britain rather than England (2002:139), he also points out how despite the sense of Britishness, Scotland, Ireland and Wales also had their own

sense of nationhood even if this was less vigorous than before the war (Powell 2002: 150).

Regarding ludicrous unifying forces, Duffy points towards gardening, which she suggests ‘might be the final manifestation of the freeborn Englishman’ (2001: 151). McKay on the other hand, considers gardens and their importance in relation to expressing identity politics (2013). In his *Radical Gardening* he talks about the politics of gardening, and how this can be used as an act of construction of national identity, which he believes takes place especially during fascism. Proud, in her *Consider England*, also remarks on the importance of gardening for the English (1994: 10). Fox even describes gardening as ‘probably the most popular hobby in the country’, in her *Watching the English* (2004:129) she justifies this by explaining that two-thirds of English can be described as ‘active gardeners’. Proof of this is the existence of the several gardening programmes and blogs across the media. Just to give a couple of examples, we find *Gardeners’ Question Time*, a BBC radio Four programme, which was first broadcasted on 9th April 1947 and is still running nowadays²⁷, and *Gardener’s World*, which is a television programme broadcast on BBC Two²⁸.

Going back to the use of the ideal in the description of England and Englishness, we can find many more works, such is the case of Roger Scruton’s re-creation of Englishness. In his book *England: an Elegy*, Scruton states that ‘... England furnished [English people] ... with ideals, and the English people acquired some of the gentleness, amiability and civilised manners which that ideal prescribed’, and what the English people have become is according to him ‘a proof that ideals are important’ (Scruton, 2000: ix). Thus, ideals are not only created by societies but they also influence them. Another account of *Englishness*, which also relies on the importance of myth in the re-creation of England, is Robert Colls’ *Identity of England*. He argues that ‘too simple a distinction between history and myth’ could not account for how English identity makes use of both categories as ‘forms of truth’ (Colls, 2002: 7).

In his portrayal of England Colls starts off by referring to Orwell’s portrayal of the English in ‘The English People’, to then add that things have changed so much that it is not possible to compare his own view with that of Orwell. His book, he argues, does not attempt to compare the English identity from the past to the present one, but to

²⁷ *Gardeners’ Questions Time* is broadcast on Sundays at 14:00 and lasts about an hour. A podcast is also available.

²⁸ This television programme also has a website and a monthly magazine.

deal with both of them by establishing some connection between the way in which the present generation in England perceives itself as English, and how they perceive the English identity of Orwell's times. He stresses the fact that the present generation of English people 'stand now in need of a reassessment of who they are' and to satisfy this need he gives an account of 'who they were with present needs in mind' (Colls, 2002: 6).

In fact, when talking about the relation of the English with sport, Colls identifies this to be an enduring characteristic of its people, nonetheless he identifies and explains the changing nature of this connection. To begin with, the English gentleman could be defined, according to Colls, by his love for sport. In the nineteenth century this love became almost a national service with middle classes involved in it too. In the later part of the twentieth century, sport goes from being associated with character to being associated simply with success, where it becomes a financial activity linked to sponsorship and marketing. In this case, what could have been identified once as a national characteristic of the English, a love of sport, has now become a financial activity where the English gentleman is forced to 'move on, or adapt' (Colls, 2002: 179).

Continuing with the topic of sports, Julian Norridge also remarks on the importance of sports at the time he identifies some sports as something which was once associated with the higher ranks, namely horse racing, which later was taken up by the masses and made into an excuse for betting, which in turn became the fuel that started up drunkenness and fighting (2008). Moreover, Norridge identifies the introduction of some sports into public schools as a way of channelling students' aggression into a unifying desire to make their side win.

Going back to the mythical side to Englishness, Edwin Jones offers a different view of the English myth in his *The English Nation*, where the myth of England is according to him based on a lie constructed in the sixteenth century. Jones understands the influence of this mythical history, and its relation with the individual's formation of identity, which in turn plays a very important role in the creation and formation of a sense of community. He believes that the basis of English identity was established back in the sixteenth century, which he describes as follows:

This national memory became so deeply embedded in the mind of most English people that it became part of English folklore and one of the most powerful assumptions of

thought operating on the behaviour and outlook of the English people for over four Centuries. (2003: xiii)

Jones goes on to explain how this ‘propaganda’ has often been used by politicians in order to control the people. According to him, it is due to this misinterpretation of their history that the English forget they are Europeans. This is something which comes up in the newspapers regularly with headlines that talk about Europe as ‘them’ versus ‘us’ (the English), despite the fact that Britain is part of the European Union. However, this union is not complete given that Britain does not share the monetary system. Jones also remarks on how this sense of identity is associated to a feeling of specialness, superiority, otherness and self-sufficiency, which makes the English feel different from the rest. Many have pointed out the making of the English myth as based on inventions (Barczewski, 2005: 49; Brundage and Cosgrove, 2007; Maloney, 2010).

Paul Langford’s *Englishness Identified* is a study of Englishness mainly based on those characteristics identified with the English throughout history, rather than with the process of identification. In doing so, he pays special attention to foreigners and their views on the topic, given that despite the fact that they may not be able to offer an ‘objective’ testimony, theirs seems to be ‘disengaged’ (Langford, 2001). In doing so, he finds that Europe’s admiration throughout history towards England was based on its superiority in politics and the developments, which its society experienced, where England’s leitmotiv was innovation. This, Langford explains, is somehow paradoxical given that the English pay special attention to their past and traditions. He identifies this nostalgia and apparent obsession with the past as a symptomatic reaction towards all the changes and innovations experienced in England.

Langford also remarks on how often England’s success had been attributed to its people and for this reason by the 1800s, when studying the greatness of England, studies turned towards its people rather than their arsenals or laws. This in itself is problematic, given that to study English people it is necessary to decide first on which group/s of people to study, and this in turn implies also having to decide which echelon/s of the social class Englishness is going to be attributed and related to. As Langford points out, on the one hand class differences gave almost antagonistic images of Englishness, whereas on the other hand, foreigners seemed to identify a uniformity of manners which was not to be found on the continent (Langford, 2001: 5).

In his quest for the identification of Englishness, Langford finds that way back in the eighteenth century foreigners remarked on the feeling of crossing countries when they got to England. It seemed that the crossing of a frontier in Europe was a much milder transition. England and the English were perceived as considerably different than the rest of Europe. This difference is marked by an extensive list of characteristics of the English character. Langford finds that the ambiguities existing in the elements included in his description of the English character, and their evolution in relation to the purposes they have served throughout history are, according to him, where ‘the most interesting features of perception and self-perception are to be found’ (Langford, 2001: 27). These ambiguities are, to my understanding, a further argument towards the impossibility of presenting and believing in an English character as an essence, only pertaining to Englishness, given that some of the characteristics usually associated with the English give room to the double interpretation or as I mentioned earlier ‘double-think’, as Langford argues.

Turning towards the list of characteristics identified by Langford as characteristic of the English, sluggishness at home and at work seems to be one of them. To begin with, this seems to contrast with the image of the English as an entrepreneurial people who were forward-thinking and hard-working enough to mass an Empire. In fact he found that, as a consequence of the Empire, the Englishman²⁹ was presented and perceived as a ‘doer’ (Langford, 2001: 81). However, there is even more ambiguity to this, as Langford identifies this sluggishness could only be associated to London. Other nationalities remarked on how late a normal day started in London, compared to other European capitals and also about the way the workplace is not characterised by workers’ hard work, an image which can be said to be ‘validated’ by some contemporary comedy series such as *The Office*, *The Phone Shop* and *The IT Crowd*, where workers appear not to be doing much work at all, spending their time talking to each other or doing anything other than work. This is something that will also come up when we deal with the comedy series *Teachers*. However, Langford acknowledges the fact that this laziness was not associated to the industrialized north where workers had a completely different routine, they had really long working hours (Langford, 2001: 32).

This brings me to a further differentiating factor in terms of the English, the North-South divide. On this issue, Disraeli back in 1850 remarked on the impossibility

²⁹ At that time, the making of the empire was presented as being exclusively down to men, given that women were a much less present part of society then than they are nowadays.

of finding a truly shared English identity due to the existing differences between north and south (Disraeli, 1998). This is an issue widely discussed by many. Holder offers a very witty and funny account of this North-South divide in her *It's (No) Grim Up North*, where she takes into account both, northern and southern stereotypes, trying to dismantle them with an exaggerated account which invites to laughter, a book which she explains is aimed at those 'London-centric' individuals who think that life ends outside the M25. In fact it is not rare to hear someone saying, always in jovial jokey manner, that anything North of London is the North. Holder plays around with the idea of the underdeveloped, friendly northerner against the southerners' 'bad manners and funny way of talking' (2005:17). Hers is an account clearly taken from the northern perspective,³⁰ making fun of existing stereotypes. Less playfully, but along similar lines, Maconie also argues the case for the North in his *Pies and Prejudice: in Search of the North* (2008).

In a more serious tone, we find Russell's account: *Looking North*. This book is based on the belief that the images put forwards about 'the North', or what is often delimited as such, is greatly 'under-examined' (2004: 3). Russell carries out an academic research on existing writing about northern identity and the England of the North, combining it with his own investigation on those areas, which according to him, had been neglected in the past. In doing so, he takes as the focus of his study, that is, as 'the North': Cheshire, Cumberland, Durham, Lancashire, Northumberland, Westmorland and Yorkshire.

Going back to the topic of performance, Langford also identifies in the English an 'obsession with business' which implied at times rudeness towards tourists who were probably only concerned with leisure (Langford, 2001: 77), the lack of hospitality and sociability being other English traits. This business-like mind could be said to be linked with another English trait, practicality, which according to Langford was often extreme to the point of pettiness (Langford, 2001: 202). Order is a further characteristic that could be said to be related to performance, which seemed to be the case for both the highest and the lowest echelons of society.

Foreigners remarked, according to Langford, on 'the demeanour of ordinary families at ordinary entertainments, strolling about with easy manner and unhurried motion' (2001: 65), sedateness being another related characteristic (2001: 73). This

³⁰ It is clear from what has been said so far, that a kinder, friendlier image is given of the north of England than that of the south.

however, seems to be in opposition to another English trait: fast walking, which was something the English felt very proud of and which to them was proof of their superiority as far as industry was concerned (Langford, 2001: 39). Sedateness is presented in his book as linked to tradition in the form of conservatism. The English are perceived abroad as capable of drawing on ancient institutions and talents to provide for new requirements (2001: 73). This love of tradition is in turn linked with loyalty, which in the upper classes is described as ‘the English sub-religion’ (2001: 132).

Also with regards to the English character Langford gives an extensive list of characteristics: courage, aggression, barbarity, civility, idiosyncrasy in manners, gravity, sturdiness, naturalness (as in good natured), sincerity, plainness of speech (except when it comes to bodily matters, specially sexual ones), prudishness, honesty, hypocrisy (specially of women) unfamiliar and not prone on giving affection, class-ridden, xenophobic,³¹ reserved and not being keen on mixing with others, separateness, melancholy, sadness, joviality in Parliament, charitable and taciturnity. All of these as well as being morally superior, being the best example of this the English model of womanhood, although many thought that the English concern with decency was more to do with manner than it was to do with morals (2001: 170). However, as Langford himself points out, there exists a certain degree of ambiguity. I am not sure being morally superior can be reconciled with being hypocritical for example.

Together with this, amongst some of the characteristics listed above there is some room for more contradiction. For example, the English are described as being very civil and very concerned with good manners, whereas on the other hand they are also perceived as being barbarous with bravery turning into brutality. A barbarity and aggression which tended to be associated with beef eating. In the seventeenth century this aggression is specially associated with the lower classes, nonetheless, Langford remarks on the existence of an aristocratic pugilism that flourished from the end of the eighteenth century in England, which was unparalleled elsewhere. In fact, he comments on how at schools such as Eton and Westminster violence was something which was part and parcel of school life at every level (Langford, 2001: 43).

Sadness and taciturnity, which have already been mentioned, are presented as defining characteristics of the English character, linked with melancholy, yet the English are also known for being extremely lively and chatty in Parliament. Parliament

³¹ For further information on this topic see a *Xenophobe's Guide to the English*, by Mial and Milsted (2009).

was in fact thought of as the 'supreme English club', where 'the manners and prejudices of ordinary Englishmen were fully displayed' (Langford, 2001:213). Whilst society was thought of as dull and taciturn, in Parliament where they were expected to be more dignified and solemn, they were the complete opposite and Parliament was renowned for its levity.

As far as behaviour and habits are concerned the English are perceived as being really keen on sport (something already mentioned by Colls and Norridge), fair play, clubs, drinking, swearing, house-keeping and keeping their businesses to themselves. In fact, drinking is believed to be a long running tradition in England from Georgian times (Porter, 2006). Clubbability, contrary to what it may suggest, is not an expression of sociability and a desire to meet others and share common interests. As Langford explains, this English interest for clubs derives from the English apprehension to encounter or meet new people, and their lack of trust of outsiders. Clubs, which are presented as the quintessentially English institution, are perceived as an informal version of Parliament, as the English gentleman's 'closed world of tedium and retreat' (Langford, 2001: 253).

The image of the gentleman has come up in several occasions, as has the allusion to the English as being a class-ridden society. In fact, Langford acknowledges that class differences amongst the English gave at times almost antagonistic images of Englishness, notwithstanding the fact that there still seemed to be a shared sense on nationhood (Langford, 2001: 15). A gentleman, belonging to the higher classes is considered as very different to his equivalent in the lowest classes and it is not so much something of the last century as some would like to argue. Charles Jennings in *People Like Us: a Season Among the Upper Classes*, remarks on how different individuals were when looking at their social class, which according to him is intimately related to the school they attend (Jennings, 1998).

Similarly, in *Mind the Gap*, Mount shows that the image of England is still very much guided and divided by the rift between social classes (2004: 315), where the only chance for change could come from perhaps allowing lower class people to start ruling. Although he claims, there has been some attempt at changing things throughout time, perhaps more so in Margaret Thatcher's era, he also acknowledges that nothing has changed. In fact, this idea of Thatcherism as trying to lessen the class divide is not agreed by all. Jones argues that it was precisely the Thatcherite politics of social mobility which encouraged and strengthened class divisions in society (Jones, 2011).

Whatever is the case one thing is clear, England is undoubtedly a class-ridden society. Although I will deal with this issue in more depth further later in this thesis, I will illustrate my point with an example taken from the media and, more specifically, radio. An example of how this is perceived to be so today can be found in an apparently trivial conversation, in Dave Gorman's podcast, when an Australian listener makes a comment about a pun he does not understand 'Old School Thai' (this is the name of a restaurant). Dave Gorman comes to the conclusion that it must be 'an Australian thing', then he goes on to explain how the pun works: 'Old School Thai/Tie' refereeing to the 'public' fee paying schools where only very financially able children can go to, and the kind of tie existing amongst its members, which is remembered later on in life. Dave Gorman and his team conclude in a jovial jokey way that this listener did not understand the pun, because 'there are no posh people in Australia'.³²

From the jokey manner Gorman says this, we can infer he is not really implying there are no social classes there, but rather he refers to the way in which this idiomatic expression 'old school tie' does not seem to be understood by Australians, which implies that Australians may not be aware of the existence of this 'tie', or at least the Australian who wrote to the programme. Nonetheless, the fact that he is making a joke means he is not totally serious about this assertion. Still, the relevance of this comment emanates from the reference made to the way in which the school you go to can be so influential in adult life in Britain, owing to the way in which specific links are created amongst members of the same social class. An issue that will come up again when we deal with the analysis of the comedies.

As well as detailing a list of defining characteristics of the English character and commenting on the existing ambiguities in those characteristics, Langford remarks on how Englishness has been usually said to be represented by a character, and one that as Langford points out, according to the philosopher Herbert Spencer³³ best represents the English character; the Victorian Churchman Thomas Spencer (2001: 313). The characteristics that define his character being: his never ending energy, his practicality, independence, perseverance, philanthropy, his honesty and strict adherence to moral principles. Even his deficiencies are defining of the English or the 'Anglo-Saxon nature' as Langford describes it: his abruptness of manner and the lack of it in social situations, his uprightness about the English superiority over their transatlantic and continental

³² The Dave Gorman Podcast, 1st February 2012.

³³ (1820-1903) English philosopher, socialist, biologist and classical liberal political Victorian theorist.

neighbours, his inability to appreciate beauty in art and nature, (2001: 314) and his commitment towards duty. His 'due allowance for family piety and patriotic pride' were also defining not only of Thomas Spencer but also of the English. These were all defining characteristics that even foreigners would identify as English, as Langford puts it. However, the way in which the English are perceived as a driven race is not associated with superiority but with sheer arrogance. Their lack of interest towards other peoples is also an English trait (Langford, 2001: 315). A further characteristic presented here is the English' imperviousness towards criticism, which may be related to the English belief in their superiority. All these are characteristics which described the English of the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. However, as Langford notes, some of these evolved and morphed throughout time.

Englishness Identified is a review of English traits in the seventeenth century and their evolution into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Amongst those characteristics that seem to have accounted for the English success, and their territorial expansion, political stability and economic growth (these are in themselves also defining characteristics of the English), we find the main ones are self-discipline and self-dedication. These characteristics still prevail when defining the England of today, according to Langford. On the other hand, other defining traits seem to have changed throughout history: unpredictable energy seems to have developed into industrialization, forthrightness struggles with conformity, decency seems to be making its way towards a lack of decorum, taciturnity correlates to fondness for clubs and collaboration, 'rude incivility' developed into polite reserve, and their intractable imagination has changed developing into eccentricity (Langford, 2001:315).

Nonetheless, and after providing a list of English characteristics and their change and evolution throughout time, Langford remarks on how, for some, England was divided into two nations, one which represented the essence of Englishness and the other which moved away from it, or offered a deviated distorted image of it. Namely, the aristocratic and plebeians who deviated from the 'image' of England embodied in the middle-classes. So there seems to be variety and difference within the unity of Englishness way back in the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, where some parts of society were considered to be fit for being English, whereas others were not and were therefore excluded, according to Langford.

Undeniably some of the above mentioned English traits would have evolved or completely disappeared, if one were to accept they were ever 'defining' characteristics

of the English. Imperial and economic decline have undoubtedly had an effect on both, defining and interpreting Englishness. Still, according to Langford there are some English traits from the past that seem to be characteristic of modern English society: the English adaptability and their innate pragmatism, a reserved manner, and a degree of eccentricity (Langford, 2001).

The changes that society experienced in the nineteenth century have also left a mark on the definition of Englishness. The change in the roles of men and women in society exemplifies this. However, it is arguable that female modesty and male reserve are just different representations of the same *essential* quality of Anglo-Saxon reticence, which Langford talks about. Yet feminism and the relative equality of men and women in today's society have had a considerable impact on the Englishness of the early nineteenth century. The English gentleman and his female counterpart cannot possibly account for today's society where certain courtesies could be crossed off as sexist. For this reason, Langford remarks on the indisputable change of English womanhood, to add that whether these new models 'turn out to be any less English it is harder to say' (Langford, 318:2001). From my point of view, there is no doubt that they will still be English, whether the English and outsiders are prepared to accept this evolution is another matter altogether. On occasions, societies seem to show a certain reticence towards change, as a result they end up putting too much emphasis on tradition when they feel threatened by the unknown and evolution.

So far, it can be argued that Langford gives an essentialist image of the English, albeit of character rather than genetics. Nonetheless, he seems to acknowledge the diversity Englishness is composed of when he says:

[...] the mongrel nature of the English breed and its ability to adapt to new strains were often considered among its typical strengths. The English character was indeed a character, much more than it was ever a type. (2001: 318)

This statement allows for the interpretation of diversity in the English people. It is undeniable that the English are a mixture of many different peoples and their convergence on the British Isles throughout time.

So far, I have presented views of England, which are mainly based on a process of identification through exclusion, namely English and not Irish, Scottish or Welsh. However, it has also been a process of exclusion amongst the English themselves. In the attempt at describing Englishness some sections of society have been left out for not

being sufficiently 'English' and not being up to standards, in a hegemonic play where some sections of English society have been excluded. However, these excluded sections are as much a part of England as those generally chosen to represent it, as is this tendency to do so, this brings me on to the identification of Englishnesses.

In fact, if combined, all these ways of interpreting the formation of national identity, Duffy's, Scruton's, Colls' and Langford's, offer a very useful tool of study. Historical facts and ideals or myths combine in order to offer representations of Englishness(es), that also function as (an) ideal(s) that people can identify with. Different communities will offer different representations of themselves, and thus of Englishness, and at the same time different individuals might choose to comply with one or more of those ideals whether it be on a greater or a smaller scale. For example, a second generation 'English Caribbean' individual might identify himself/herself with the representation of a black English person, or that of a white English person or even with just part of what it means to be one and/or the other. In doing so society puts forward certain ideals or representations and individuals choose which to identify with. This is despite the fact that, as I have already mentioned, both the images that we give of ourselves and those 'imposed' from others also have a bearing on the definition of an individual's identity.

In contrast to the studies shown above, and as I said earlier, there exist other studies of the definition of Englishness which offer a more up to date exploration of this concept. As Langford points out, although the English were described in the eighteenth century as a mongrel people, created as a consequence of the mixing of Scandinavian and Germanic tribes during the fifth and eleventh centuries, by mid nineteenth century many were led and/or chose to believe that 'the English were racially pure' (Langford, 2001: 18). Nonetheless, some argued the opposite:

We are a mixed race, and our character partakes of the compound nature of our descent – its excellence consisting not in one predominant quality, but in the union of several. We have not the rich humour and glowing imagination of the Spaniards, the insidious refinements of the Italians, the selfish prudence of the Scotch, nor the delicacy and gaiety of the French; but we have a sprinkling of all these. (Fielding, 1824: x-xi).

Together with this supposed purity of race, which is difficult to maintain, there are also some customs which tend to be associated with the English. Let's take the example of drinking tea. Surely if one is to think about something typically English, one of the first things that comes into mind is the English cup of tea or 'cuppa', depending

on the register we choose to use. If put under scrutiny this most English of customs is the product of many cultures: the cup may very likely come from China, the tea is Indian and the sugar used to sweeten it originally came from the West Indies (Colls, 2002:164). Colls argues that much of the self definition of the English can be linked to a process of differentiation in which in many cases traces of multiculturalism have been incorporated in such a way that they go unnoticed as he explains when he says:

The 'Skins' of the 1970s were white to their bootstraps, but found strength through 'Oi', a sound learned from the 'sparse structures' of Reggae chords. Palest of all, 'Punks' of both sexes reacted to Caribbean struggles with all the spontaneous dispossessed energy of white Rastafarians [...] By the 1990s some part of being young and being English was about being black. (2002: 164).

Thus, a definition of a white Englishness would be a definition of an individual who is not a non-white individual, which in turns implies that there is inevitably non-white in white. In addition to this, it is also possible to find multicultural traces in other typically English traits. To give an example, in England, it is very common to be invited to enjoy a curry or a kebab on your way back home from a night out. This, I came to learn, was as much an English custom, as it is to eat hot doughnuts shaped like sticks in Spain (what is known as 'churros') and accompanying it with thick hot chocolate. However, this is not something merely extracted from personal experience, Gilroy also remarks on the way in which the pork pie seems to have been replaced by a bucket of Vindaloo (2002). Therefore, in the identification of Englishness, it is necessary to consider the way in which other originally non-English traits have become part of what nowadays is recognised as Englishness. This would thus lead to the de-identification of England.

In this process of de-identification, various aspects not normally associated with England will be taken into account; namely, issues of race and/or ethnicity, sexuality, religion, beliefs, and regionality. Often depictions of England focus on general views of the English which, according to the writers mentioned below, describe the majority of people, the norm. However, and as I have already discussed, identity is not only about what a passport says, or what others label the individual as, it is also an individual choice and its study should therefore cater for everyone's specificities, even if that leads to the study of myriads of identities.

3.5. Black is White as White is Black, but There are Myriads of Greys Too

Blacks, Asians and whites in Britain have been influencing each other for centuries, and this legacy is reflected in the hybridised lifestyles of Britain's black and Asian British youth. British history should no longer be written from the point of view of English nostalgia. Rather, it needs to reflect multiculturalism, for this has been Britain's identity for centuries. (Ramdin, 1999:x)

As this quotation states, cultural variety is not something new in England. Ramdin, also reflects on something which has already been mentioned in relation to the English-British synonymy-dichotomy. He implies that Britishness is often studied in relation to Englishness, an Englishness that, from this quotation, is understood as 'pure' and does not include ethnic variety.

In line with this idea of exclusion, Gilroy remarks about how, for him, it is inexplicable that Britain has been unable to incorporate its black or minority groups into its endangered 'national identity', so as to become more inclusive and cosmopolitan in order to become more habitable for its people. He suggests that these 'chronic difficulties', which in turn provoke episodes of 'racial and national anxiety' might be due to a feeling of deep nostalgia about the loss of the Empire (Gilroy, 2002:xxxvii). This nostalgia coupled with different versions of 'race talk' provokes a feeling of invasiveness towards immigrants and the social and political problems that appear as a consequence of this invasion. This, in turn, has favoured the development of a sense of national identity that cannot be separated from the fight against racism (Gilroy, 2005: 121).

Regrettably, it is not so difficult to find newspaper headlines, and some spokespeople, namely BNP or UKIP politicians just to give an example, discussing and arguing for the many disadvantages immigration has on the country. In fact, in the television documentary *Ghetto Britain: 30 Years of Race*, Dr. Robert Beckford travels around Britain, exploring and talking to citizens and politicians about their views on immigration, unveiling the way in which some people are influenced by some, and often, false propaganda, as Beckford reveals, on the dangers of this invasion. This feeling of uncertainty and fear would, according to Gilroy, explain the lack of inclusion of different ethnicities when considering British national identity. On the other hand the media has also echoed these concerns and we can find newspaper articles dealing with this inability for inclusion (Muir, 2013, September 15, October 13 & December 2).

Nonetheless, I believe ethnic variety should be taken into account, not only in the description and study of Britishness, but of Englishness too. England should no longer be defined as a society free of ethnicity and multiculturalism, given that, as I hope it has been shown, ethnicity and multiculturalism are an important part of the history of England.

Throughout history, definitions of national identity have been intimately related to definitions of race and ethnicity. Thus, the study and understanding of these terms is of paramount importance to the study of Englishnesses, since this gives rise to a series of inclusions and exclusions within the understanding and definition of national groups.

The case for defining identity in terms of what something is and what it is not has already been argued. Defining race identity is even more complicated, given the many variables which come into play. To begin with, we find the difficulty of arriving at a convincing and adequate definition, not only of the term race, but also of the terms ethnicity and multiculturalism, which are intimately related to race. The issue of defining race and ethnicity has been widely discussed and studied, both in academic and non-academic spheres (Jacobs & Bowles, 1988; DeConde, 1992; Helms & Talleyrand, 1997; Gunaratnam, 2003; Hughes, 2003; Cornell & Hartman, 2007; Diffen, n.d.).³⁴ It is undeniable however, that both these concepts have a lot in common: they are both social constructs, and they are intimately related, to the point of being used together on many occasions.

Thus, it is noted by many that there does not seem to exist agreement on the delimitation and differentiation between race and ethnicity (Gat, 2013; Rodríguez, 2000; Marger, 2012; Block; Solomos, 2010). It is undeniable though that when the term race appeared, it was an act of distinguishing between individuals with different physical appearances, in an act of racial discrimination and with clear purposes of domination. These terms are also often used when discussing and defining the Empire and its formation (Gat, 2013). It is also for this reason that there exists nowadays some reluctance to use these together, due to the existing association of violence and aggression that often accompanies expressions of national race.

Scientists however, have proven that 'race' is not a suitable term/concept to distinguish genetically between individuals, given that there exist more differences between individuals of the same 'race' than between members of different 'races'

³⁴ Retrieved from: http://www.diffen.com/difference/Ethnicity_vs_Race.

(Eriksen, 2010). Added to this, it is also important to consider the way in which 'race' is perceived in different ways by different communities, in such a way that the same individual may be considered of one race or another in different contexts by different communities. On the other hand, ethnicity tends to be associated to cultural factors, ancestry, nationality, customs, religion, language and beliefs. This is therefore not inherited but learnt.

In the area that occupies us here, the understanding and delimitation of English race and ethnic identities, it is almost compulsory to mention the murder of Stephen Lawrence in April 1993, which triggered many a discussion on the topic of 'institutional racism' and thus on definitions and a new awareness of race (Malik, 2001; Cottle, 2004; N. Hall, Grive, & Savage, 2009; Bartoli, 2013). This incident was the instigating force for many changes to come in British society, not only within the political sphere but also in education. In fact recommendations 67, 68 and 69 were created for the education system to value cultural diversity and foster tolerance in order to prevent racism (Hall, Grive, & Savage, 2009). Regrettably, still in the twenty first century in Britain, institutional racism is a topic of discussion and talk (Stone, 2013; Bartoli, 2013 Stone, 2013; Bartoli, 2013).

This racism is something which is taught and learnt and that depends on the social context where it develops. Examples of its existence can be seen in all spheres of society. Just to give an example, in literary works, it is often the case that individuals suffer racism at the time they realise their skin colour is different to their peers'. Non-white young individuals, living in mainly white environments, are objects of racist acts on the basis of their skin colour, those who were friends before reject them. It is not something that started off that way, but that developed that way. A contemporary example of this can be found in Nawaz' novel: *Radical: My Journey from Islamist Extremism to a Democratic Awakening* (2012). In this novel the protagonist comes to terms with skin colour when he is ostracised by his, up until then, schoolmates and friends. One day at school at the beginning of the new academic year, he is denied the right to play football with the rest of the boys, and he is punched in order to be dissuaded. These boys are the same boys he had been on good terms with the previous academic year, and who had not seemed to have noticed their different skin colours until then. Other characters such as Meena from *Anita and Me*, (1997), also display this discomfort and difficulty and have to face up to the exclusion from the community, due to their skin colour.

However, this distinction based on skin colour is not an easy one to make given the many nuances introduced by multiculturalism and individuals' personal choice of identity. As the title of this section indicates it is inevitable to find black in the definition of white and the other way round, as it has already been mentioned in this thesis. Added to which is the issue of interraciality and multiracial and multicultural families. This is something which poses some difficulty when it comes to talking about racial identity and which has been widely discussed by many around the world (Twine 1997; Lazarre, 2001; Harris & Sim, 2002; Ali, 2003; Chito Childs, 2005; Byrne, 2006; Spencer, 2006 and 2010).

Along similar lines, Twine argues the case of whiteness in Black Britain in her *A White Side of Black Britain*. She begins her book using the example of Diana Jeater, a white English professor of African studies living in Bristol. Diana is white but shares her life with black people, their customs and traditions. As Twine defines her, she would be a white individual of a 'transracial' family (Twine 2010: 4), who as such needs to negotiate racism, race and racialization, in order to acquire her racial literacy. Twine's objective in her book is to provide an analysis which is theoretically grounded by the ways the aforementioned are negotiated. Hence, according to her, these parents need to become racially literate, in order to provide their children with the necessary tools to face the racial, and at times racist, encounters they will need to cope with throughout their life.

Twine starts from the idea of race as a production, and racial identities as creations which are negotiated, contested and translated within the wide array of black, biracial, mixed-race, and other hybrid racial identities. She talks about racial literacy and ethnic capital. Racial literacy is explained in relation to white mothers and fathers of biracial families, and is defined as the literacy these white parents have acquired to detect everyday racism from both, white and non-white communities and individuals. She also remarks on how white women end up being excluded and 'unwhitened' for having relationships with black individuals (Twine, 2010: 28) in a way white men do not tend to be. Hence, in this case gender seems to be a conditioning factor of the way race is perceived.

Returning to the idea of multiculturalism and ethnic variety, it is undeniable that the growing number of multiracial and interethnic individuals in the UK is a remarkable demographic change, which must be taken into account (Spencer, 1997; Parekh, 2002; Bradford, 2006; Phillips & Phillips, 1998). Parker and Song note how the number of

interracial relationships has been and seems to keep growing in the UK and the USA (2001). This is also reflected in the Ethnicity and Identity Report published in 2005 in the UK, based on the 2001 census where, interestingly enough, the population is divided between whites and non-whites, amongst which different ethnicities were mentioned, namely: 'Asian' or 'Asian British', 'Black or Black British', 'mixed', 'Chinese', and 'other ethnic groups'. It is worth noting how there is no room for 'Black English', 'Asian English', 'Chinese English' or any other kind of mixed 'race' identity, whereas 'mixed' and 'other ethnic' would fit anybody who would not consider him/herself to be included in any of the categories offered. Thus, somebody with Afro-European ancestors living and born in England, would be considered 'mixed' or 'other ethnic' as would an individual born to English and Chinese parents. There seems to be no room for those who may have developed a shared identity in this census.

As a consequence of 'racial' mixing, and although it is true that the definition of race was initially associated strictly to issues of skin colour, it is also true today that to talk about race and to limit its definition to skin colour would not only be unviable but also useless. As some have noted, skin colours and its perceptions vary all around the world, and it would be possible to find a 'white' person who looks darker than an Afro-Caribbean (Phoenix & Tizzard 2002), added to which are the different 'racial tones' added by interracial relationships. Hence using skin colour as a marker of race proves not to be a reliable tool for its definition (Jones, 2012; Eriksen, 2010). Added to this is the problem of perception of skin colour, given that individuals' understanding of white and non-white can be very different. I consider myself an example of this, given that being a South-Western European individual, whose ancestors as far as I know were and have been considered to be white in Spain, I was also told once by a 'white' Englishman that I could not consider myself to be white.

Often mixed race individuals seem to be all put in the same category, which contrary to what happens with 'white' or 'black' identities does not seem to have a recognised group identity, either by society or by institutions. Both in literature and in academic writings, writers have remarked on this situation of the mixed race individual who does not fit in with either of his/her parents' more 'homogeneous' groups (Brown, 2001; Syal, 1997; Twine, 2010). It is therefore not uncommon to find that 'mixed race' individuals tend to identify with one or the other parent's identity at different times and with regard to different aspects of their life. Something very similar happens with individuals who are not mixed race, whose parents were born outside the UK, but who

have been brought up in Britain; an individual considered to be white English by society, could choose to identify with any other ethnic/racial group. There are many more variables that could take place, which would prevent racial identity from being a clear-cut and neat definition in terms of the understanding of identity.

In an attempt to cater for this diversity, Yasmin Alibhai-Brown offers an inclusive version of England in which ethnic variations are included and accounted for. In her *Mixed Feelings. The Complex Lives of Mixed-Race Britons*, she explores the feelings and attitudes of mixed background children and their sense of identity, proving that the English landscape is a lot more varied and complex than that proposed in some more conventional and traditional views on the matter (2001).

In *Who Do We Think We Are? Imagining the New Britain*, Alibhai-Brown gives an account of the diversity of England's population (2000). She points out how there exist many different group identities, i.e.: white Britons' as opposed to non-white Britons' identities, but within each one of these there exists an amalgam of diversifications, that have to do with ethnic background and the choice the individual makes as to whether to identify with one or the other or both or even none, and the degree to which he or she does so.

Ramdin also deals with the multiethnic side of England, in his *Reimagining Britain* (1999), where he explores the variety of cultures and people that have converged on British soil throughout history. He observes how Britain has always been a land where different peoples have settled and mingled with the existing cultures, modifying each other, resulting in the existing hybridised lifestyles. Exploring this diversity he starts off by studying the first contact of British with 'black' people, and he goes back as far as Roman times. It is also worthy of mention the way in which the term 'black' is used for all non-white communities thus including different nationalities and ethnicities such as Afro-Caribbean, Indians, Pakistanis and Afro-Asians. Ramdin notices how to start with, differences amongst peoples begun to be perceived as something racial whereas in contemporary Britain it is more of an ethnic issue. However, and despite the constant contact with different 'racial' and ethnic groups, the landscape presented of Britain is not one of understanding and a welcoming attitude towards newcomers, but one of struggle and discrimination, which has changed from being 'racial' to becoming ethnic.

Similarly, in the field of politics, non-white groups have also been excluded. Working class movements were not considered to represent black people's interests and

thus they had to seek representation through autonomous movements. This meant the distinction between working-class movements and ‘new social movements’ (Gilroy in Sukra, 1998: 105). English society is therefore divided. Sukra argues that still by the end of the twentieth century black people were being presented as problematic and un-British, which in turn is used as an excuse to justify some specific policing of black people (1998).

Thus, and considering all the above, if race and ethnicity are social constructs, it means they must evolve with societies and change and develop with them. In the past, and despite all the different waves of invaders, which have left their genetic and cultural mark in the UK, the English were presented and perceived as a people, and not a mixture of peoples. In the present time, England tends to be presented as a place where the English, share their land with others. It is precisely this fear of ‘losing’ their authenticity that seems to encourage some to delimit and define Englishnesses.

Therefore, in this thesis my aim is to compare the already mentioned versions of Englishnesses, as presented by some of the academic works which claim to present the ‘real’ England and its people, with its (re)presentations in audiovisual twenty first century comedy, in order to find out to what extent these contemporary versions fit or not the written ones. Ultimately, I will consider to what degree one and/or the other are representative of England’s changing reality, by focusing on the existence or not of this diversity and by exploring its representation.

Once I have discussed the images of Englishness(es) and/or English identity as presented in the academic works studied. I will begin by exploring representations of Englishnesses in the educational environment, as presented by the comedies, from the point of view of the young individual, looking into different types of schools, to the teacher type individual and finishing by looking at university students.

CHAPTER 4. EDUCATIN' ENGLAND: THE ENGLISH INDIVIDUAL IN THE EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

4.1. The comedies

Before I begin with the analysis of the audio-visual material, I believe it is necessary to briefly talk about the different comedies, and how they feature the different types of educational institutions, so as to set the scene for the analysis of its types. For this purpose, I will first of all talk briefly about each comedy and the institution portrayed in it, at the time I reflect on some of the implications that studying at one or the other seems to entail when it comes to defining individuals in society. It is important to my argument to recognise the role that an individual's education plays in the formation of his/her identity, as we will see.

The first comedy I will study is *Bromwell High*, an animated comedy series which was first aired in 2005, in Teletoon in Canada and in Channel 4 in the UK³⁵. Bromwell High is a deteriorated, overcrowded and underfunded secondary state school in South London, where students' behaviour is far from exemplary, and comedy is drawn out of its farfetched outrageous and 'off the wall' characters. The school is vandalised by its students on a regular basis, and bullying seems to be a very prominent part of some students' life at Bromwell. The main characters are three friends, Natella, Keisha and Latrina who, together with the teaching staff, offer a snipped view of what takes place in this 'peculiar', to say the least, low achievement secondary school. The three friends represent different types of young individuals, who are also characterized by the language they use as well as their ethnical diversity. The students at this school come from many different cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

Also dealing with the image of the young individual presented in comedies is *The Inbetweeners*.³⁶ This comedy series follows the life of a group of suburban teenagers attending Rudge Park, a fictional Secondary Education school. The main characters are a group of 'dysfunctional' teenage friends who come from similar backgrounds, who reluctantly end up accepting Will, the new boy who comes from a private school, in their group. From then onwards, the comedy presents viewers with the

³⁵ This animated comedy series ran from 2005-2006, produced two seasons and won two awards in 2005 and 2006 respectively. For more detailed information see Anex I, chart 1.

³⁶ This is a comedy series broadcast on E4, which produced three seasons, and a film, which has been nominated to twenty seven awards and has won fourteen of those. There is also a USA version of this series.

ups and downs with which these friends are confronted in their quest for acceptance, popularity and 'pulling'. Therefore, although there are other characters from different ethnic backgrounds in the series, the individual presented in this comedy is mainly that of the white middle class Anglo-Saxon individual.

Little Britain also illustrates the teenage individual in its Vicky Pollard character, giving life to the 'chav'³⁷, and the 'chav's' friends, clothes, way of talking and everyday life. As well as Vicky, and continuing with a similar type of individual to hers, the working class individual, we find the characters of Gary and Jason,³⁸ two friends who often go to visit the former's grandmother, on whom Jason has a crush. In this series there are also snippet views of a classroom of a grammar school and their *remarkable* teachers, who demand the most outrageous tasks out of their students or who start playing the saxophone in the middle of an exam. Here the predominant image is that of the white Anglo-Saxon individual.³⁹

The comedy drama *Teachers* focuses mainly on the teacher side of the educational context, although there is some representation of students⁴⁰. Both the staff-room and the classroom denote some ethnic variety, although there does not seem to be so much cultural difference between individuals, as can be found in *Bromwell High*. Despite the fact that some members of staff come from different ethnic origins, most of them are completely 'integrated' and are, 'as English, as it gets'. It is often the case that it is hard to say whether these individuals and their customs are integrated, or whether they are part of what defines England and its customs, as it happens with curry for example. Nonetheless, the ethnic card is played at times, in order to bother, pester or threaten others.

Another comedy which I will refer to with regards to education is *The Thick of It*, a BBC satirical political sitcom that explores the world of politics at Number 10,⁴¹ where state and private education are compared within the third series, in relation to the

³⁷ This is a term charged with negative connotations, but as it will be shown later, Vicky Pollard gives life to the term 'chav' which at that time was very much part of English society, both in the media and in the academic world.

³⁸ Although these characters will be not studied in this thesis, given that they never appear in an educational context and when they appear they are always at home.

³⁹ This is a three season comedy series that has been nominated for thirty two awards and has won twenty six of them. For more detailed information see Anex I, Chart 3.

⁴⁰ This comedy series produced four seasons and was nominated for nine awards although it did not win any. For more detailed information see Anex I, Chart 4.

⁴¹ This comedy series has produced four seasons and has been nominated for forty-four awards, winning 21 of those. For more details see Anex I, Chart 6.

daughter of the new Secretary of State for the Department of Social Affairs, Nicola Murray.

The types presented at university will therefore be studied in this section through the popular comedy drama *Fresh Meat*, a Channel 4 production from the creators of the *Peep Show*, where one of the main characters, the actor Joe Thomas, also starred in *The Inbetweeners*. It shows how the different types of students come together and interact with each other throughout the start of their adult life. This series has produced three seasons and has received many an award.⁴²

4.2. Comprehensive/State vs 'Public' School Type(s)

Before I begin with the analysis of the types found in the comedies mentioned above, it is important to consider each institution separately. In order to better understand the analysis of the gags, it is necessary to contextualise the educational institutions. Thus, I will not merely give a description of the institutions, I will talk about the, usually not overtly said, implications and connotations associated to each of the institutions studied in this thesis.

For this purpose I will consider two conflicting ideas, hence the title 'type(s)'. In the first place, as I will discuss below, there seems to exist an image, within the English educational system, of the 'type' of individual that attends and comes out of 'public' and private schools as opposed to the image of the individual coming out of a state/comprehensive school. However, this image is complemented by a myriad of types, as can be seen in the different comedies studied here.

Individuals coming out of comprehensive/state schools are presented and perceived in a peculiar way, not only in comedies but also in literature and radio. It is not uncommon to come across references to this. For example, on *The Dave Gorman Podcast*,⁴³ Dave Gorman and Danielle Ward identify themselves as 'comprehensive' children. Danielle explains that during her time as an ESL teacher in Moscow, she had to pretend she was a 'proper' trained teacher and that she had studied at private and boarding schools, because her coordinator there had told students so, to make their

⁴² It has been nominated for seventeen awards and has won three of those. For more detailed information see Anex I, Chart 5.

⁴³ Dave Gorman, comedian and author, hosts this radio show together with Danielle Ward and Martin White on Absolute Radio.

lessons seem more prestigious. Already, there is an implicit idea that education at private schools is not only presented, but also perceived as being of a higher quality not only in England (by Danielle herself), but also abroad (by students in Moscow). This image therefore has proven to transgress the national borders.

This meant that Danielle was being asked questions about ‘uniforms, boater hats’ and even ‘midnight feasts’, as she explains, which translated in her having to make things up or avoiding the topic if possible, given that, as she says she ‘went to a comprehensive’, she ‘didn’t even go to a posh school’, hers was a really ‘rubbish school’. But the worst thing according to her was the fact that her being at a comprehensive school translated in her not being able to answer some of her students’ questions. They were asking her questions about tenses in English, about ‘the past perfect and the future and what the tenses mean’ and, using her words, she ‘wouldn’t have a clue’. Dave Gorman agrees with her and adds ‘they don’t teach you that at a comprehensive’. Therefore, not only the quality of teaching but also the contents of what is taught are presented as different. It is true that by just taking into account terminology, ‘independent’ when referring to ‘public’ and private schools, implies that the syllabus will invariably differ from that set by the national curriculum, however, this conversation implies that the connotation associated to attending a comprehensive school is that of not very good quality.

Dave Gorman then goes on to add that because they went to comprehensive schools, they had vivid imaginations to make up the sort of things that would go on in a boarding school. He admits that they had idealized life at boarding schools, and what the individuals coming out of them were like, and finishes by saying that when later on in life he met people from those schools, there was nothing of the sort going on. Therefore, there is a distinguished image of the public versus the comprehensive individual or type, and a certain degree of idealization of the former.

In the comedies studied here, individuals attending state schools are, in general terms, presented as not really complying with the uniform etiquette of the school and are represented as generally less articulate and worse behaved. Thus, there exists a specific image or type of ‘comprehensive’ children versus the ‘public’ or private school student, notwithstanding the fact that within each type many different variations can be found. The worse the standard of the school seems to be, the more relaxed the uniform etiquette on the part of the students and teachers when it comes to enforcing compliance

to this standard, and the more make-up and jewellery children wear and the louder and more aggressive they seem to be.

Although in the comedies studied here no ‘public’ or private school is featured directly in length, Will, one of the main characters of *The Inbetweeners*, is the closest it is possible to get to the ‘public’/private school type. He attended a private school before going to the local state high school Rudge Park, and that is something he keeps priding himself on. On the other hand, in *Little Britain*, an image is put forward of a very high academically achieving non-fee paying school, Kelsey Grammar School. This school is a boys’ only school, a characteristic which tends to be associated with ‘public’ schools. However, it is an elitist school, given that not everyone can enter it. Only the brightest or the children who have received the best type of education (whether it be at an independent school or via private tuition) will have access to this type of school. This implies that if ‘public’ and private schools provide the best education standards (in this order), then a considerable number of its students will invariably come from a privileged background. This academic selection has been and still is a matter of much controversy in Britain. In fact in the 1960s and 70s, these types of schools were abolished although some areas of Britain kept them, such as Buckinghamshire, Kent and Trafford (Harrison, 2012).

Despite the possible similarities, ‘public’ and grammar schools are completely different and social status plays an important part in this. One example of this can be seen in the programme *South Bank Especial*, where Melvyn Bragg interviews Matt Lucas and David Walliams, the creators of *Little Britain*. Melvyn mentions that they both were from similar backgrounds, they both grew up in the suburbs and that therefore their childhood was quite similar, to which they make the following remarks:

Matt: Well, I think our childhoods were fairly similar in that we both grew up in the suburbs, didn’t we?

David: Yeah. Just you were north and I was south... of London. But I think we went to the same kind of Schools.

Matt: No

David: But yours was slightly posher.

Matt: Yeah, exactly. I went to a public school, and you went to a grammar school.

David: A grammar school which is quite lowly to someone who’s been to a public school, isn’t it?

Matt: Yes. I dismiss you (he says smiling and with a mocking gesture of his hand).

(*Little Britain*, Series Two, CD Two, South Bank Special Show)

However mockingly, they make clear the distinction between a public and a grammar school, despite the fact that both are elitist in one way or another and they are both 'posh' in many people's eyes, as Bragg's comment implies, that is, they are both from similar backgrounds, they both lived in the suburbs. However, as David and Matt clarify, it is their education that tells them apart. It is obvious from their conversation, that they are playing with the idea that in Matt's eyes, or someone who has been privately educated, David is not posh. At this point it is necessary to consider the meaning of the word 'posh', given that although it has already appeared in relation to Dave Gorman's podcast, it now acquires a different meaning due to comments and gestures made by both David and Matt. The MacMillan online free dictionary (MacMillan, 2013) gives two different meanings of this term: 'something that is posh looks expensive and attractive' and 'someone who is posh talks and behaves in a way that is typical of people from a high social class. This word often shows that you do not like people like this'. In the interview David and Matt obviously referred to the second meaning of the term, with Matt's pretended dismissal of David attending a Grammar School. However, if a school is posh, both meanings would be associated with it.

On the other hand, it is an undeniable fact that in England, speech and accent are perceived as the result and consequence of factors such as educational and social background, roots, friends, working environment and ultimately a sense of identity. Accent, as stated on the British Library web page, is a tool often and unfortunately used to make assumptions about people, given that different accents are perceived differently and thus, individuals can be labelled as too harsh, posh, unintelligent, unfriendly, aggressive and common depending on their speech (n.d.).⁴⁴ For this reason the way individuals speak or choose to speak can and must be used as a means of expressing cultural identity.

Therefore, before beginning the analysis, we find already a complex educational background in which, social class, academic achievement and accent play an important role in the analysis of the educational landscape of England, and which must be taken into account in order to better understand some of the references made in the comedies. This is what will occupy me in the following section, where I will analyse how these

⁴⁴ As presented in the following link uploaded by the British Library:
<http://www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/sounds/regional-voices/>

different educational institutions are presented and perceived in comedy, together with some of the assumptions usually made about them.

4.3. Uniform Etiquette and School Grounds

With regards to students' attitude towards school uniform, at Bromwell High uniform etiquette does not seem to be a priority. Although the uniform is worn, ties and skirts vary in size and length in order to suit each student's liking. Rather than all complying with the standard uniform etiquette, shirts are not tucked in, skirts vary in size considerably, many different types of coats are worn in many different colours, instead of the uniform blazer, together with lots of make-up, in the case of some girls, and jewellery which is worn by both boys and girls alike. A very similar image is offered by Vicky Pollard and her friends, where ties are worn at an approximate length of 10cms and skirts are not much longer than that.

A completely different image is offered at the Kelsey Grammar School in Flange in *Little Britain*, where children wear their uniforms impeccably and do not wear any kind of jewellery, just like Will from *The Inbetweeners*, who studied at a private school before being sent to a comprehensive. Wearing a blazer on his first day of school earns Will some verbal abuse, which implies most students do not use it despite it being part of the uniform. Thus, it can be said that the higher the standard of the school uniform etiquette the 'posher' the school.

Also on the topic of etiquette and specifically in what refers to jewellery, Will explains that things are also different in a private school compared to a comprehensive. In one of the episodes, on the way to school, Simon notices that Jay, one of the four friends, has had an ear pierced and he explains that the left ear is the one you pierce 'to show that you are gay'. Although Neil agrees with Simon and Jay strongly disagrees, they ask Will to find out if he knows:

Simon: Will, which ear's gay?

Will: Oh, I'm the last person to ask.

Neil: I thought you knew everything!

Will: Well, I don't know any men who've had their ears pierced because I went to a private school.⁴⁵

(*The Inbetweeners*, Series Three, Episode One 'Fashion Show')

⁴⁵ Will emphasizes the pronoun 'I' to clarify that he is different from the rest of his friends.

Will clearly states that at his old school no piercings were allowed, and that is why he does not know anything about piercings, or what piercing the left or the right ear may mean. This exchange also proves the high expectations put on Will, because he went to a private school, which we have already discussed in relation to private education. Nonetheless, this is a recurrent idea, which will come in more than one occasion in this study in relation to privately educated individuals.

On the other hand, etiquette is not the only tale-telling characteristic which differentiates more financially well-off schools from more disadvantaged ones. The school grounds of the Kelsey Grammar School are those of an idyllic old-fashioned building with impressive architecture and with an extensive green area for students to play on. This image contrasts greatly with that of Bromwell High and Vicky Pollard's school where there are no green areas and the buildings are very run down.

Summerdown School in *Teachers* and Rudge Park in *The Inbetweeners* offer a slightly different image. Although students' uniform etiquette is not perfect, uniforms are worn less casually, and in the case of both schools, boys are not allowed to wear jewellery and girls cannot wear it if it is too showy, although there are always some cases of more daring and challenging students that try to ignore the rules. As far as the school grounds are concerned, both schools count on a considerable area of green spaces.

4.4. Aggression

Overt aggression is also presented as a defining characteristic of schools, which also helps to tell schools apart. Depending on the type of school, it is presented as being more present or not, and it will be dealt with in one way or another. Although bullying is not uncommon at schools, in the series analysed here, it is shown as being more present at some schools than others.

At Bromwell High students are hit and kicked everywhere without anybody doing anything about it, the school grounds are completely run down and abused by students, there are broken windows everywhere, graffiti both outside and inside the school premises, at one point the school name plaque reads 'Bromwell THighS' (Series Two, Episode Three), there are broken windows in the classrooms, vandalised cars in the playgrounds etc., and bullying is part and parcel of the everyday life of the school.

Aggression seems to be a defining characteristic of students both at Bromwell High and at Vicky Pollard's school. In fact, in the opening sketch of *Little Britain Series One, Episode One*, straight after the introduction, the first image presented is that of an 'Inner State School' (that is how the school plaque reads) where there is a fight taking place and students gather round it cheering along. When the school bell goes and students have to go back to their classrooms we can see that the people who were fighting were actually two teachers.

Further images of aggression at state schools, this time in Bromwell High, are put forward in the first episode of the first series, when a new girl comes to school and Mrs Jackson introduces her to the other students at the school in the hope that they can show her round. In the following extract there is a clear comparison and contrast between the kind of individual and education that pupils get at 'public' and state schools:

Mrs Jackson: Right, this is Tasmin everybody. In their wisdom, her parents have decided to broaden her social awareness by forcing her to leave public school and mix with poorer, more violent children.

Latrina: Like the girl last year, Rainbow Harvest?

Mrs Jackson: Yes, God rest her tiny soul. (to which the Bromwell girls seem to react by pulling a sad face and remain in silence for a second)

Tasmin: I'm sure I can help drag the school up the league tables.

(*Bromwell High*, Series One, Episode One, 'Baby Boom')

Through this exchange we learn that Rainbow Harvest is dead. Although it is not specified, part of the humour of this exchange comes from the ambiguity which may allow for interpreting that she was probably killed at Bromwell, thus proving aggression is part of everyday life there. The girls' lack of comments or remarks on the issue, together with the uncomfortable silence, allows for this interpretation. On the other hand, this implies that, the 'public' school Tasmin comes from is less aggressive, that children who go there are upper class, and that educational standards are better there too, given that Tasmin is confident her exam results will help drag up the school's average marks in the league tables. This is something Natella is not very impressed about, given that she feels her position as the bright girl at school might be compromised by Tasmin's arrival. It is also telling the use of words on the part of Mrs. Jackson, when talking about how Tasmin had arrived at Bromwell, as Mrs. Jackson assumes, she must have been *forced* to leave private education to go to a state school, the only objective being to 'broaden her social awareness', something that is explicitly said. From this we must assume, she could not have done so at her old school, where

presumably, the rest of her colleagues would have come from very similar wealthy backgrounds.

A further image, of state educational contexts being presented and perceived as being more likely to foster aggression and danger within their premises, is presented in *Little Britain*, through the character of Denver Mills a silver Olympic medallist. A retired sportsman, whose political incorrectness and prejudices get the better of him, and whose inappropriateness invites laughter. Denver acts as a guest speaker at different events and he is so politically incorrect and offensive that, he either upsets almost everyone who listens to him (having to make a swift escape), or he ends up having to discard most of his speech, if anybody offers to have a look at it beforehand. This is precisely what happens when he is invited to go to a school to give a speech to children about sports. First of all, spectators are put into perspective by finding out quite early in the sketch that he was not the person they wanted in the school, but as the other person could not make it, he was good enough. When he arrives at the school, the Headmistress leads him to the Hall, where he is to give his speech. She asks to hear what he has to say on the way, as she remarks on the inadequacy of some of his comments. Their conversation reveals that Denver is full of prejudices about private and state schools. When he is told how he is going to be introduced to the children, their conversation goes as follows:

Denver Mills: Yeah, you go ahead miss. I say ‘good afternoon’ then I start with a gag. I say, “Thank God this is a private school, if this was a state school, I’d be afraid to park my car outside”

Headmistress: This IS a state school!

Denver Mills: That’s gone! (throwing a piece of paper as he walks)

(Little Britain, Series One, Episode Five)

Denver believes that state schools are so aggressive and dangerous that even leaving his car outside would be something to be worried about, however, he is proven wrong in his assumptions. The school seems so nice and safe that he wrongly assumed that he could not possibly be at a state school. Here we are invited to laugh at a prejudiced buffoon. However, his prejudices say a lot about some underlying assumptions about education in England, which must be generalised enough for most Britons to understand, which is the real gag David and Matt are aiming at.

Another image of the comprehensive school is that offered in *Teachers* at Summerdown School, where there is a slight improvement from the school presented in Bromwell High: uniform standards are slightly better, and less bullying takes place on

the school grounds. However, when bullying does happen, the staff do not do anything about it, they seem to be oblivious to it, even though the school headmistress, Claire, mentions on more than one occasion in the staff room in their everyday meetings, that preventing and reducing aggressive behaviour on the part of the students must be one of the staff's objectives. However, it is not unusual to see children being hit, or dragged across the corridors unconscious or not, from one room to another by a group of students, in a context, where teachers and peer students alike do not give the impression of being bothered in the slightest, and who do not seem to be prepared to give a hand to a bullied/unconscious child, but the complete opposite, these instances are completely ignored and unacknowledged.

At Rudge Park in *The Inbetweeners* some bullying also takes place, however, teaching staff are aware of it and choose whether to do something about it or not. An example of this is when Mr. Gilbert, the head of sixth form, catches Donovan bullying Will, while making him sit on a chair with a bucket over his head, and rather than punishing or telling Donovan off, he tells Will off for trying to be a grass. Mr Gilbert's dislike of Will is made evident on several occasions throughout the series, this instance is only an example of their ongoing teacher-student relationship.

However, and despite the fact that state schools are presented as being more aggressive than their fee-paying counterparts, this does not seem to be free of contradiction. Private and 'public' schools cannot be said to be completely aggression free though, given that some of the sports traditionally played at these schools are amongst some of the most aggressive ones, such as rugby for boys and hockey for girls. Despite the fact that some state schools play rugby and hockey, these are sports usually associated with a private and a 'public' school education, which could even be said to be expected, given that only schools with sufficiently large green areas can offer them, and these have traditionally been the better off fee-paying schools. Some even argue that rugby 'is almost a religion at many Independent schools' as the School House Magazine states (2011, Autumn/Winter). Now, if we were to watch any ordinary rugby game, we would soon realise that this is not precisely a very tamed sport, there is a high degree of aggression; pulling, pushing, tackling, and consequently even some blood. Thus, it can be argued that 'posh' schools are not free of aggression, only it is of a different kind, it is just managed and channelled towards a sport. It is also important to consider that rugby tends to be a boys sport, where the female equivalent would be hockey.

Nonetheless, uniform etiquette, sports and the curriculum do not seem to be the only differences existing between independent and state schools, as the following section will reveal.

4.5. Academic Achievement: Posh is more

Although I have not overtly remarked on it before, this title expresses something that has already come up in this study, and that is the fact that ‘public’ and private schools are described as posh. However, in the level of poshness, a ‘public’ school would rank higher up on the list than a private one, and consequently a comprehensive school. In fact, the already mentioned list would represent the level of poshness of schools from more to less, being the worst ranked schools state/comprehensive and inner state/comprehensive, respectively.

Academic achievement is intimately related to the type of school and whether it is a ‘public’, private, grammar or state/comprehensive. Therefore, ‘public’, private and grammar schools are expected to provide good academic training, which will, in turn, translate into very high achievement for students. However, not all the above mentioned schools are meant to provide an equal standard of education, in fact the best considered educational standard is associated with that provided by a ‘public’ school. An example of how private education is thought of as worse than ‘public’ education can be found in *Bromwell High*, when Tasmin, the already mentioned ‘public’ school girl, who is temporarily taken to Bromwell High, is being picked up by her parents who want to take her back to ‘public’ education, after considering the negative effect that her stay at a state school has had on her. When Tasmin first arrives at the school she is really well behaved and polite, but she soon becomes the biggest and most cruel bully at school, as well as the cleverest and the most popular amongst boys. This is a rivalry the three protagonists of this animated series are not prepared to put up with, so they call Tasmin’s parents for them to take her with them. Her parents are outraged at the education she is receiving there, and express their disapproval about it. It is precisely in this instance that a further distinction between ‘public’ and private education is made, as Tasmin’s parents argue the reasons to take her out of state education:

Father: All you’re doing here is learning about drugs, bullying and underage sex.

Mother: If we’d wanted you to learn about that, we’d have paid to send you to a private school.

(Bromwell High, Series One, Episode One)

In this instance, it is made clear that Bromwell High is not giving this child the adequate high educational standard her parents want for her. But not only this, Tasmin's parents also argue that a private school would provide similar negative learning experiences to those provided by the state school, only they need to pay for it.

There are more instances in this animated comedy series in which 'public' education and state education are compared to the detriment of the latter. In the second series, a whole episode is based around the differences between these two types of schools. In an attempt to raise money for the school, Mr. Bibby organizes different events at Bromwell High such as: a sponsored run, a beauty contest, a smoking competition and the National Schools Science Competition. For the latter the first prize is £10,000. It is precisely this competition which clearly shows that resources at public schools are much better than those available at Bromwell. The very impressive looking space rocket built by the 'public' school children goes up into the sky leaving everyone with their mouths wide-open, whereas Bromwell High's rocket stays where it is after a flimsy explosion that only lets out some smoke. This makes Natella react and ask Iqbal,⁴⁶ the headmaster, to improve Bromwell. She goes to his office and tells him everything that in her view will make their school as good as a 'public' one, as can be seen in the following conversation:

Natella: We want to do Latin and play hockey, and have homework.

Iqbal: No, you need proper teachers for that stuff, and the school cash is tied up in something you don't need to know about. Maybe we could talk again after the next harvest.

(Bromwell High, Series Two, Episode Three, 'Goodbye Mr. Chips')

Natella here mentions not only the academic curriculum, but also the sports they should practice and the fact that they need to get set homework, in order to improve the school; improvements which she clearly associates with independent education. From this conversation it is made clear that the school's money is being used in something that has nothing to do with school. Although Iqbal seems not to be interested at first, he soon changes his mind when Natella tells him about the six figure tuition fees he could be charging, therefore earning. He then decides to build the new boarding school, with 'proper teachers' leaving one place for one of the 'poor kids', as Iqbal calls them, for

⁴⁶ Iqbal is not the average headmaster, he has no qualifications to his name and he is often betting the school's money on dubious businesses in an, often failed, attempt at raising money.

which an exam will be set, and the student with the highest mark will be granted a scholarship. Once again, academic excellence is taken as a given at a private school, and that is why only the brightest child will have the opportunity to study there. This is a clear example of how the educational system in England is presented as one that helps to define and perpetuate privileges amongst the better financially able echelons of society.

Believing, as Natella does, that she is the brightest student at Bromwell High, she assumes she will be the one who gets the scholarship at the new superior elitist school, so she starts giving her farewells to her friends, telling them that as and from the following day, she will be at the new school, wearing the uniform of a private school student, which in turn will give her the possibility of holding a position influential enough to be able to change the system:

Latrina: But then, we is split up!

Keisha: And we'll be left behind in this shithole.

Natella: Yeah, it does seem unfair. But I'll never forget you, and with the superior education I receive I'll be able to change the system from the inside... probably (the pause denotes a certain reluctance on her part to do so).

Keisha: Maybe they is let us all go to the good school together.

Natella: Erm, I don't think so.

Latrina: Why not?

Natella: Let's face it, it wouldn't really be a good school if they let you in, would it? (She giggles)

(Bromwell High, Series Two, Episode Three, 'Goodbye Mr. Chips')

Natella has no doubts about the fact that the education she will receive at the private boarding school will be, to use her words, 'superior' to the one her friends at Bromwell High have access to, so much so that she knows she would be able to change things 'from the inside', another very different thing is whether she would want to or not. Although Natella is bidding her friends farewell, she does not seem to be very moved by this goodbye and she presents a very unmoved and pragmatic attitude. Complying with the image of the not very touchy-feely (Duffy, 2001 and Langford, 2001) sturdy and pragmatic (Langford, 2001) image of the English individual.

An assumption is made about the unfairness of it all and how this superior education will most likely grant her a situation of power from which she might be able to change the existing elitist educational system. She is representing the image of an elitist educational system to which only a few privileged ones have access to, on the basis of either academic excellence or money, which her working class, less academically talented friends must not attend for the school to maintain its status quo.

Furthermore, as we have already discussed, academic excellence tends to go hand in hand with money, and therefore with social class, given that as we have already discussed, attending a 'public' or a private school, is something strongly determined by a comfortable financial situation. And as we have already mentioned, this private education is an almost certain guarantee of receiving an excellent education, which will in turn improve chances to get a top job.

But going back to the image presented of private education, and going back to this same episode of Bromwell High, shortly after the already mentioned exchange of farewells between the three friends, the superiority of independent over state education is re-stated again, this time, by Iqbal, when he makes his announcement about who is going to enter the new school in his speech:

Iqbal: I just popped back to tell you the result of the entrance exam and tell you who is get in to my good school and out of Mr. Bibb's stinking shitbox... Keisha.

(Bromwell High, Series Two, Episode Three, 'Goodbye Mr. Chips')

It is remarkable the way in which Iqbal describes both schools in terms of 'good' versus 'stinking shitbox', once more reinforcing the statement which gives title to this section: 'Posh is More'. Unbelievable though it may seem, Keisha, the aggressive child with attention deficit disorder, is the one who gets the scholarship to the 'good' school, however, it is not due to her academic skills and superiority, but because she changes her name for Natella's during the exam.

Once in the new school, Keisha's inability to follow the lessons, turns into aggression towards her classmates, which is handled in a completely different way to how it was dealt with at Bromwell High, where Keisha used to be sent to the 'isolation unit', up to twenty-eight times in a week. At the new 'good' school, at the first sign of Keisha's aggression, when she is reprimanded for her behaviour and she thinks she is going to be sent to the 'isolation unit' again, she is told by one of the teachers: 'we don't have punishment here young lady, we have games'. She is taken to the hockey team instead, where she soon becomes the captain. This is a clear example of how this comedy offers an image of the superiority of independent schools over state ones, given that aggressiveness is dealt with in a more productive way, channelling this vigour and vitality towards physical education. This idea of channelling students aggression towards a sport, and encouraging them to redirect this strength towards a unifying desire to make their team win, is the one Norridge identifies in his book *Can We Have Our*

Balls Back, Please? where he also explores the history and myths around fourteen mayor sports, amongst them, rugby, cricket and even pub games (2008).

Another example of how ‘Posh is More’ or rather, ‘state is less’ is visible in the image given of the state school *Bromwell High*, which is presented as a very under-achieving inner-city comprehensive. In this state inner school, teachers do not seem to be too concerned about the level of education they are offering, and cannot wait to get out of teaching.⁴⁷ This implies that teachers may not be terribly involved in their job. The first explicit example of the low quality of teaching in *Bromwell High* can be found in the first series, when the OFSTED Inspector goes to Bromwell High and after sitting in some of the lessons concludes:

Inspector: History is appalling, which is fine. Science is woeful, with occasional lessons woeful to very woeful [...] that’s all pretty terrible really, but very much what we expect from an inner-city comp such as this. All we demand from you is that you produce one Olympic athlete per year, and that’s where your problems really lie.
(*Bromwell High*, Series One, Episode Four ‘Sack Race’)

The inspector does not seem to expect any less from a school such as Bromwell High, and that is why the really low quality of the lessons does not look like anything abnormal or anything that should be amended, in fact it is precisely what she counted on encountering there. However, she is disappointed given that they have not got any Olympic athletes, and unless they do something to amend this, they will be in trouble.

This teaching mediocrity at Bromwell High translates into students’ underachievement. One example of this is presented in series one, episode five ‘Valentine’s Day’, when a hole is dug in the middle of the school grounds and there is a big plaque warning about the danger, but because students cannot read, most of them fall down it. A further example of students illiteracy at an inner-city comprehensive can be found in *Little Britain*, where Vicky Pollard is the best example of underachievement; she proves not to be able to speak or write properly and she is not characterised by her bright ideas or comments, on the contrary she proves the complete opposite.

An example of Vicky’s academic performance is provided when her teacher reads her essay on Lord Kitchener. He asks Vicky to stay behind to comment on the

⁴⁷ In Series One, Episode Six ‘No More Teachers’, teachers take the first chance that comes along to do anything but teaching.

work she has done and while he reads her essay we get a glimpse of Vicky's writing skills:

Teacher: Now... about this essay.

Vicky: I done it! (shouting)

Teacher: Yeah. I have one or two problems with it. "What was Lord Kitchener's role in World War I? No, but yeah. In World War I, or summink, there was this bloke, right, called kitchen, or summink, or nuffing, who done this fing, but he ain't ne... even not done it, so shut up. Anyway, Kathy reckons she saw Candice getting off with Tony..." Tozer?

Vicky: Tozer, yeah.

Teacher: "... in Foot Locker, but don't listen to her because 'cos she's got one tit bigger than the other". Vicky, this simply won't do.

Vicky: Why? Is there a problem with spelling?

(Little Britain, Series One, Episode One)

Vicky cannot write properly and she cannot spell correctly, given that she writes things the way she pronounces them. Added to this is the fact that her illiteracy and lack of brightness makes her unaware of her extremely low academic achievement. Here we are presented with an image of an illiterate working-class child, who is also rude and so full of herself she cannot see her faults.

A different perspective of the state comprehensive is offered by Summerdown School in *Teachers*, also a state school. The school's academic standard is considerably better than the one at Bromwell High, and possibly Vicky Pollard's school too, given that there does not seem to be a student with such low academic achievement as Vicky's. Summerdown School does not seem to have a problem of literacy, even though some teachers' main concern may not be their teaching. Simon, one of the English teachers, is more concerned about his insecurities and being 'cool', than about covering the curriculum throughout the series. Another English teacher, Penny, who first appears in series two, proves not to have read some of the books that she is meant to be teaching.

A similar school image is provided in *The Inbetweeners*, which is also set in a comprehensive school called Rudge Park in Bristol. This comedy focuses not on the teaching staff but on the students, consequently it does not really feature teachers, in fact the only teachers with some presence in the sitcom are Mr Gilbert, Head of Sixth Form, a very strict teacher who makes sure order is maintained in his presence if he wants it so, and Mr Kennedy who proves to be over friendly with the boys. In this series, there are constant references to the difference between Will, the privately educated child, and the other boys who have attended state schools all their life. Thus,

private and state education are constantly compared in an implicit manner, where Will always tends to feel and present himself as the one with the superior education.

An overt comparison of private and state education is presented in the comedy series *The Thick of It*. In the third episode of the third season, education standards in a comprehensive and an independent school are compared, and the former is presented as the worst option. The new Secretary of State for the Department of Social Affairs, Nicola Murray, discusses her possible choice of secondary school for her eleven year old daughter with Malcolm Tucker, the Policy Co-ordinator from Number Ten. Nicola explains that at the moment her daughter, Ella, is still at primary, and more specifically ‘state primary’ at a ‘lovely little school with terrible SATS⁴⁸ results’, but ‘really good kind of broad demographic and steel band’. Already she is presenting a state school in which the academic achievement of its students is not very good, where the population of students is very varied and which seems to be good at encouraging more the artistic side of its pupils than their academic skills. She rapidly sees in Malcolm’s eyes what he is thinking about as far as her daughter is concerned, and she does not want to do what Malcolm wants, so they put things out in the open in this conversation:

Nicola: She’s not going to the comprehensive, Malcolm. She’s going to a local independent school.

Malcolm: Jesus H fucking Corbett. Do you honestly think? Do you honestly believe that as a minister you can get away with that? You are saying that all your local state schools, all the schools that this government has drastically improved are knife-addled rape sheds, and that’s not a big story? For fuck’s sake! Sort it or abort it!

(The Thick of It, Series Three, Episode One)

Malcolm’s first priority, as it is customary in him, is what the press might say about the minister’s choice of school for her daughter. He exaggerates Nicola’s possible concerns about sending Ella to the comprehensive school nearby, presenting an image of the state institution as an aggressive place where underage sex is an issue. These images and implications coincide in many ways with the ones already mentioned. Nicola clearly wants to send her daughter to the local independent school, where she believes she will receive a better education and where she will be in a better environment for leaning. However, for the minister of education to send her daughter to a private institution would be to publicly recognise this fact, something the Policy Co-ordinator for Number Ten is not prepared to allow.

⁴⁸ Standard Assessment Tasks, these are a set of tests in English, Maths and Science which children take in the UK at the age of seven, ten and thirteen years old, and which help schools to judge their students ability and progress.

As Malcolm keeps threatening Nicola and abusing her verbally, he comments on the existing problem with her husband's job and in those circumstances taking her daughter to an independent school is too much, so she will need to change her mind about her daughter. His argument is the following:

Malcolm: Look. Your crooked husband I can make go away. But your crooked husband combined with you being worried about your underage daughter coming home up the duff from some truanting bastard, I cannot. She goes to the comp, okay?

(The Thick of It, Series Three, Episode One)

Shortly after this conversation Malcolm tells her she needs to choose between telling her husband to leave his job or send Ella to a comprehensive. In the end she decides to send her daughter to the local comprehensive school, on the basis that, as Nicola herself says, Ella 'is very bright, so... they say if you're very bright then it sort of doesn't matter what school you go to' to which Malcolm agrees. Again, state education is being overtly criticised, as we can see from Malcolm's comments and Nicola's concerns. And as it will be revealed, Nicola's fears were not unfounded.

Throughout the following two episodes there is no mention of how things are going with Ella, but in episode four we learn that things are not going smoothly. As the special adviser to the secretary of state, Ollie Read, puts it:

Ollie: Things are a little bit shitty at home, the daughter's gone all Raging Bull... she's kicking off at school. Basically, ever since Malcolm made Nicola put her in the fucking comp, she's heading for what Mr Neil Diamond I believe would have called a "Sweet Columbine"⁴⁹ incident.

(The Thick of It, Series Three, Episode Four)

Once again aggression and state education are presented as being hand in hand. Also from a conversation that Nicola has with her mother, we infer that Ella is insulting her grandmother who is looking after her, because her mother is at work all day and her father does not really make himself present. Ollie blames the way Ella is behaving to the fact that she was made to go to the comprehensive. Again, as it was the case with Tasmin, the girl who went to Bromwell High for a short time, and Will in the *The Inbetweeners*, when referring to children going from private to state education, the implication is that the child has been forced, in one way or another, to go to the state school. It is clear in all these cases that the preferred option would be private over state education.

⁴⁹ Here he makes a pun on Neil Diamond's song *Sweet Caroline* and the Columbine High School massacre in Colorado in the USA, when two students killed thirteen people and injured many more.

Peter Mannion, the Shadow Minister for Social Affairs and Citizenship of the opposition and his team seem to have a similar opinion to Ollie, as far as comprehensive schools are concerned. One of Peter Mannion's assistants, Phil, is talking about Ella's change of school. He uses a board in order to discuss the issue in more detail where he writes down key words, and he even uses photographs to better illustrate the matter. With the help of some visual aid, he explains how, after having been listed on the intake list for an independent all girls' school, Ella is going to the 'local comprehensive, playground full of first trimester pregnancies and Croydon facelifts', which he describes as a '[...] wrong, or at least very very careless' thing to do on the part of her mum. The reference to the 'Croydon facelift' hints at a 'type' which I will discuss in more detail later on, and which I have already mentioned, the 'chav'.

It is also important to take into account Phil's 'implementation matrix' (as he calls it), which he has drawn on the board, and he uses in order to better discuss Ella's problems. His matrix comprises two main parts: the left side is dedicated to the independent school and the right side, which is left for the comprehensive school. On the left hand side of the board the words 'posh' and 'reliable' are written, describing the independent school, which Phil also refers to as being a 'teeny' and 'Sloanie'⁵⁰ girls' independent school. On the other hand, on the right hand side the words written on the board are 'unreliable' and 'shit', the state school, which Phil describes as a 'comprehensive bang in the middle of a poor catchment area'. This series offers an elitist image of education where 'posh' rich people send their children to private schools, for them to be able to succeed academically and get a high standard of education, and thus improve their opportunities in life, very much like the other comedy series do.

The comedy series *The Inbetweeners*, set in a comprehensive school, also presents a similar idea about the private school as being a preferable option to a state school. When Will first arrives at Rudge Park (first scene of the series) the comprehensive school he has been 'forced to go to', he is really disappointed and expresses his fear by saying that 'they say, whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger'. Will goes even further than this in the opening scene of the second series when he says:

⁵⁰ The word Sloane is defined by the Macmillan Free Online Dictionary as 'a young upper-class English person, especially a woman' (Macmillan, 2013).

Will: I'm still at a normal terrifying comprehensive, because my mum hasn't scraped enough money together to send me back to my old, private and – let's face it – better school.

(*The Inbetweeners*, Series Two, Episode One)

The idea of the private school as a better place for learning is clearly and openly expressed in Will's statement. However, this is not all, he also mentions the fact that comprehensive schools are more aggressive thus becoming 'terrifying'.

All in all, real public education, which is state-based and therefore free for everyone, offered at a comprehensive/state school is not presented as being always reliable. On the contrary, 'public' and private school students are presented as being more politically correct, more knowledgeable and therefore being more prepared for the academic world.

After having briefly talked about the different educational institutions and the kind of education offered, as presented in the comedies selected here, I will discuss each comedy series separately, focusing on its characters and types, at the time I compare to what extent these are taken into account in the academic works selected. I will begin with the image of the secondary education English individual, to finish with that of the young adult in *Fresh Meat*.

CHAPTER 5. BROMWELL HIGH AND VICKY POLLARD

In this section I will analyse the image of the inner comprehensive school types, for this, I will focus on the main characters, the gags made around them and the assumptions associated to each type. As the title of this section reads, I will also focus on *Little Britain*'s Vicky Pollard, a character who also fits the characteristics of a particular kind of student from the inner-city state school.

5.1. Underachieving State/Comprehensive schools and its young type(s)

First of all, I will focus on the young 'state/comprehensive school' individual(s). I will first of all look at the individuals coming out of underachieving schools, to later on move on to the state/comprehensive ones, which are presented as having better academic achievement than the former institutions. Thus, I will begin with *Bromwell High*.

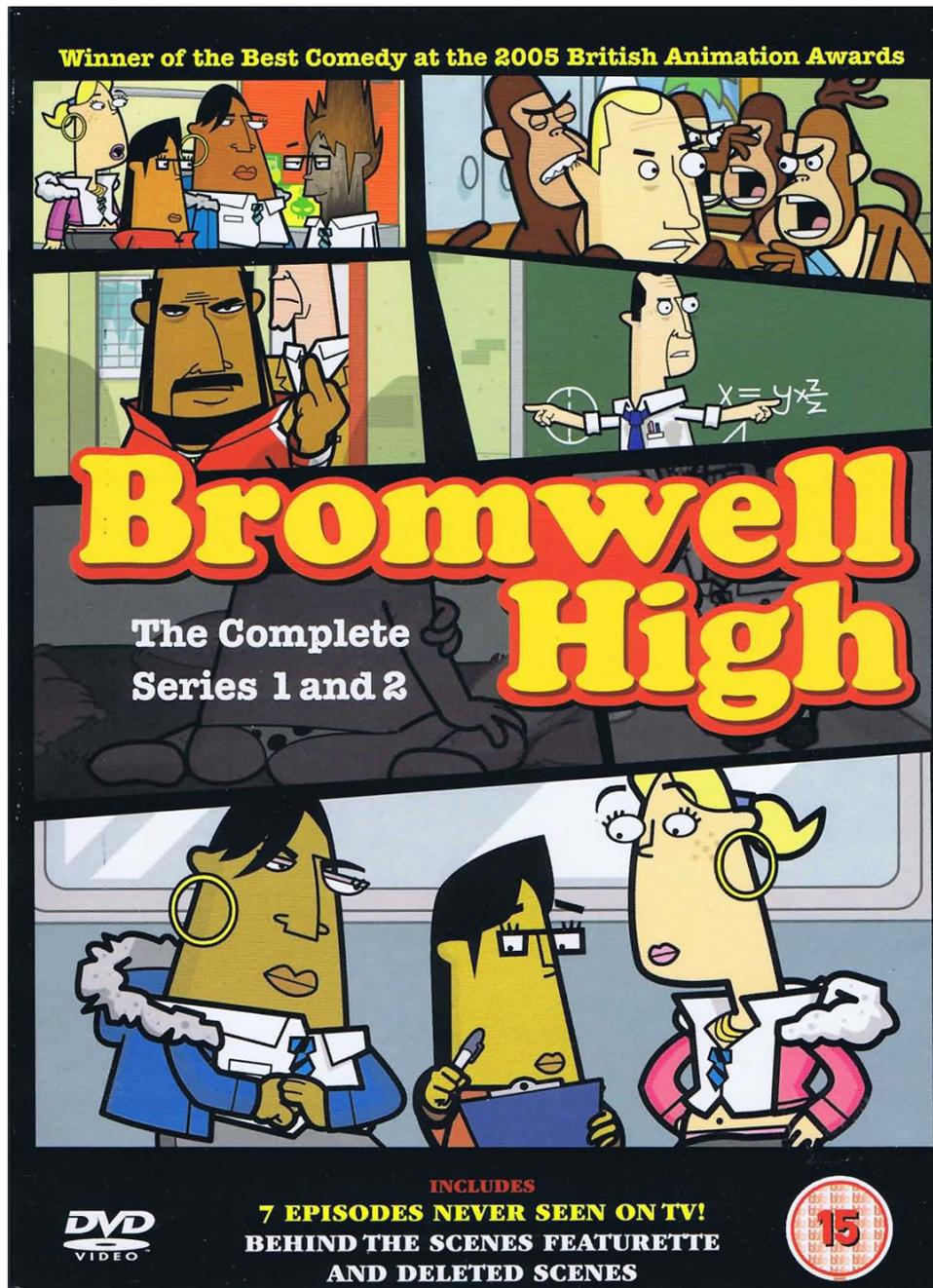


Image 1. Source: Bishop, P. (Director). (2005-2006). *Bromwell High*. Channel 4.

Perhaps due to the fact that this is an animated comedy series, characters and situations are so farfetched that comedy is drawn out of the most outrageous situations. As is the case with *South Park*, just to give an example, cartoons can afford to be more extravagant than films, if just merely for the fact that 'special effects' are much easier to do on the screen. For whatever reason, this animated series is outrageously politically incorrect, and stereotypes are taken to the limit.

In the image above we can see the three main characters of this series right at the bottom, where we find Keisha, Natella and Latrina, from left to right, just above Keisha we can see Iqbal the Headmaster, some of the teachers on the right, and just above the Headmaster, we find Kylie, the bullied child, who in this image seems to have been burned.

Out of the comedies examined here, the most underachieving school is *Bromwell High*. However, there is a student here who does not seem to fit the mould, which is presented in the character of Natella, who seems to be the odd one out. She mixes with the rest, however she is always distinguishing herself from the other students in the school, she even believes at one point she will enter a private boarding school given her high academic achievement, as we have already mentioned.

5.2. Natella the Asian-English child

Natella is daughter to a corner shop owner, a newsagent to be more precise, and she has been born into a Hindu family. She advocates tolerance above all, and often resorts to her abilities to try and talk people into doing things her way. She is a very bright and articulate student, as is expected from her, according to the teachers, her academic superiority only being challenged when a ‘public’ school girl, Tasmin, is sent to Bromwell High for a short while. She will most likely marry a cousin or someone chosen for her by her parents. Natella is herself a type, being Asian she is all everybody expects her to be. All these predictions about her future are not something accidental, but have been suggested by others and ratified by Natella herself. Despite the fact that we do not really find this type of English individual in many of the works we have mentioned in relation with the study of Englishness, it is undeniable that types such as Natella’s are to be found in many schools around the country, and should, in my opinion be taken into account in identifications and descriptions of Englishnesses.

5.2.1. Natella as a clever, hard-working and an articulate individual

Early in the series, already in Episode One, Natella is presented as a very intellectually able individual in contrast with her peers, who clearly feels superior to her colleagues and explicitly express so in more than one occasion. In this episode, a teacher is invited to Bromwell High, Miss Hutchinson, to give the class a talk on sex education. Once the

talk is finished, Miss Dickson asks the boys and girls if they have any questions, and this is the response she gets:

Latrina: Why are you so fat?

Natella: Please, excuse my friend's clumsiness. May I ask a question of a more pertinent sexual nature?

Miss Dickson: Oh, thank God for the Asians (addressing Miss Hutchinson).

(*Bromwell High*. Series One, Episode One: 'Baby Boom')

In this instance comprehensive educated students show their lack of academic interest and ability, this is where Natella shows the difference between her colleagues and herself. She proves to be the exception in the classroom, compared to her peers' academic mediocrity, with her very appropriate and well expressed query. Miss Dickson on the other hand, is pleased with Natella's eloquence and appropriateness, which she does not relate to Natella as an individual but as a group of individuals; Asian people. Later on in the series, Natella is also referred to as 'the clever one' by Mrs. Jackson when she is calling the register (Series Two, Episode Two: 'Police Story'). Although Natella feels superior to her peers, it is on the basis that she is Asian, as her teachers seem to assume. Thus, she could be said to exemplify the English characteristic, which we discussed in earlier sections, in relation to a feeling of superiority (Jones, 2003; Langford, 2001)

Another comedy series in which this image of the Asian child as an academic high achiever is presented in is *Goodness Gracious Me*, where parents talk about the results their son got for his A-levels. The mother seems very pleased about their son's really good results, whereas the father is much more negative about it, as can be seen from the following conversation where the father fears the results will not be satisfactory enough:

Father: Oh, tell me the worst.

Mother: No, no, no, it's great he got what he needed.

Father: English A, Mathematics A, Physics A, Chemistry A, (he pulls a disappointed face) What is this? (he points at the letter)

Mother: What?

Mother: He got a B in classical studies.

Father: He got a B?

Mother: It doesn't matter.

Father: What do you mean, it doesn't matter, it doesn't matter, my son got a (he spits) B?

Mother: It's only one

Father: Still he got a B, he could have got all As. Mr. Sine's son got all As but my son had to get a B.

Mother: Mr Sine son did two A levels our son did five, in one sitting, he is the first in his school ever to do that.

Father: Really?

Mother: Yes

Father: Then he is going to a school full of idiots. How am I going to keep my head up in the community, hum? My son got a B.

Mother: He got the grades to do Medicine at Cambridge.

Father: He is doing medicine at Cambridge? Idiot, he should be doing a PhD.

Mother: They don't let him do a postgraduate without a degree.

Father: I know, that's why I was telling him to do his degree in his spare time. What is wrong with him?

(Goodness Gracious Me, Series Two, Episode Four)

The father goes on complaining about the fact their son has not made it into a well known football team, like a neighbour's, it is then that we learn that he is only six. In this case, not only is the boy extremely bright for his age, but also his father seems to never be satisfied. In this instance, we are invited to laugh at these outrageously demanding Asian father, who is never satisfied regardless how extremely gifted his son proves to be, and who is more concerned about what the community will think than about his son's real achievements. Nonetheless, the overall image is that of the extremely bright and hard-working Asian-English individual.

5.2.2. Natella's lack of choice for marriage

Apart from Asians' assumed high academic performance and achievement, there are other aspects related to their personal and family life which are not only assumed by others, but affirmed by Natella herself, such as the fact that being Asian means she will probably marry someone chosen for her by her parents. The first instance when this image is put forward is in series one, and it is Natella herself who presents it. When Mrs Jackson is reprimanding her for being unhelpful and refusing to take Tasmin (the new girl) round the school and show her where everything is, the following conversation takes place:

Mrs. Jackson: What would your parents say if they knew you were being so uncooperative?

Natella: They wouldn't say anything. They'd stab me and then make me marry my cousin.

(Bromwell High. Series One, Episode One: 'Baby Boom')

Later on, in the same series, this image is taken as normal by the Educational Inspector. When Natella is trying to persuade her to dismiss Mr. Campbell rather than Mr. Phillips, she falsely alleges that Mr. Campbell tried to sell her drugs and was trying to make her his child bride, to which the inspector's answer denotes that this is taken as

something normal in Natella's culture and thus, it should not be taken as an offensive act, when she answers:

Inspector: Well, he's showing a remarkable sensitivity to your culture, where, as I understand, young children enjoy getting married to fat older men.
(*Bromwell High*. Series One, Episode Four 'Sack Race')

This stereotyped image of the Asian-English girl, who will be made to get married against her will, is repeated in more than one occasion in this series. Despite the fact that this is obviously a fictitious portrayal of an Asian girl, it is also undeniable that the issue is a real one in society, as found in the media. We can find news dealing with the issue in many different ways, from the 24 year old Muslim woman raised in Britain, who advocates for an arranged marriage for herself (Akkoc, 2014), to the more critical articles which deal with the fatality of 'forced marriage' as it is described (Owen & Wilkinson, 2013; Warnes, 2014; BBC News, 2014, June 16).

5.2.3. Newsagents' are run by Asians

Another 'defining' aspect of Asian people, which is presented and ratified not only by Natella but also by others, is the fact that Newsagents' are invariably run by Asians. The first time this is implied is in the first series, when the girls go to a newsagent's to buy some explosive banned sweets, and to Natella's astonishment, the newsagent is not Asian. She expresses this directly when she asks: 'If you are a newsagent, why aren't you Asian?' to which the newsagent's answer is just to run away, supposedly after having been found out as an impostor.

Later on in the series when Latrina becomes a sprinter, and the official at the races questions her taking part in the race in surprise given that she is not black, Natella steps in to criticise the official's prejudices. However it bounces back to her when prejudices assumed about her are in fact confirmed:

Official: Aren't you supposed to be selling refreshments?

Natella: No, not until I finish timing this race.

(*Bromwell High*. Series One, Episode Four 'Sack Race')

Something really similar takes place when Natella is trying to talk Keisha into not making over-generalising stereotyped and stereotyping comments about gypsies. In this instance Keisha shows her prejudice against gypsies, even though she says she likes

them, and both the girls insult and attack each other resorting to negative stereotypes, and end the conversation by confirming and conforming to them:

Keisha: Man, I love Gypsies. Clothes pegs, horses. They got it all.

Natella: Your prejudice astonishes me.

Keisha: Thank you very much Natella.

Natella: Pegs and horses indeed! Your stereotypical attitude engenders intolerance towards a proud people.

Keisha: Yeah, Pegs and horses. You said it Natella.

Natella: Gypsies belong to a race like you belong to a race and I belong to a race. And we don't stereotype each other, do we?

Keisha: Huh, shouldn't you be down the newsagent?

Natella: (answers back angrily and offended) Shouldn't you be dealing crack in the wood with your gangster yardie motherfuckers?

Keisha: No, I mean, it's Wednesday lunch time. Shouldn't you be down he newsagent?

Natella: (gasp) My dad will kill me.

(*Bromwell High*. Series Two, Episode One 'Tolerance')

After this exchange, not only has Natella's objective been swept aside, but it has been crushed. Natella was advocating against stereotyping and the negative effects it has on society together with the intolerance and prejudices it feeds. Keisha is clearly not aware of the racist implications of her comments, nor she understands her friend's comments. Natella's language is far too complicated for someone with the basic mastering of the language Keisha has. Nonetheless, at the end of the conversation, Natella is restated as someone who should be working in the newsagent's as it is expected from her, and Keisha conforms to her image as an illiterate aggressive gangster child, who deep down, and despite her criminal behaviour, is genuinely concerned about her friend's obligations at the newsagent's.

Another instance of the stereotyped image of Asians as the ones running newsagents can be found in *Little Britain* Series Two, Episode Three, where one of the sketches is about a newsagent run by an Asian looking man (Matt Lucas blacked up) who comes across as being a little nosy about his customers' business, in his attempt at trying to be friendly.

A similar image, this time not of a newsagent but of a small shop, is presented in *The Inbetweeners*, when the boys need to rent a suit for the Christmas Prom and Simon's dad takes them to the same shop where he rented his suit when he was a teenager. They go into a little shop run by an Asian shop assistant, who seems to have the same suits ever since the shop was opened, and who does not seem to say much more than 'too jazzi?' when the boys try something on which is ridiculously old

fashioned, or at least that is what it seems they are thinking by the look on their faces (Series One, Episode Six: 'Christmas Prom').

These examples reinforce the image of the corner shop Asian owner. Indeed, these images are not isolated, as it is not that rare to find more examples of this in other comedy films, where if there is a corner shop, it is run by an Asian individual, as it is the case in *Shaun of the Dead*, *This is England*, or as it is very clearly featured in the Youtube comedy series *Corner Shop*. In fact, in the media the 'family run Asian corner shop' is described as 'a feature of life in Britain' (Brown, 2002).⁵¹ Furthermore, we can find recent samples of concern in the media about the decline of the Asian run corner shop, in a nostalgic manner, alluding to the disappearance of such a traditional and familiar British image (Brown, 2002; Daily Mail, 2002; Easton, 2009). After all, it is not rare to find comments such as the following, taken from the BBC: 'the Asian corner shop has passed into British folklore' (Choudhury, n.d.), so much so that there is even a British band called Cornershop.

5.3. Keisha, the Black English child

Keisha is a black under-achieving, under-educated gangster student, who suffers from attention-deficit disorder and who enjoys burning things along with violence. She blames society for her underachievement because she feels she is treated badly for being black. Keisha also lacks a considerable amount of vocabulary. Many words need to be explained to her constantly by her friends, and she speaks in a strong Afro-Caribbean British accent. She is the bully of the school and slaps and hits people at her pleasure. Together with this, her family is presented as dysfunctional and broken, in fact, she never talks about her parents herself. At one point, one of her teachers, Mr Bibby, doubts if she even has a family when telling her about how proud they would be if she became a prefect, as can be seen in the following extract:

Mr. Bibby: Imagine that. What a proud day that would be for your parents, guardians or whatever combination of incompetent care workers administer your domestic needs.
(*Bromwell High*. Series One, Episode Two: 'Prefect')

⁵¹ As described in an article published by *The Guardian*. Retrieved from: <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2002/jan/05/socialsciences.britishidentity>.

It is important to say here, that the reason they want to make Keisha a prefect is to use her as the intimidating force to discipline the whole school. First of all, this exchange starts with a lie and follows with Mr. Bibby assuming that whoever Keisha's carers may be, family or not, they must unequivocally be 'incompetent' at doing the minimum; that is, catering for her domestic needs. It is remarkable here that he has not even considered love and emotional care, a cold trait that I will discuss later on in relation to Mr. Bibby's character.

5.3.1. Black and aggressive

As it has already been mentioned, Keisha represents the aggressive illiterate type, who happens to be black, or is it part and parcel of being black? We saw earlier that, as much as Natella wanted to rebel against the stereotype of the Asian corner shop owner, in an attempt at getting at her friend, she accuses Keisha of being a young criminal, which she in fact confirms. While it is true the image of the black individual as being a drug dealer will come up again in this study, it is also true that not all black individuals are represented in this way. However, existing prejudices which relate criminal activity and skin colour will also be made evident through the comedies studied here. But going back to the character which occupies us here, Keisha, it is on a great number of occasions that she presents herself as the bully of the school, so much so that eliciting them all would result in a list of instances too long, which would only hinder my argument. I will however mention those episodes in which her aggression is more present or relevant for the development of the plot. It is also worthy of mention that there is one person she harasses with consistency throughout the whole series, and that is Kylie, a shy little blonde girl with acne.⁵²

As I mentioned earlier, Keisha is made a prefect at school precisely because of her aggressive and violent manner. Keisha, in her unorthodox way, makes sure the school runs smoothly by harassing everyone to the point of obedience, out of sheer fear. Mr. Bibby and Iqbal talk about the success of their plan, as the former expresses he is really pleased with how things run at school, given that, using his words: 'discipline in the school is at an all-time high, Keisha is like Terminator but harder' (Series One, Episode Two: 'Prefect').

⁵² Kylie is the girl who appears in the first image shown of *Bromwell High*, the girl who seems to have been burnt.

In the same series, she also shows her aggression, this time upon the object of her love, a blonde boy who is new at school. She does not know how to react to the new feeling she is experiencing so she reacts the only way she knows, by hitting him (Episode Five: 'Keisha's in love').

Keisha's urge to hit and cause trouble is a recurring theme throughout the series. In Series Two, as we have seen already, Keisha gets sent to the 'isolation unit' for her disruptive and aggressive behaviour a total amount of twenty-eight times in a week (Episode Three: 'Goodbye Mr. Chips'). Another example of Keisha's aggressive and disruptive behaviour is presented later on in the same series where she sets fire to the school on various occasions and she gets sent to see a psychologist to help her overcome her pyromaniac urge (Episode Four: 'Fire drill').

All in all, it seems that Keisha is not only aggressive, but that is the only way she has of interacting with the world. Often, when she does not understand a word or something someone tells her, she reacts by hitting people, so it could be said that her aggression and her illiteracy go hand in hand. In fact, in more than one occasion she acknowledges the fact that she suffers from attention deficit disorder, the excuse she uses to justify her not doing any work.

5.3.2. Black and with a chip on her shoulder

Everything in her life is associated and justified by her being black, even her religion, as can be seen in the following extract, where Mr Beale (the Religious Education teacher) is talking about different religions:

Mr. Beale: We're talking about religion. Mahmoud and Hassan are Muslims? (they both look at him wide eyed without asserting) Patel is a Hindu. What religion are you? (Addressing Keisha)

Keisha: I'm black.

Mr. Beale: (laughs a little) Get out!

(Bromwell High. Series One, Episode Two, 'Prefect')

This short extract shows several things. On the one hand, it shows how Mr. Beale wrongly believes Mahmoud and Hassan are Muslims, presumably based on their physical appearance, and on the other hand, it shows how Keisha's religious identity, for her, is formed on the basis of her skin colour. For Keisha, everything in her life seems to be down to her being black, that is why when she's asked about her religion, she says she is black. But she goes even further than that, every time she is asked/forced

to do something she does not like she defends herself by saying that it is all because she is black, or as she would say: 'Only 'cos I is black!' This is in fact her answer when she is taken to court, and she is forced to admit the reason why she was being so aggressive with a boy, when the real reason she kept hitting and bullying him was in fact because she fancied him, and she did not know how to react other than by hitting him (Series One, Episode Five: 'Keisha's in love').

Keisha feels she is being picked on all the time, or at least that is one of her favourite arguments, because in fact she does not seem to have any kind of emotional trauma about it. She never thinks that the reason why she gets punished might be because she is actually aggressive. In fact in one episode (Series Two, Episode Three: 'Goodbye Mr. Chips'), when she gets sent to the isolation unit for the twentieth time, she accuses Mrs Jackson of taking her there as an act of discrimination, and she says: 'You is picking on me 'cos of my Muslim Faith' which she had actually just decided to adopt that very same morning, and which she abandons shortly afterwards on the basis that she will not stop eating bacon crisps. However, for Keisha, being black is not only about skin colour and attitude as we have already seen, this black persona is also intimately linked with a specific speech.

5.3.3. Black individual's speech

By examining Keisha's defence mechanism to almost anything, there is a perfect sample of the speech which tends to be associated with black individuals: 'Only 'cos I is black'. Words are shortened and the verb 'to be' is only used in the present in its third person singular form 'is', regardless the subject of the verb. Iqbal the headmaster also overuses the form of the verb to be 'is', which together with his accent is defined by Mr Bibby as 'banana boat English'. This way of talking is also adapted by other 'non-black' characters, in order to create a cool persona. At one point, some teachers try to imitate the children's clothes and language and Mr. Phillip, the PE teacher, tries to look and talk like the students (Episode Two, Series One: 'Prefect'). In doing so, he imitates the already mentioned 'black talk' in his attempt at being down with the kids. This implies that all or most students, regardless their 'race' or 'ethnicity', are likely to use that language. He is in the playground in rap-like attire: jeans, a red jacket and a cap which he wears sideways, leaning on the goal post and saying: 'Eee. Me niggaz. Homie. Hey biatch'. Students respond to him in disgust and just ignore him, except a child who

steals his clothes. However, this speech, which is generally associated with individuals of Afro-Caribbean origins, is also adopted by individuals of Anglo-Saxon origins.

In *Little Britain*, Vicky Pollard (apparently of white Anglo-Saxon origins⁵³) starts going out with a black boy and when she meets her friends she seems to have changed her speech completely. Although she has always had a bit of an attitude her gait has changed and so has her speech. The following image shows her with her boyfriend arriving to meet Vicky's friends, who have been waiting for her for a while now.



Image 2. Source: *Little Britain*, Series Two, Episode Six: 2:44.

The girls ask her if she is going to go out ‘robbing’ with them to which she replies:

Vicky: (JAMAICAN) No but, yeah but, no but, yeah but, no because this whole thing happened that I don’t know nothing about, so like shut up, and don’t go giving me evils because me got me man, Jermaine now, and we’ve just been round the back of the water slides makin’ babies.’

Vicky’s friend: So are you coming robbin’ down Wollies with us later or what?

Vicky: ‘Me don’t know. Me think about just hangin’ with me man Jermaine, and be cookin’ up some chicken and rice and peas, but, yeah but, no but, yeah, because it’s up to Jermaine now, because me is his bitch now, because Jermaine, what say you?’

Jermaine: (POSH) Oh I don’t really know, Victoria. I’m just happy to go with the flow.

Vicky: Me man has spoken. Wollies it is. Rasta!

(*Little Britain*, Series Two, Episode Six)

⁵³ This is an assumption I make on the basis of her physical appearance, given that she could fit this description.

First of all I must comment on the words ‘JAMAICAN’ and ‘POSH’ which have not been added by me, but which were included in the subtitles given in the original DVD. Vicky’s voice becomes graver, she speaks more slowly and she walks with a bit of an attitude like Jermaine, her boyfriend. This is the only instance in which Vicky changes her accent. She chooses to speak in a Jamaican accent because she is going out with a black boy, so she decides to identify with the Jamaican community. However, and to Vicky’s friends’ surprise, her boyfriend speaks with a perfect RP accent, which is described in the script of the original video as posh, a term which, as we have already discussed can be a little ambiguous due to the different connotations it has.

Once more, the speech is marked by a specific use of pronouns ‘me’ instead of ‘I’, just like Mr Phillips does (the PE teacher at Bromwell High). Vicky’s voice, like Keisha’s, sounds grave and her intonation is similar to that of Keisha. There is however, a contradicting image of the black individual: Vicky’s ‘black boyfriend’, as he is referred to by her friends, who speaks in an impeccable Queen’s English accent. In this case, types are therefore challenged. Once again, identities are understood, chosen and represented by individuals according to their personal choice.

This idea of a speech usually associated to a ‘race’ or ‘ethnicity’ being appropriated by many individuals, who apparently do not belong to that racial group, is not something that only occurs in fiction. In the link where the video of this scene is uploaded on Youtube, there are many comments which remark on this. Some of the comments found straight after this scene are the following:⁵⁴

PantheraOnca: So true, loads of white kids try and talk like they are black. So common now nobody really says anything.

Malcolm Pagett: They speak it because it’s called Multicultural london English (MLE). It’s said to replace cockney by 2030. Shame that this, gov’ner. Ver half inching our talk.

ChocoholicSISTA263: lucas manages to looks like a female even with that pot belly lol. The ending when the black guy speaks was so funny.⁵⁵

These comments, not only denote the fact that this is a funny scene, but also the way in which ‘racial speech’ is appropriated by individuals, regardless of ethnic or racial differences. Thus, the speech marker that once could be unmistakably associated to a specific racial identity has now been appropriated as a trend, loosing its ethnic edge. A speech, which was once associated to a specific group of individuals from a specific

⁵⁴ The spelling mistakes have been maintained for the purpose of literal quotation. These quotes were retrieved on 22nd January 2014.

⁵⁵ Retrieved from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zKVyV1sdxh4>.

racial and ethnic background, is now seen and used as an accessory for the individual's social persona.

5.3.4. Black people must be good at sports

That is something that Keisha does not conform to as a black individual, but which is accredited to black individuals, as can be seen in the dialogue below from the series. Here the inspector goes to Bromwell High, and in disappointment she explains how she will need to dismiss Mr Philip due to the fact that they have not achieved the only thing that is asked for from an inner-city comprehensive such as Bromwell High, and that is to produce one Olympic athlete per year. Latrina proves to be excellent at sports, however the inspector does not even consider her because she is not black:

Inspector: ... no one has reached the required standard.

Natella: What about Latrina?

Inspector: All the athletes have to be black, I would have thought that was obvious.

Natella: But that's racist! What about Asian children?

Inspector: Well they operate the stopwatch, and sell refreshments.

Inspector: As we don't have one single child of appropriate ethnicity for the South London Athletics Finals this afternoon I have no option but to recommend that Mr Phillips be sacked.

(Bromwell High. Series One, Episode Four: 'Sack Race')

At the last minute Natella and Latrina come in after having looked at Latrina's diary and Natella explains that 'there's a 17 in 28 chance that her dad was black', it is thanks to this that she is allowed to take part in the race, although not without any further opposition. When she gets there, she is sneered at by the official in charge of the race, who is sceptical about her running, given the fact she is not black. In fact, she is the only white girl taking part.

This idea of the black individual as the good athlete is not an isolated one relegated to the outrageousness of the politically incorrect cartoons of this series, it is something that comes up later on in *Teachers*, and which seems to be more extended than I would have ventured to say. This is indeed a widely discussed issue. On the one hand, it is not hard to find plenty of examples of this preconceived idea whether it be in the media, where we can find plenty of examples justifying this on the basis of the natural selection put on African-American individuals, or in science magazines (Rowan, 2010; Popular Social Science, 2013) where physical constitution is taken into account. Even the ex Olympic medallist Carl Lewis himself is known to have declared on more

than one occasion that black athletes are superior due to their genetic constitution. This preconceived idea about black people, is nonetheless challenged too by those who believe it is more to do with cultural aspects than with purely physical ones (Entine, 2008).

All in all the character of Keisha would not really fit the description of the English as seen in the academic world. It is true however, that she is presented as an aggressive and courageous individual, which is something Langford identified as being characteristic of the English (2001).

After discussing the stereotype and the preconceived ideas about Natella, the Asian child, and Keisha, I am going to move on to a different figure, which despite sharing a similar background, and being educated at the same institution is commonly associated to white people, the chav.

5.4. The 'Chav'

First of all I must acknowledge I am aware of the negative connotations such a derogatory term carries with it, and the way it looks down upon a specific type of working class individual, the 'chav'. However, in order to portray a faithful image of English types it is necessary not only to describe the types, but also to acknowledge the terminology that has been created, and has been and still is being used, to refer to specific groups of individuals in society.

Although the term 'chav' started to be used before, it was first included in the Collins English Dictionary in 2005, when a chav was described as a young working-class individual who tends to wear casual sports clothes (Jones 8:2011). Nowadays the definition given by the Collins Dictionary Online is: '(Southern England, informal, derogatory) a young working-class person whose tastes, although sometimes expensive, are considered vulgar by some' (Collins, 2014). Along very similar lines, the MacMillan Free online dictionary gives the following definition: 'someone, especially a working-class person, who is not well educated, who dresses in designer clothes and wears a lot of gold jewellery but whose appearance shows bad taste' (MacMillan, 2013)

Although the definitions are fairly similar, it is already possible to see that the term chav, as clarified by the Collins Online dictionary is a regional term. The existing terminology to refer to the 'chav' varies regionally, for example, in Scotland chavs are known as Neds on the West Coast of Scotland they are called Schemies, in Liverpool

they are Scallies, around London the word Kev is commonly used, in Plymouth they are called Janners, in Belfast they are known as Smicks, Steeks, Moakes and Spides, in Essex you find Bazzas and Pikeys (although this last word is also associated with gypsies in the rest of Britain), and in Newcastle they are Charvers (Bok 10: 2006). On the other hand, the word chav is just a mere update of ‘oik’ or ‘job’. Regardless of the word used, it is worthy of mention here that all the above mentioned terminology, when used, can be interpreted and understood as offensive.

The first book published on this matter dates back to 2004 when *The Little Book of Chavs: The Branded Guide to Britain’s New Elite* was first printed, and whose author chose to use the pseudonym of Lee Bok. This little book, which is part of a series, sold over 100,000 copies having to be reprinted eight times, as the author explains in the introduction to the last edition of the book. The definition of the word chav according to this book differs slightly from the one given by the dictionary, and chavs are described as ‘non-educated delinquents’ and ‘the burgeoning peasant underclass’ (Bok 8:2006). A month later after *The Little Book of Chavs* was first published, another book of the series was published, *The Little Book of Chav Speak*, and two years later in 2006 the last book of the series came out *The Little Book of Chav Jokes*. After the first book of the series was published readers wrote to the editors so that names of ‘chav’ places, which had been left out of the book’s original list, could be added, something the author acknowledges and is very grateful for.

In the same year another book was published, which made ‘Chav Spotting’ into a sport the whole family could practise and enjoy when they were out and about, comparing chavs to animals, as can be seen in the following extract:

‘The Essential Guide to Chav Spotting’

A game the whole family can play! Spotting a chav in the wild is easy. Often moving around in packs like a strange nomadic tribe, the rigid dress code will enable you to spot a chav yards away. Cutting-edge, fake-designer fashion, branded sportswear and accessories to die for, fabulously extravagant 9-carat-gold ‘bling’ (jewellery), it’s all here in this fun-for-all-the-family, point-scoring game!

(Wallace & Spanner 2004:15)

On the one hand, the aim of the game is spotting them ‘in the wild’, implying the fact that they are to be found outside civilization. On the other hand, using the term ‘pack’ to refer to them alludes to their similarity with animals.

Furthermore, the points to be awarded for spotting one of these peculiar creatures differs, depending on the items of clothing they wear, which are not described in a very complementary way, as can be seen in the following example:

BIG Hoop Gold Earrings: nothing says ‘filthy chavette’ quite like a nice thick pair of big hoop gold earrings

(Wallace & Spanner 2004: 19).

This way, for example, the authors go on explaining that for spotting a female chav wearing big hoop gold earrings, you get 10 points, 15 points ‘if they are big enough for a budgie to swing on’, 20 points if ‘a police dog could jump through them’ and 25 points ‘if they actually rest on the chavette’s shoulders’ (Wallace & Spanner 2004: 20). This ‘fun for all the family’ game is a clear act of scorn and disrespect towards this social group.

In this book, the authors explain how they met at a McDonald’s branch, and how the whole project of the book came about. They started setting themselves aside from the clientele, and subsequently they began to identify and seek out ‘chavs’ and their behaviour to ‘laugh at it wherever possible’ (Wallace & Spanner 2004: 256). In fact, the book sprang from the success obtained from the authors’ webpage www.chavscum.co.uk. This is a site where people could, and still can, write in to leave comments about Chavs in their area, and send suggestions about new Chav areas, which are then included on the page. In fact, according to the Guardian, it was this site which was mainly to blame for the flourishing chav phenomenon (Hudson, 2004). A very similar site is *I Live Here*,⁵⁶ where people can write their comment about the area where they live along very similar lines, criticising how their area is plagued with chavs. Nowadays, when typing the word ‘Chav’ in any search engine on the internet, lots of pages come up, and some of them even include questionnaires where you can test and find out if ‘u is a Chav’, such as <http://www.boredandlazy.co.uk/quiz.php?q=chav> (this one has a picture of Vicky Pollard the already mentioned character of *Little Britain*) and <http://chavstest.com>. This phenomenon, as Wallace and Spanner explain in their book, springs from a process of differentiation, of de-identification, in which the process of forming the individual’s identity is strongly supported by what he/she wants not to be.

In any case, both books mentioned above, *The Little Book of Chavs* and *Chav! A User’s Guide to Britain’s New Ruling Class*, offer very similar perspectives of the chav

⁵⁶ <http://www.ilivehere.co.uk>.

as a youngster who enjoys money and expensive things, but who is not keen on working to get them. According to these books, men chose to have their hair shaved or with lots of gel, and wear 'Engerland' (that is how it would be pronounced) T-shirts, or sports designer T-shirts with big visible logos – the bigger the better – sparkling white trainers, designer caps and a hoody, which in many cases will be pulled over the cap and which, according to the literature, is worn in order to avoid the CCTV cameras⁵⁷. Female chavs hairstyle and clothing are described in *The Little Book of Chavs* as follows:

According to the *Daily Mail*, the females of the species *pull their shoddily dyed hair back in that ultra-tight bun known as a 'council-house facelift'* wear skirts that would be better described as wide belts and tops that expose too much. (Bok, 2004: 16)

The author then goes on specifying makes of clothes, namely Mark One and New Look, and continues by specifying footwear, which includes stilettos and trainers. The hairstyle is described as 'bottle-blonde and scraped back into a ponytail, with lots of mousse and/or hairspray, scrunchies, etc' (Bok, 2004: 16). Nevertheless, and despite the fact that there exist obvious differences in clothing between men and women, both share a soft spot for gold and bling.

From a completely different perspective and coming from a totally different viewpoint Owen Jones wrote his book *Chavs: the Demonization of the Working Class* (2011). It was precisely the lightness and contempt with which people seemed to ridicule and laugh at a specific part of society, during a dinner with friends, which motivated him to write and present the dangers and implications of doing so. This tendency to mock and write off a part of society, which often results in the stereotyping of the working classes, turning them into a laughing stock has been identified by many (Rogalty & Taylor, 2011; Jones 2011). Jones discusses the term *chav* as well as the political and social implications attached to the use of this term and the presentation and perception of chavs. Jones argues that this open tendency of ridiculing and laughing at the *chav* as a working-class individual is due to the socio-economic and political evolution that Britain has experienced. According to him, the working classes have been devoid of any power or presence in society and that is why laughing at them seems like such a good and safe sport for some. On top of this, the laughable depiction of the *chav* associating it to a specific echelon of society blurs the reality of the working-classes. A reality which, as I will discuss by the end of this thesis, is not that easy to move out of.

⁵⁷ Nowadays most establishments hold a 'hats off, hoods down' policy.

Jones argues that Thatcherism and its role in the decline of the power of unions coupled with today's tendency to proclaim that there are no classes, has had a very negative effect on the working classes. He believes that social aspirations and the effort to encourage people to try and better themselves by climbing up the supposedly 'non-existent' social ladder, by getting better qualifications in order to get more secure jobs, thus becoming middle-class, have left an alienated disenchanted working-class which does not feel it has a voice in politics and society in general, and is therefore mocked and laughed at freely.

This image of the upward moving English society has left a concept of a working-class individual who has chosen not to take the leap, therefore his/her situation is perceived and portrayed as a choice. This is part of the reason why some working-class people are so often mocked for society's amusement, because they are made to believe that they deserve it, given that everyone has got the choice (Jones, 2011). In fact, in the comedy series *The Thick of It*, this idea is overtly discussed when talking about chavs in a conversation that two of the minister's advisors have about the said minister's daughter (already discussed in this thesis), and the negative effect that going to a state school had on her. When Ollie explains that Ella, the minister's daughter, has become more aggressive since 'Malcolm made Nicola put her daughter in the fucking comp', the following exchange takes place:

Glenn: It's the whole deserving and undeserving poor argument again, though, isn't it?

Ollie: It's the chavs and chav-nots.

Glenn: Yeah.

(The Thick of It, Series Three, Episode Four)

When Glenn refers to the 'deserving and undeserving argument', Ollie does not hesitate to identify what Glenn is talking about, or rather who he is talking about, chavs. They were both talking about the working class, they both recognised the clues and seemed to agree on everything. Firstly, they identify children at the comprehensive school as chavs and secondly they recognise the fact that when it comes to them, one always goes back to whether they deserve help or not.

These instances and all the examples already given are further proof of the fact that, as Jones argues, nobody seems to bat an eye-lid when comedians ridicule this part

of society (here he mentions David Walliams and Matt Lucas in *Little Britain*).⁵⁸ Consequently working-class individuals will be laughed at in ‘middle-class dinner parties’ remorselessly. In fact, *Little Britain*’s version of the chav, Vicky Pollard, is a ruthless, selfish, illiterate, full of herself and utterly dumb character we are invited to laugh at without any kind of pity or remorse. She is not the kind of character it is easy to develop empathy or pity for.

Furthermore, the media leaves little room for any kind of understanding towards this figure. It is not hard to find headlines where uneducated aggressive youths vandalise and victimise individuals or whole areas. As Jones mentions in his book, even gyms have been known to offer self defence lessons, advertised as the best way to defend against possible attacks from chavs (2011: 3).

5.4.1. Latrina the ‘chav’, just like Vicky Pollard

In the case of the comedies studied here, Latrina in *Bromwell High* and Vicky Pollard in *Little Britain* are both different versions of the same type, the chav. According to the books and webpages mentioned earlier, which claim to offer the ultimate guide to discover, spot and know about chavs, and which set out to do so in a comic manner, both Vicky and Latrina would fit perfectly into the description of chavs, not only by their clothing and appearance, but also because of their attitude and interests. They both could be said to be not very keen on tolerance, they also have strong accents which distance themselves greatly from standardized RP English. Latrina’s speech and Vicky Pollard’s are somewhat similar in which they both show a poor command of the English language and its lexicon. However, their accents are completely different. Whereas Vicky speaks in a West Country accent, Latrina uses a very different and peculiar one, at times she uses cockney terms such as ‘geezer’ but she also uses Keisha’s grammatically incorrect structures, using the ‘is’ with every and any subject, as can be seen in the following conversation, when Latrina is helping Keisha with her homework on the bus on the way to school (Series One, Episode Four: ‘Sack Race’):

Latrina: So she is go to this party with some rich guy from Watford but her sister is gets off with him.

Keisha: No!

⁵⁸ To this, I would add other examples such as the *Lee Nelson’s Well Good Show* which is a chat show in which the chav, Jason, is the laughable presenter/interviewer, and his female counterpart, Latrina from *Bromwell High*, just to mention a couple of examples.

Latrina: Then this guy's best mate starts raggin' on her, saying she's a ferocious mingin' dog.

Keisha: You lyin'

Latrina: So they is start hangin' together a little bit and she is treat him nasty, like Richard is treat Judy⁵⁹ and then his is ask her to marry him!

Keisha: That is so fierce.

Latrina: But she is run off with some soldier she is met at a club, and the soldier beats up on her so she comes home. And now she says she will marry the geezer!

Keisha: And you're saying this is called *Pride and Prejudice*?

Natella: By Jane Austen.

Keisha: I've got to stop doing my English homework on the bus.

(*Bromwell High*. Series One, Episode Four 'The Sack Race')

First of all, it is clear that the Keisha and Latrina are not discussing Jane Austen's novel in any way in academic or literary terms. Secondly, this extract shows how the 'chav' chooses to speak like Keisha, thus blurring boundaries between types. Her language is very similar to that of Keisha at times. However, differing from Keisha, Latrina is very conscious about her looks or rather about how good she looks and constantly shows her underwear, which can be seen peeping out of the uniform skirt. Similarly, Vicky Pollard also dresses in a very provocative way, and seems to be extremely confident about her good looks, as can be deduced from her sometimes kinky outfits, and the way she constantly states she is the fittest girl and everyone wants 'to do' her.

This self-confidence is coupled with a very open mind about boyfriends and relationships, Latrina is always going out with someone and gets pregnant on more than one occasion during the series – like Vicky Pollard – although Latrina does not continue with the pregnancy, or at least it is not shown. Vicky on the other hand discovers she is pregnant almost by chance and throughout the series some of her children are shown. This is linked with the idea we mentioned earlier about the 'filthy chavette'. Female chavs are usually represented as young pregnant girls pushing a pram, who probably do not do any work, and live off the money of the state and in a council house. In fact, Vicky Pollard's reason not to take the pill is because she has been told they stop you from getting pregnant (as we will see in the following section), and that is obviously not what she wants. Thus, chavs are not only illiterate, aggressive and have really bad taste, but they are also presented as parasites.

Very peculiar of Vicky Pollard's speech, is the way she starts answering almost every question she is asked with a 'No, but yeah, but no' perhaps followed by '... cause what happened was somethin' or nuffin' which I don't know nothin' about' concluding

⁵⁹ Here it is understood that Latrina refers to Richard Madeley and his wife Judy, who have broadcast a chat show for over twenty years together and which was very popular and very well known.

with something along the lines of ‘so shut up’ and almost every time finishing with ‘stop giving me evils!’ When she is asked about something she rarely gives an answer to the question, or if she does, she blurs it with a lot of information about other things that others have done, or that others have wrongly accused her of. An example of this can be seen in an instance when Vicky is trying to go into the dressing room of a band called Blazing Squads, without having any passes and she argues the following:

Vicky: We’re with Blazin’ Squads.

Bodyguard: Can I see you passes, please?

Vicky: No but, yeah but, no but, but yeah, but no, because what happened was, was we did have our passes but Kelly Appleby snatched them all and burned them because Ruth Hubbard who’s bitch number one told her I nicked one of her new hair scrunchies, but I never, but anyway, don’t listen to her ‘cause everyone knows her fanny goes sideways.

(Little Britain, Series Two, Episode Five)

She usually talks about other people and what other people have done eluding the question altogether, although in this instance the answer is muddled amongst a lot of other information such as which way one of her friend’s fanny goes. In fact this is another example of how Vicky’s poor command of the language ends up, as it is usually the case with her, in Vicky blaming something else for something that has nothing to do with the question or accusation made in the first place.

Vicky Pollard’s speech is obviously tainted by slang and a relaxed pronunciation, missing some word endings such as the ‘t’ in ‘what’ or the beginning of others such as ‘be’ in ‘because’. However differing from Latrina, her speech does not resemble that of a young black individual. Nonetheless, there is one instance in which she chooses to change her accent radically, and that is when she is going out with her ‘black boyfriend’ (the instance I have already referred to earlier).

So far, in relation to the chav, we have commented on their choice of clothing, their speech, their manners, their interests in life, and we have hinted at the way this type is not presented as a particularly bright individual, as the following section will explore.

5.4.2. Chavs don’t know nuffink’

Chavs are presented and perceived as being really inarticulate, uneducated individuals. In *Little Britain* the first example of this is, in fact, the first sketch in the first series, when Vicky’s teacher asks her to stay behind. When everyone leaves she goes towards

her teacher, kicking the rucksack towards where the teacher is, and stepping on her cigarette before sitting in front of him with her legs wide open, openly showing her black underwear. The teacher asks why she has not handed in her essay yet, and Vicky tells him about what other people get up to, instead of answering the question. The end of their conversation goes as follows:

Teacher: Vicky, Have you even started this essay? (on Lord Kitchener)

Vicky: No, but yea, but no, but yeah, but no, but yeah, but no, because I'm not really going on the pill because Nadine reckons they stop you from getting pregnant.

Teacher: You know if I don't get this essay by the end of the week I am going to have to fail you.

Vicky: Yeah, but Louise Farrol emptied a whole bottle of Fanta into Shannon's bag, but anyway, Luke reckons he fingered her round the back of the language lab.

Teacher: Vicky, do you want to pass your GCSEs?

Vicky: GCS what? Don't go giving me evils.

(Little Britain, Series One, Episode One)

In this instance she first does not answer the teacher's question, and secondly she shows her incredible low level of academic achievement by proving not to even know what GCSEs⁶⁰ are. On the other hand, there is a first hint of Vicky's ideas about pregnancy as something good, regardless of how young she may be.

Later on in the series when the teacher finally gets her essay, it is finally proven that her written language does not really differ much from her oral command of English, as it can be seen when the teacher reads out loud Vicky's essay on Lord Kitchener (*Little Britain, Series One, Episode One*), which I have already discussed. Another example of her illiteracy is her inability to spell. When Vicky is caught shoplifting, trying to take the till with her inside her baby' pushchair, and is invited to leave. She tries to convince the security guard that she bought it earlier and claims she is 'totally innocent, I-N-A, innocent!' (Series Two, Episode One). This inability to spell is actually also a characteristic which Keishe and Vicky have in common.

Later on in the same series she herself admits to her illiteracy when she goes to a newsagent's and claims she has won 'the whole jackpot'. However, when she hands in the winning ticket, the newsagent realises that it is not valid and accuses Vicky of having made it herself, to what she argues:

Vicky: no, but yeah, but no, but [...] and anyway, I couldn't have

⁶⁰ GCCE stands for General Certificate of Secondary Education.

made it myself even if I wanted to, actually, cos I can't read or write cos I'm like totally lexdiclec.

(*Little Britain*, Series Two, Episode Seven)

Not only does Vicky admit to her inability to read or write, but she does not even know the word 'dyslexic', which is what she probably meant to say as the cause of her troubles for reading and writing. On top of this, she does not prove to be very bright, given the fact that she thought she may get the money for the jackpot by showing the newsagent a piece of paper, where she had handwritten the numbers and badly drawn some images.

In *Bromwell High* there are other characters which are very similar to Vicky Pollard, not only in the way they look but also as far as their illiteracy is concerned, such as Kylie and her mum. Kylie is the girl everyone bullies at school for being small, having spots on her face and never retaliating. When a hole is dug in the middle of the playground and many children fall in it, Kylies' mum, Kylie Rice-Davies Senior, goes to see the headmaster with her lawyer to sue the school, for the damages caused to her daughter when she fell in. As she comes in Mr. Iqbal's office, there is something very peculiar about her look.



Image 3. Source: *Bromwell High*, Series Two, Episode Five, 'Valentine Day': 8:27.

Mrs Rice-Davies look coincides in many ways with the way chavs are described in *The Little Book of Chavs* and *Chav! A User's Guide to Britain's New Ruling Class*. She is blonde, she has her hair pulled back on a pony-tail in the 'council-house facelift'

style (Bok 2004:16), she is wearing sporty clothes and a thick gold chain round her neck matching her big hoop gold earrings (Wallace & Spanner 2004: 18). Whenever she is asked or told anything, her only answer is ‘I don’t understand nuffink’.

In effect, chavs are presented as illiterate individuals who do not count on their verbal expression as one of their strengths and that, as is the case with Vicky Pollard, do not even know what GCSEs are. They are presented as illiterate thick and aggressive brutes who are not to be treated with any sympathy, given that their ruthlessness makes them undeserving of such a feeling of compassion. Related with their ruthlessness and lack of manners, is the idea of roughness.

5.4.3. ‘Chavs’ are a ‘bit rough’

The way of describing ‘chavs’, which appears on the title of this section, is the way in which the middle class students at Rudge Park (the main characters of *The Inbetweeners*) describe ‘chavs’ at first sight. It is Will’s birthday and he invites his friends for a ‘sophisticated’ dinner at his’, however Jay keeps complaining about the fact there are not any girls there and he would rather be at a proper party with girls. To Will’s dismay, his party is not as successful as he expected, so he ends up giving in to the boys suggestions, and he agrees to go and invite some girls they saw on the way to his house. When they find them, the image they see is that of three girls wearing tracksuits and big hoop golden earrings, and who are drinking in the street. The boys’ first impression is not very good as can be seen from their comments about them:

Simon: They look a bit rough.

Will: Are they drinking in the street?

Jay: Dirty.

Will: Not quite the sophisticates I had in mind, but at least they are female.

(The Inbetweeners, Series Two, Episode Three: ‘Will’s birthday’)

These middle-class kids do not really approve of their looks, except Jay, who seems to be fine as long as they are female. Despite reservations on the part of the boys, Will agrees to invite them, so that he can finally have the birthday party he had planned. Without exchanging a word with them, the boys see them as ‘rough’, and this is what they find in the street:



Image 4. Source: *The Inbetweeners*, Series Two, Episode Three: 'Will's birthday', 0:24:49.

The next step for the boys is to ask them round to Will's party. Nobody wants to do it, so in the end Will gets Simon to approach the girls and invite them, which he reluctantly does. When he very shyly approaches the girls, he is in for a bit of a shock, as their conversation reveals:

Simon: Hi there!

Girl One: What did you fucking say?

Simon: Um... hello.

Girl One: And what?

Simon: I wanted to ask you to a party.

Girl One: I'm thirteen.

Simon: Alright.

Girl One: And she's eleven, you nonce.

Simon: Well, there's been a mistake, so...

Girl One: Like looking at little girls, do ya?

Girl Two: Like getting them to go to parties where you can touch them, do ya?

Simon: No, God, no. Look I'm going now.

Girl One: Paedo. You fucking paedo!

Girl Two: Yeah, run, you paedo.

Patrice starts doing rude things to the girls (imitating masturbation moves)

Simon: Fucking hell. Don't do that, Patrice!

Girl Two: Urgh! Paedo!

Girl One: I'll get my fucking brover on you!

Girl Two: That's it, run away, paedo boy.

Girl One: Keep going, paedo! Keep walking you fucking paedo!

(*The Inbetweeners*, Series Two, Episode Three 'Will's birthday')

To this I may add, that any time any of the girls speaks it is in a very loud and in an aggressive manner. In the end the boys are scared off by a group of 'rough' girls between the ages of eleven and thirteen who, despite their young age, are drinking in the

street, and who prove to be too aggressive for the boys, who end up feeling too intimidated by the little girls and consequently just run away. As well as their look, their attitude and their aggression, their accent is presented as completely different to the boys', despite the fact that they all may live in the same area. Once again, accent is linked to the character of the chav, where word endings are cut off, swearwords are used generously and sounds are not pronounced in a standard way.

This scene reveals how teenage middle class boys feel intimidated by young girls who fit the description of the chav. This 'fear' of chavs seems to be a recurring theme, as we have already seen.

5.4.4. The 'Chav' as 'well a slag'

One of the defining characteristics of female chavs seems to be related to her sexuality, and more specifically to her willingness to become a mother, which as the title implies is described in a very specific pejorative way. This can be observed, not only as some in the comedies, but also according to different sources from published books, even if they are not academic (Bok, 2006 and Wallace & Spanner, 2004) to news and the web. If we were to browse in the already mentioned web pages dealing with chavs, we would find many comments to do with young teenage pregnant aggressive mothers. Interestingly enough, and just to take the example of The Daily Mail, in 2008 it published an article on how the term Chav 'is a weapon of class hatred and should be banned' (Camber) and a year later we find another article warning of the danger of the teenage mothers who were to blame for the creation of a generation of 'uber-chavs' (Dolan), who come to terrorise society and who are uneducated and impossible to educate, due to their rude and disrespectful manners. This image of the young mother 'sponging' money out of the government could be the one to blame for the visible dislike of the chav, and thus for the representations made of this figure, and the use of pejorative offensive adjectives to describe it.

Both, Latrina and Vicky Pollard are presented as being quite open about having sexual relations with men on a regular basis, and with different men/boys each time. This, instead of being presented as the sexual liberation of women with regards to the old-fashioned prejudices towards sexually active women, is presented as the complete opposite. Labelling chavs as 'slags' implies a way of looking at sexuality tainted by a negative view, expressed through the choice of words used to describe them, words

which are not only used by others, but by themselves. It is important remember here, that in *Chav! A User's Guide to Britain's New Ruling Class*, when describing the female chav choice of earrings the words chosen to describe the specimen are 'filthy chavette'.

In *Bromwell High* Latrina describes herself as 'the bike of the South' when she introduces herself to a gypsy leader who happens to be camping within the school premises (Series Two, Episode One: 'Tolerance'). Later on in the series, Keisha tells Latrina she will end up being a prostitute when she is older, and she does not seem to be in disagreement given that she does not comment on it. Again, in the episode 'Police Story', a careers adviser goes to Bromwell High and although the three girls are waiting to talk to her, Keisha does not see the point of waiting in a queue, because she claims she knows what they will all do for a living when they are older, as she explains:

Keisha: Why is we wasting my time with this?

Natella: Keisha, the careers advice officer is especially trained to tailor jobs to our individual needs.

Keisha: Look Natella! I'm gonna be a pop-star, you're gonna be a family doctor and Latrina is gonna be a high class prostitute.

Latrina: Keisha (she says in a loud disagreeing tone) you can't sing!

(*Bromwell High*, Series Two, Episode Two 'Police Story')

Latrina is more than happy with the prediction of her future job and with the choice of the word prostitute. The same happens with Vicky Pollard, who is also very happy using the term slag to describe herself. An example of this can be seen in Series Two, when Vicky goes to work for the first time ever in her life. She is going for a job as an erotic telephone operator. When she is talking to her boss, she calls herself a slag to prove how well qualified she is to do the job, as can be seen in the following extract:

Boss: It's £3.80 an hour. Easy work. All you gotta do is talk dirty to 'em.

Vicky: Oh, my God. I can so do that cos I'm like well a slag.

(*Little Britain*, Series Two, Episode Two)

The choice of words to describe female chavs is quite telling. According the MacMillan Free Dictionary, 'slag' is an offensive word used to insult a woman 'whose sexual behaviour is considered to be immoral' (2013). The word prostitute on the other hand offers a neutral definition; it is defined as the term used to refer to women who are paid for offering sex. However, it is not politically correct to approach a random woman on the street and call her any of these, given that it would be conceived as an insult. Nonetheless, in the comedies studied here, there has been no query about defining and

presenting the female chav this way, an acceptance that denotes certain disrespect towards this figure.

All in all, we are presented with a negative image of the female ‘chav’ as being too promiscuous; an individual who is not ashamed or repentant of this reputation, quite the opposite. The audience is not therefore invited to feel compassion towards this character given that ‘chavs’ are presented as being proud of it. Thus, there is no room for identifying or sympathizing with this type of character in any way. Taking this idea further, it is important to consider that if these girls are so promiscuous, they must be having sexual intercourse with boys, presumably, given that the image of the lesbian ‘chav’ has not appeared in any of the data analysed for this study. However, boys are not described in any negative way due to their active sexual life. Related to this idea, is also the one of having unprotected sex, with the obvious biological consequence; having babies. Despite the fact that none of the characters described so far seem to fit the description of the English as not very ‘touchy feely’, the chav must at some point favour physical closeness in order to procreate.

5.4.5. ‘Chavs’ have lots of children



Image 5. Source: Single Mother Ahoy! Retrieved from: <http://singlemotherahoy.blogspot.com.es/2012/11/single-mothers-scourge-of-society.html>.

In the comedy series analysed here both ‘chav’ characters, Vicky and Latrina, are presented as either forming or belonging to families with a lot of children. Already in the first episode of the first series of *Bromwell High* Latrina and her family are presented in a very specific way, which very much coincides with the image of Vicky Pollard, who is often seen, as image above shows, pushing a pram with six very different looking children, where we are invited to believe the father is different for each one of them. This episode starts with Latrina taking one of her baby brothers to school. Her mum is only twenty-five and she’s already had ‘lots of babies’. According to Latrina ‘not having babies is for gays!’ Therefore, they are presented as not being great fans of family planning, in fact, when this baby is born – which Latrina calls just baby – her mother did not even know she was pregnant, as Latrina says, when her mum gave birth ‘the bouncers went mental’. Like Latrina’s mum, Vicky Pollard seems to be unaware of the fact that she is pregnant at one point too, in fact she finds out she is eight months pregnant by chance (*Little Britain*, Series One, Episode 7). On the other hand, and despite the ‘chavs’ apparent love of parenthood, given that they are presented as conceiving way above the average, theirs is presented as a dysfunctional family.⁶¹

Latrina’s family does not seem to pay too much attention to the bringing up of their offspring. In fact, when Latrina takes the child to school nobody notices it, and later on in the episode she decides to swap the sexual education teacher’s baby toy, for her real one. Vicky too shows similar parental carelessness, as can be seen from the conversation she has with the social worker who goes to her house, who is there to pay her a visit and to check on how she and her baby are doing.

Social Worker: Vicky, where is your baby?

Vicky Pollard: Swapped it for a Westlife CD.

Social Worker: Vicky, how could you do such a thing?

Vicky Pollard: I know. They're rubbish.

(*Little Britain*, Series One, Episode Seven)

Not only has she given her baby away for a CD, but she does not see the wrong in that. This is a ruthless, careless and very selfish type of person we cannot possibly feel sorry for.

⁶¹ The comedy series *Shameless* also presents this image of the not cared for children, who just survive in a very precarious family environment.

Shortly after giving birth, and presumably after having got her baby back, she is invited to her old school to show and talk to everyone about how, according to her teacher, 'she's turned her life around':

Teacher: she used to be a bit of a tearaway. She got caught shoplifting, was sent to a young offenders institution, became pregnant at 14 and had the baby taken into care, but she's turned her life around. She's now got a job at Boots, a small flat, and is taking a part-time course in...?

Vicky: Reading.

(*Little Britain*, Series One, Episode Eight)

This exchange reinforces the fact that Vicky has been an illiterate delinquent, however, as her presentation goes on, and as she talks with her old class-mates she ends up proving she has not really changed that much; she is still shoplifting and her aggressive attitude remains the same. It is straight after she finishes her talk that she proves not to be the most caring of mothers when she starts leaving without her baby, and the teacher has to remind her about it, to which she answers: 'Ah, it's alright, you can keep it. I've got loads more at home anyway'

5.4.6. Yeah, but no, but yeah, but... Is Vicky the 'real' chav? Stop giving me evils!

Regarding everything I have written so far about chavs and all the outrageous descriptions completely lacking of political correctness, I must point out that I have done nothing more than collate ideas which have been put forward in and by society in books, the media and comedy.

Just to give another example of how openly English society uses the term chav, I will comment on a BBC Radio 4 podcast within the series *Comedy of the Week* (Steel, 2011). The specific podcast is called 'Mark Steel's in Town' which is also the title of a book written by Mark Steel, writer and stand-up comedian. Both, the book and the podcasts, claim that Mark's job is to discover what makes towns distinctive by observing and commenting on them, in a way which, as his web page claims, goes 'right to the heart of British culture', unearthing 'local quirks and habits' which take 'him through the backwaters of England'. In this particular podcast he focuses on the town of Boston and at one point he explains he is quoting from the webpage

www.chavtowns.co.uk,⁶² to then start talking about chavs. He comments on the fact that chavs are described as teenage girls who are pregnant and smoke, who go to the local disco after having drunk two bottles of SPAR shop Lambrini before going out to be appropriately inebriated. Something that the audience seems to agree with, given that when Mark acknowledges that this comment sounds ‘just a tad unfair’, someone in the audience answers back to him saying that it is true, followed by a cheer and the laughter of the audience. Nonetheless, Mark finishes this topic by clarifying the fact that he does not like the word chav because he sees it as ‘people having a go at poor people’, which coincides with the view offered by Jones (2011).

Still on the topic of chavs, Mark interviews Tom Adams, better known as the rapper Luminus, whose hit song ‘Boston Town’ earned him a reputation as a chav. The song, which by August 2015, had almost 52.000 hits on youtube since it was first uploaded by a friend of his, David Carr, in January 2007, talks about the danger of walking through Boston town, where Tom Adams is from. The video features Luminus wearing sporty clothes, a cap, and talking about the perils faced by anyone walking through the streets at night. He features and describes chavs’ way of life. His video got considerable attention and in April 2012 the video had 267 comments, some comments having been left within the same month. The chav image Luminus gains as a consequence of making this video gave him a reputation as a gangster, which he explains he regrets, not only in the interview with Mark Steel but also in an interview with the BBC (Brown, July 2009). He explains he is not a gangster and he only wanted to make a social comment.

However uncomfortable and politically incorrect it may seem, the chav is a part of society and images of chavs as dangerous youngsters who live off benefits and wear designer sports clothes (fake or not), a hoody and/or a cap and a lot of jewellery, are perceived as an integral part of English everyday life. As the creators of Vicky Pollard explained, their chav character is a character that people recognize and that is why they argue Vicky’s character was so successful, they comment on the fact that people would go to them and tell them ‘I know a Vicky Pollard’ (*Little Britain*, Series Three, CD 2, South Bank Show Special). They explain where their inspiration for the character came from, and show the ‘Time Out’ cover of Slough teens from 2001. The image in the

⁶² The original text he is quoting from can be found in the following link:
<http://www.chavtowns.co.uk/category/worst-places-to-live-in-the-east-midlands/lincolnshire/page/2/>.

cover is of two teenage girls wearing makeup, sporty clothes, very high pony tails, and big golden hoop earrings.

Moreover, there exist some indications which could point at Vicky Pollard as the ‘real’ thing for some, or at least that is what the media seems to suggest. A YouGov survey carried out in 2006 suggested that 70% of TV industry professionals thought of Vicky Pollard as an accurate reflection of the working class youth (BBC News Magazine, 2011 June 3rd). Still, it is easy to find articles and references to the ‘chav’ individual as a ‘Vicky Pollard’ type, in newspapers, magazines, and many articles on the web. One could almost find that nowadays the terms chavette or female chav and Vicky Pollard are interchangeable. In fact, an instance of this was recorded on UK television. In June 2008, a video of the auditions of the television programme *The X-Factor* (UK) was uploaded on Youtube, where Simon Cowell, Sharon Osbourne and Luie Walsh compare one of the participants with Vicky Pollard (Eloen136, 2008).

On the other hand, although the term ‘chav’ seems to be associated with the working classes, it is very specific to a particular group of the working class, that is, not all working class individuals are chavs. An example of this can be seen in the science fiction drama by Channel Four, *Misfits*, where a group of kids doing community service get hit by a very strange storm and develop superpowers: the two girls in the group are working class, and both wear jewellery (big golden earring hoops), however, one of them, Alisha, brands the other as a chav, obviously excluding herself from that category. Kelly, was not only described in Channel 4’s official site for the series as a chav, but she was also presented in a way that would easily fit with the physical images put forward by the literature on chavs: she is blonde, she wears a lot of make-up and showy jewellery (just like Alisha), and she always wears a high and tight pony tail in the style already mentioned, the ‘council house facelift’. In fact, doing a search on google of ‘Misfits Kelly the chav’ many entries appear on various web-pages where she is described as such. Alisha on the other hand has Afro hair and is usually loose, as can be seen in the image below.



Image 6. Source: Digital Spy (n.d.).

However, and despite the obvious link to working class people, there seems to exist a celebrity ‘chav’ culture. On the one hand there are a series of ‘Famous Chav Role Models’ such as Chris Moyles, Christina Aguilera, Jade Goody, Jessi Wallace and many more (Bok 22: 2006) who cannot be considered as ‘chavs’ according to all that has been said about them so far. Some celebrities such as Cheryl Cole and her ‘disciple’ in Britain’s TV show ‘Have you got the X factor?’ Cher Lloyd are associated or identified as ‘chavs’, not as role models but as ‘chavs’ themselves. This creates a contradiction and an impossible reconciliation between what has been and still is associated as being indicative of chavdom. Thus, the identification and delimitation of a perfectly neat definition of chav does not seem to be an easy and contradiction-free task. Yet, there would be instances in which someone could argue that someone’s look would invariably make someone else say ‘chav’ without any hesitation or doubt. However, boundaries between ‘chavs’ and ‘chav-nots’ are somehow and inexorably blurred.

Thus, we can agree on the fact that, if used, the term ‘chav’ is uttered without hesitation, but the intricacies of ‘knowing’ how to use it are not that simple. Taking into account the disparity of individuals associated with chavdom, from Vicky Pollard to

Cheryl Cole, it is clear we cannot label someone only on the basis of money, however chavs are meant to be working class. This seemingly contradiction, eradicates in the fact that money or occupation does not measure or in fact determine an individual's social class. I believe it has to do with choice, a personal purposeful decision to wear, speak and behave in a particular way, which tends to be condemned by those members of society who also choose to label these individuals as 'chavs'. Thus, we can argue that being working class is perhaps being taken out of the limits of its definition.⁶³ Cheryl Cole could hardly be said to be working class, and nor could Vicky Pollard who does not work. We could hardly identify either of these two with the working classes of the 80s, who went on strikes to fight for their rights. One could argue that defining the chav as a working class individual is far from accurate, given that many will feel alienated from identifying themselves with the working class, if that identification implies an association with the chav.

Therefore, 'chav' proves not to be a term with a straight forward definition. At this point, and using Vicky Pollard's words, I will very politely beg you to 'stop giving me evils' for the reiterated use of this term, given that I am not advocating for the use and perpetuation of the word 'chav' and such stereotyping. In fact, I hope that this thesis helps to identify and demystify some of the existing 'myths' on English 'types' which present a threat to tolerance and understanding amongst diverse populations.

5.5. Inner Comp: a brief reflection

So far, and as far as inner comprehensive schools go, we have been offered a very specific type of English individual. Apart from the already mentioned chav, we have also encountered the aggressive illiterate drug dealing black child and the extremely bright and hard-working girl whose parents are Asian. At no point have any of these non-white characters been presented as anything other than English. These are the types of individuals one is 'likely' to find at a very ethnically diverse underperforming inner state school. Looking into reality, in relation to these comedies, it is relevant to mention here the Channel 4 documentaries *Educating Yorkshire*, *Educating Essex* and

⁶³ Any dictionary defines the working class individual someone with a manual job and who does not earn a lot of money as a consequence.

Educating the East End. These television programmes focus on underperforming schools, which have been turned into Academies in the hope education standards improve. In these schools we can find a similar reality to that offered in the comedies, not in terms of the specific types, but in the way an ethnically diverse not very good school poses problems not only for teaching but for trying to maintain peace and discipline. We can therefore assert that despite the fact that comedies offer farfetched images of certain aspects of reality that are used as inspiration, they are also useful to get an insight into real assumptions and existing stereotypes in English society, within the context of state education.

Looking at the characters presented here, and comparing them with the Englishnesses studied in earlier sections, it is possible to say that, in *Bromwell High*, in general terms, all characters except Natella would fit into the description of people who do not seem to show a great concern about arts, one of Orwell's English characteristics (1947). It has been made clear too, that according to this comedy series there seems to be different types of educational institution depending on the individuals' social class, which takes me to another of the characteristics identified by Orwell, that of the English as a class-ridden society. As we have seen, the different educational institutions have very different types of individuals. However, and continuing with Orwell's representation of Englishness, the rest of characteristics he presents as being identifiable of the English such as a respect towards law, a suspicion of foreigners, a love for animals, hypocrisy and a love for games, do not seem to appear in the series.

When it comes to the feeling of superiority, identified by Jones (2003) and Langford (2001), it is worthy of mention that the only characters who seem to display this characteristics are Iqbal the Headmaster, Natella, and the privately educated children that appear in one of the episodes of the series. Nonetheless, their feelings of superiority come from very different standpoint. Iqbal feels superior merely on the basis that he is the Headmaster and he does not seem to care about anything other than money. Besides his exercise of power is not restrained in any way, going against the ideas put forth by Duffy (2001). Natella on the other hand, uses her superior domain of the language and rhetoric to her advantage, to try and make event go her way. Whereas the children from the private school, just know they are superior and feel very comfortable about it, without trying to manipulate or convince anybody about anything. They seem to remain aloof to rest of the world, aloofness being one of the characteristics identified by Duffy as being defining of the English (2001). Tasmin,

however, the girl from the public school, who goes to Bromwell High School for a while, knows she is superior and uses it in her advantage to become the most popular girl at school in all aspects: the cleverest, most attractive and more terrorising. Tasmin clearly adapts to her new environment; adaptability being one the English characteristics of the English according to Langford (2001). Thus, although physically she might fit the image of the English rose, as would Latrina, none of them would seem to adhere to any of the other English traits of good manners, disinclination to sex (Duffy, 2001), reserved manner, eccentricity, self-discipline and self-dedication, civility, prudishness, xenophobic, reserved, charitable, melancholic, sad individual (Langford, 2001).

It is also clear that these series do not portray the gentle, amiable individuals who display very civilised manner that Scruton talks about (2000), specially the 'chav'. On the other hand, it is precisely the image of the chav, as presented through the characters of Vicky Pollard, that seems to conform with the image of the individual who likes going to clubs and drinking (Langford, 2001 and Duffy 2001). However, we can see that most of these characters seem to be courageous, and specially Keisha presents herself as an aggressive, barbarous, not very sociable individual (Langford, 2001). It is true also of some of the characters discusses here, such as Iqbal, Keisha, Natella and Vicky Pollard that they are prone to use swearwords, another characteristic identified by Langford (2001).

In this section we have dealt with the Inner City Comprehensive School. However, it is important to bear in mind that not all state schools are Inner City Comprehensives, although all Inner City Comprehensives are state schools. It is possible to find other type of state school, offering better education standards. This will depend on the area they are located, as is suggested in *The Thick of It*, where a school located in a poor catchment area is predicted to offer unreliable education, within a context of relative aggression and misbehaviour on the part of the students. It is these type of better performing state school which will occupy us in the following section.

CHAPTER 6. THE INBETWEENERS

6.1. 'Normal' State/Comprehensive Schools type(s) versus the Private School Individual

As far as comprehensive/state schools are concerned and as it is to be expected, not all comprehensive schools have equal students' academic achievement. So far, I have been mainly talking and analysing images of the inner and underachieving state school, so now I will focus on the image of the state institution and the students who go to a 'normal' state/comprehensive school which are offered in the comedy series *The Inbetweeners* and *Teachers*. In the former, one of the main characters, Will, describes the school he has been forced to attend (due to his mum's slightly deteriorated financial circumstance), Rudge Park, as a 'normal terrifying comprehensive' school, as I have already discussed in this thesis (Opening scene of *The Inbetweeners* Series Two, Episode One). In fact the series starts with Will explaining the things he never expected to happen to him, such as his dad leaving his mum, and having to go to a state school, which is the very beginning of the series:

I'd be taken out of private education and forced to go to a normal school... where the school nutter would then take a bit of a dislike to me. But they do say. "Whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger" – except polio.

(*The Inbetweeners*, Series One, Episode One 'The First Day')



Image 7.

Source: *The Inbetweeners*,
Series One, Episode One 'The
First Day', 0:32.



Image 8.

Source: *The Inbetweeners*, Series One, Episode One 'The First Day', 0:41.

This view of a comprehensive is tinged by Will's experience at the private school he comes from. However, the images provided in the videos leave no room for imagination. It is clear that the other students not only do not wear the uniform like him, but that they dislike him or ignore him, and he is consequently bullied. As was can see in image 7, Will is the one with the paper bin over his head, he is being bullied but nobody seems to do anything about it, not even Mr. Gilbert who sees him and leaves him as he is. In image seven we can see him entering the school in his usual attire, which does not help him at all in blending with the rest of the students.

6.2. The types

As we have already seen, this television series offers different types of individuals coming from different backgrounds and how they interact with each other. The main characters here are the students: Will, Simon, Neil and Jay. First of all, I will briefly talk about each character in order to set the scene for what it is to come, and facilitate understanding.

Although the series develops mainly around all of them, the narrator, where there is one, is Will Mackenzie, the privately educated boy who is forced out of his private school into a comprehensive one, where, as he explains, he is bullied. However, it is not all grim for him, given that Mr. Gilbert assigns Simon the task of showing Will around the school during his first few days. This, aided by Will's tenacity, ends up being the beginning of a long-term friendship. Will's slightly over protective mum is fancied by the boys, and they often joke about it, and about the different kind of things they would like to do to his mother, something Will does not seem to be very impressed by.

Simon Cooper is a middle class boy, living in a nice house in the suburbs, whose constant insecurity makes him rely excessively on his friends Jay and Neil. He is madly in love with Carli, a girl his age he has known since they played together as children, and constantly makes a fool of himself when trying to impress her. He seems to be Will's best friend and tends to be more understanding towards him than the others.

Jay Cartwright is the cool-wannabe boy. He first appears in the series boasting about how much sex he has had over the summer. However, as he keeps talking we get to know he most probably has had no sex, as we will see later on. He is constantly boasting about everything he knows and does, and even gets the boys to go with him on a camping holiday allured by the promise of having plenty of sexual relationships. Nonetheless, the holidays seem to be a failure for everyone but Neil, who manages to spend the night having sex with a girl in the only intimate place available, Simon's car.

Neil Sutherland is the dumb one. He seems to be in his own personal world, which just so happens to be a few seconds behind everyone else's. He does not seem to be taking much advantage of the education he is receiving at school and he tends to be the butt of the jokes. However, he tends to take it generally quite well, except when they have to do with this dad. The boys keep teasing him about his father being gay because he 'wears tight shorts' and 'plays badminton on a Tuesday'.

Although these are the main characters, there are other characters worthy of mention. Mr. Gilbert, who is the Head of Sixth Form at Rudge Park and who does not seem to be the type to hold any prisoners. He is the authority figure in the series, and when he is around students behave. However, he gives Will a hard time for no reason other than the fact he can. He is the most important figure when it comes to maintaining discipline at school. The school bully in this series is Mark Donovan, who takes special interest in Will, but it is Will's beautiful mother who aids him in more than one occasion to get away from the harassment. The female main characters come from the hand of Carli D'Amato, the girl that has captivated Simon's heart, who is fully aware of her physical appeal and who does not hesitate to show it, pretty much as the other main female character does, Charlotte Hinchcliffe, the sexiest girl at school and who Will is madly in love with.⁶⁴ In the case of both these female characters, theirs is very specific role, to look pretty, taking advantage of the boys' weakness of their allure. Their gender performativity is very specific and stereotypical. Perhaps, their image could be said to

⁶⁴ For a full list of characters and images, see ANEX II.

be similar to that of Latrina, who was also aware of her good physique and her popularity with the opposite sex, however, in this case, these girls would not be labelled as ‘chavs’, their speech, and moderate make up would prevent anybody from doing so. Let us not forget, that this school is set in a middle class area, where most of the students attending the school are likely to come from the suburbs.

6.3. Private education and accent

Although this section will deal with the image of the private school individual, none of the comedies studied in this section are set in a ‘public’ or private school. The closest we can get to a private school image is through the character of Will. He is constantly being singled out, not only by others but by himself, as being different from the rest of his friends and classmates. He prides himself on it, even though it means he is sometimes verbally abused as a consequence. Therefore the view offered here of the private school individual is being constantly compared or measured against that of the state/comprehensive one.

Will’s privileged education singles him out as a ‘weirdo’ due to his private school look. He wears the uniform impeccably, which is quite noticeable at Rudge Park, given that he is amongst the few people who do, and, as stated earlier, carries a briefcase with him with his material. On his first day at school, people call him names due to his ‘clumpy shoes’, his ‘gay hair’ and his badge, which he has been told he needs to wear so that people know he is new at the school and can call him by his name. He also gets called names such as ‘posh twat’, the one with the ‘spacker badge’, ‘briefcase wanker’, just ‘wanker’ and ‘dickhead’, amongst other things. Although it is not only his look which gives away his background, but also the way he speaks. He speaks in RP, which also gives away information about his background. However, it is only at the very end of the series that an explicit reference is made about his accent and what it implies according to his friends. In the last scene of the last episode of the series, Simon is very angry because the boys have managed to push Simon’s car inside a lake, and his anger and frustration let out some strong comments towards and about his friends, when Will tries to sooth the tension:

Will: I'm sure we'll think of something.

Simon: You never think of anything. You've just got an accent that makes us think you're clever, but you're not. You're just as much of a fucking idiot as these two ('these two' referring to Jay and Neil).

(*The Inbetweeners*, Series Three, Episode Six 'Camping')

Simon expresses his opinion about accents, which in fact none of his friends challenges. Will's private school accent makes his friends think that he is clever, which implies that the school you go to shapes your accent, which in turn is represented, perceived and believed to also be a sign of intelligence and better education. However, Will seems to be the exception to the rule, or is he? We will deal with the image of a 'public' school boy in *Fresh Meat* when we talk about the character of JP. Whatever the case, we can say that not only does Will appear to others as 'superior' (Jones, 2003 and Langford, 2001), but he himself feels superior. In this case, we can say Will seems to feel superior to the others and thus behaves with a certain degree of aloofness (Duffy, 2001), both of these personality traits identified as characteristic of the English.

6.4. Education and social class

Apart from accent, social class is an issue that comes up in the series, not only in the way Will explains that he is still at the 'terrifying normal comprehensive', but also when it comes to work experiences. When it comes to work placements, Will expresses his disagreement with his. Instead of being sent to the newspaper where he asked, he gets sent to a garage, and Neil, his not very bright friend, gets to go to the newspaper. So totally convinced that must be a mistake, he tries to talk to Mr. Gilbert about it, a not very friendly and approachable teacher, with very little patience. Their conversation goes as follows:

Mr. Gilbert: Morning, and shut up! Right everyone, your work experience placements have been finalised, and as 99% of you left it to the careers officer, I don't want to hear any whingeing about where you're heading.

Will: (with a face of relative disgust) Sir, there seems to be some mistake.

Mr. Gilbert: Is the mistake you choosing to ignore me saying "no whingeing"?

Will: Ha-ha! No, sir. It says here I'm going to work at a garage?

Mr. Gilbert: Yes?

Will: Come on (smiling with an inquisitive look) Me, a garage? Does that seem likely?

Mr. Gilbert: What's your point Mackenzie?

Will: I wrote to the local paper sir, to shadow a journalist there, maybe even write a few pieces myself.

Mr. Gilbert: Right, let me have a look. I don't get paid extra for this, you know. OK, it says here that Sutherland is expected at the newspaper. Case closed.

Will: Well, then there's clearly been some sort of mix-up. I don't mean to be rude but ... look at him. (looking at him) No offence.

Neil: None taken (with a blank look on his face).

Mr. Gilbert: What was your first choice Sutherland?

Neil: Airplane driver.

Mr. Gilbert: And that is...

Neil: Someone who drives planes.

Mr. Gilbert: You mean a pilot.

Neil: Do I?

Mr. Gilbert: What was your second choice?

Neil: Working with cars.

Mr. Gilbert: Right, Have you ever wanted to work in a newspaper?

Neil: No, sir.

Mr. Gilbert: Have you ever read a newspaper?

Neil: Not really.

Mr. Gilbert: Ok, it does seem there's been some sort of mistake here somewhere.

Will: Well, that's OK, mistakes happen, shall I go to the paper tomorrow?

Mr. Gilbert: No, no, you go to the garage, it's all booked!

Will: Is this a joke?

Mr. Gilbert: Do I make a lot of jokes?

Will: But sir...

Mr. Gilbert: I can't change the placements.

Will: Can't or won't?

Mr. Gilbert: You pick, it's the same result.
(Neil is raising his hand)

Mr. Gilbert: Sutherland?

Neil: Does this means I won't be driving any planes?
(The boys leave the room and go to their lockers)

Will: Well, this is a fuck-up. What kind of experience am I going to get at a garage? Apart from a depressing working-class one?
(*The Inbetweeners*, Series Two, Episode Two 'Work Experience')

In this exchange, which loses a lot of its comic impetus when missing the acting, it is clear that Will, the private school boy, is pretty outraged by the fact he will have to go to a garage, which according to him, will be a 'depressing working-class' experience. Something his much less intelligent friend Neil was much more likely to be suited for. Shortly afterwards, he refers to this experience as his 'new, pointless, shitty manual job' (*The Inbetweeners*, Series Two, Episode Two, 5:56). However, Will does not stop there, once in the garage, he is welcomed by the mechanics with enthusiasm, and when asked what part of car mechanics he was interested in, his arrogance is shown in the following exchange:

Mechanic: You'll have a right laugh here. As long as you don't mind a bit of blue talk, not a poof, are ya?

Will: No.

Mechanic: Not a problem if you are, it's just it'd be a bit harder to join in some of the banter. So is there any part of car mechanics you're interested in, as it goes?

Will: To be honest, none of it... as it goes.

Mechanic: More interested in bikes, is it?

Will: No, the media. Or law. Look, no offence, but I'm never going to work in a place like this?

Mechanic: Place like this?

Will: You know, a place like this, manual, dirty, not *stupid* exactly, but not academic by a long chalk! It's not that I'm better than this, it's just that I'm much cleverer than you need to be to work here.

(*The Inbetweeners*, Series Two, Episode Two 'Work Experience')

This exchange earns Will a considerable amount of harassment and abuse on the part of the mechanics, who make their main aim to laugh and bully him at any opportunity. Will defines it as institutional bullying. This was something that Mr. Gilbert probably expected and hoped for, given his reaction when he finds out. Will's mother decides to tell Mr. Gilbert of the things his son has been through in the hope we will be changed to a more suitable place, and Mr. Gilbert asks to be excused for a moment, he goes out into the corridor and roars with uncontrollable laughter, before going back into the office with a straight face.

In this instance, Will's arrogance leaves on show his belief that working classes are inferior, although he explains he does not believe himself 'better' than them, he does believe he is way 'cleverer' than what the average working class person needs to be. It is quite clear that these garage workers seem to him closer to 'stupid' than to 'clever'. This air of superiority and prejudice against the working classes is not shared by any of the other boys, which implies his private education, may have something to do with it. After all, he never feels at ease at the school, and he keeps referring to the fact that his old private school was better. This idea will come up again when we discuss the series *Fresh Meat*, in relation with the already mentioned character of JP. In both cases, both characters share a certain feeling of superiority which as we have already mentioned is identified as defining English characteristic by some (Jones, 2003 and Langford, 2001).

Although the other boys do not seem to share Will's ideas on the garage working experience, their attitude is not prejudice free, only it seems to be directed towards other directions.

6.5. The prejudiced middle-classes

These children, which we have already described as middle/working class boys, as some instances in the series show, are full of prejudices. The first instance where prejudices are associated to the middle classes comes in the second series when Simon's French exchange student comes along, Patrice. He is with the boys at Will's house, he sees Will's mother who is going off to play tennis and their conversation goes as follows:

Patrice: Your mother is very sexy.

Will: Sorry?

Patrice: She has the sex (he leaves the room apparently following Will's mother).

Will: He's a strange one, isn't he?

Simon: Yeah, but he's just French. They're all weird, aren't they?

Will: Oh God, please don't be racist.

Simon: That's not racist, I'm just saying, he barely says anything and when he does speak, it's always about sex, just like all French people.

(The Inbetweeners, Series Two, Episode Three 'Will's Birthday')

From this exchange it is clear that Will does not think the same as Simon, given that he remarks on his racism, which Simon dismisses given that in his eyes, he is just talking about a plain fact.

However, this image of the sex-obsessed French boy appears again. Later on that evening, when the boys are back at Will's to celebrate his birthday, Patrice comes downstairs and says:

Patrice: I just had a really nice, er... tug, thinking about your mother, and I think some went on the floor. Sorry.

Will: Great, thanks Patrice.

(The Inbetweeners, Series Two, Episode Three 'Will's Birthday')

Despite Will's efforts not to be prejudiced against Patrice, the French exchange student's actions make it hard for him not to. In fact later on, when the boys go out to look for some girls to invite them to the party, he proves to be very rude.⁶⁵ Despite the fact the boys seem to judge Patrice as some kind of sex maniac, it is important to mention here that the boys themselves, especially Neil and Jay, prove to be pretty obsessed by sex all throughout the series. However, the one labelled as strange is the

⁶⁵ We discussed this instance earlier on in the thesis in relation to chavs, see section 5.7. 'Chavs' are 'a bit rough'.

foreign exchange student. Still, the image of the strange, rude French boy is reinforced when he is shown ‘pissing’ on the street, to the boys’ disgust and surprise.

Despite Will’s efforts to remain unbiased and to be tolerant towards Patrice, he ends up giving up. By the end of the episode, Will finds the good looking exchange student, Patrice, in bed with Charlotte, the girl Will really likes, and ends up giving in to the racism he criticised earlier, as can be seen from the following conversation, where Will is talking about Patrice in a very angry state:

Will: The fucking baguette-eating dickhead frog.

Simon: That’s a bit racist.

Will: He’s made me racist.

(The Inbetweeners, Series Two, Episode Three ‘Will’s Birthday’)

It is remarkable how he is blaming his racism on Patrice, evading all responsibility, and thus justifying himself, pretty much in the same way that chavs are prejudiced against. In this case, the boys could be said to fulfil the image of the xenophobic English individual, on the basis of their willingness to be judgemental and prejudiced against Patrice.

Another instance where prejudice against non-British individuals appears is in the third series, in what supposedly will be Simon’s first night with a girl. Simon has got a girlfriend and they all go to her sister’s student university house, where they will have some intimacy. Given the fact that it is his first time, Simon takes the boys for advice, especially due to Jay’s insistence, the supposedly more experienced one. It is relevant here to say that he is the one who, when asked about whether ‘the balls’ also go in during sexual intercourse, says ‘Yeah, can do! Some girls like it some don’t’ (Series One, Episode One, ‘The First Day’). Once there, Jay realises there is a Dutch girl in the house, who dazzles Jay and Neil:

Neil: Fucking hell, she’s fit.

Jay: Yeah, she looks like she loves cock.

Neil: Do you have to do it different with a Dutch girl?

Jay: There’s three things you need to know about European birds Neil. They’re filthy, they’re hairy and they don’t mind if you wipe it on the curtains.

(The Inbetweeners, Series Three, Episode Four ‘A trip to Warwick’)

This instance not only shows the existing prejudices about European girls, but also it is remarkable how, despite Britain being in the European Union, the boys talk about Europeans as ‘the other’.

Another instance where assumptions and prejudice are evident takes place when the boys want to buy some weed. However, this time prejudice seems to go the other way round, and it is not the boys who are being judgemental but the being judged upon. The boys are at a concert, and as usual, the ‘know it all’ Jay, in his infinite wisdom advised Simon he should take some puff to impress his girlfriend. Jay offered to get some, but he had not managed to get hold of anything other than tea leaves, he paid the price of weed for. So once in the bar, Jay is told he has to get some weed now given that Simon had created the expectation. Jay and Neil see a guy dealing and approach him to try and buy some:

Jay: Sort me out geezer!

Dealer: What?!

Jay: Please, sort me out geezer? I’ve got twenty quid.

Dealer: So what, what you want from me?

Jay: You know, gear, sweet Mary Jane, ganja man.

Dealer: Oh, so you want to buy drugs? And you came to me, why?

Neil: Well, cos we saw you... (He was referring to the fact that they saw him dealing with someone)

Dealer: ‘Cos I’m black? You saw a black guy at a gig and thought “must be a drug-dealer”?’

Jay: No, we didn’t.

Dealer: You fucking white boys are all the same, you know! You scratch beneath the surface just a little bit, and you’re racist. Yeah, that’s right, I said it, racist! (There is a short uncomfortable silence)

Neil: Yeah, but, have you got any drugs?

Dealer: Yes, I have, but that’s not the point. The point is, you assumed I had some just ‘cos I’m black.

Jay: Could we buy some please?

Dealer: Why should I deal to you? Hmm? Why should I deal to two little suburban racists, who see me as some kind of stereotype? I’m at university.

Neil: But you are a drug dealer as well, yeah?

Dealer: Yes, I do deal, but you keep missing the point.

Jay: Look, here’s thirty quid. Can we just have some puff?

Dealer: Yes, you can, but only because I’m a dealer, not because I’m black. Now fuck off.

(The boys begin to walk away, but Jay picks up the stuff, stops for a second and turns round to the dealer again)

Jay: Can you role it up for us, please?

(*The Inbetweeners*, Series Three, Episode Two ‘The gig and the girlfriend’)

It is clear from this exchange, and from the boys’ faces of surprise, that for them, the fact that the dealer was black was not an issue, they clearly approached him, because they saw him dealing. However, it was also clear that the dealer wanted to distance himself from the Keisha type image, which we saw earlier. He repeatedly makes the point about them approaching him only because he is black, he also tells them about

him being at university, as a relevant fact to their conversation, which will help put things ‘straight’. He wants to prove that he is clever and studious because he is at university. Nonetheless, he is black, and he also seems to be dealing drugs, like Keisha’s brothers. His very reasoning and reaction creates prejudice. By commenting on something that had not been an issue until he mentioned it, he re-recreates the prejudice, perpetuating it. Also the fact that the dealer refers to the boys as ‘suburban’ kids, implies he identifies them as being middle-class, perhaps setting some distance between himself and the boys in an attempt at defining himself as a working class individual. So in the end, the boys are referred to as typical middle-class racists.

6.6. Comprehensive kids are not sophisticated

Still on the topic of prejudice, the clash between the comprehensive school boys and privately educated Will is made evident in relation to manners and ways of having fun. This happens on Will’s birthday party. He prepares supper for the boys and invites them all round to have, what Will expects will be, a ‘sophisticated dinner’. When they have finished having supper, Will is angry because none of his friends seem to have made an effort and they had not invited any girls to come along. Will feels all his efforts to make of his birthday a sophisticated party are wasted on his friends, so he tells them off, and their conversation goes as follows:

Jay: If you’re gonna cry about it, I’ll get some local snatch in.

Neil: What about them birds we passed outside?

Jay: Yeah, they were alright.⁶⁶

Will: Yes, please, drag some random girls off the street for me! (Raising his voice in anger)

Simon: Or, we could go to Louise Graham’s party.

Jay: Yeah, why aren’t we there? It’s got to be better than this shithole.

Will: Thanks very much, more wine?

Jay: Ah, I bet it is crawling with clunge.⁶⁷

Will: And I bet it’s not.

Jay: And you’d know?

Will: I put a lot of effort into this. I made a really nice coq au vin... (Shouting and very angry)

Jay: Cock of what? (With a smirk on his face)

⁶⁶ These are the ‘chav’ girls who shout and threaten the boys, which I mentioned earlier in relation to the ‘chav’ type.

⁶⁷ The word ‘clunge’, as is the case with other words such as ‘bumder’, is a term which started to be used in these series, but which is now part of English slang, in fact both these words appear in the online Urban Dictionary, (2014) and both reference the comedy series *The Inbetweeners*.

Simon: You don't help yourself, do you?

Will: Oh yes I see, coq au vin, very mature, it actually means chicken in wine, doesn't it Patrice?

Patrice: Quoi?

Will: Well, it does, and it doesn't mean cock up my arse, or cock on my head, or ...

Simon: You got some cock in the back of the van.

Will: Or that I got a cock in the back of a van. Look, all I wanted was a civilised and sophisticated birthday, just something a bit different from the usual parties, maybe even the sort of party that girls are impressed by. Ok, so there aren't any girls here, but why don't we at least attempt to have a sophisticated conversation? I know it's a tall order, and I'm not expecting sparkling, but let's give it a go, eh, as it is my fucking birthday?! (Shouting and very angry)

Neil: (Breaking the uncomfortable silence) how much Lego can you stuff up your bum?

Will: Oh, for Christ's sake!

Neil: Not now, just when you was younger – how much?

Jay: You are grim mate.

Simon: What were you doing sticking Lego up your bum?

Jay: Not a lot, just like... a rectangular one and a long one, couple of singles, maybe.

Will: (Bangs the table in anger) Fine, fine, let's see if those girls outside want to come and join us, then.

(The Inbetweeners, Series Two, Episode Three 'Will's Birthday')

Will is very frustrated by the lack of appreciation shown by his unsophisticated friends. Quite telling is also the fact that they saw the name of Will's recipe funny, given that they obviously did not recognise, or chose not to recognise the French meaning, which could be understood as a sign of immaturity or illiteracy in Modern Languages. Once again, Will proves to be different from his friends, given that he wants to have a sophisticated party and his friends seem to be only concerned about 'clunge'. However, when the boys looked concerned about the telling off, and seemed to be thinking over what Will had told them, Neil breaks the uncomfortable silence with a very unexpected and trivial, or shall I say 'grim' topic, to use Jay's words. This totally disillusioned Will and he ends up giving up, going out with them to look for the girls.

Will seems to feel constantly misunderstood by his friends all throughout the series, he is more into studies and academic matters, whereas they seem to be more into girls and pulling, Will is constantly concerned about grades, unlike his friends, and he does not seem to be as obsessed about sex as his friends do. If we were to consider Duffy's idea of the English as not very keen on sex (2001), Will would be the one we could say seems to be more English than the others. However, when it comes to talking about sexual matters, the boys prove to be more inventive, hence the use of the word 'clunge', a characteristic identified by Langford (2001) as peculiar to the English who seem to be quite plain when talking except when it comes to talk about sex.

6.7. Insensitivity seems to be their thing

Apart from the fact that we are dealing with teenagers here, who laugh at everything and everyone, especially if there is some sexual innuendo involved, the boys seem to be pretty insensitive, once again except Will. The best example of this is to be found in the second series, when Simon's parents separate, as can be seen from the following conversation:

Will: Er, Si, I just saw your mum inside, she looked pretty upset.

Simon: On no, blubbing?

Will: She was a bit, yeah.

Simon: Oh, bloody hell. She's been a total baby since Dad moved out.

Will: Your dad moved out? (Will's face denotes surprise and a little shock at his impassivity)

Simon: It's no biggie, they've not been getting on lately, so he's moved out for a few weeks, while they sort stuff out.

Jay: What? like her face? It's gonna take more than a few weeks to sort that mess out.

Simon: Shut up you cock!

Will: Do you maybe want to just check if she's ok?

Simon: Not really, I've had that all bloody week. It's so embarrassing! Do you want me to get rid of her?

Will: Um, no, it's fine.

(The Inbetweeners, Series Two, Episode Five 'Duke of Edinburgh')

This extract clearly shows the boys lack of concern about what Simon's mother might be going through due to her separation. Will proves to be the only one concerned about her well-being, whereas her own son is annoyed about her behaviour and Jay jokes about it.

It is worthy of mention here the way in which none of the characters seem to make any gesture of affection towards the others, with the exception of Will's mum, who caresses and hugs her boy sometimes, and Simon's parents, who are shown on more than one occasion making cheeky sexual comments to each other, at the time the kiss, or caress the other one.

6.8. Private vs. state schools: a brief reflection

This comedy series depicts the individual attending a 'normal' state school, and the vision the private school child has of this. If we were to define these boys as belonging to a particular social class, it would not be an easy task, partly due to the fact that social class, as other identity aspects, depend on the individual's choice. It is true that a financial situation gives no room to subjectivity; you are either financially able or you

are not. However, choosing to portray yourself as one thing or another is a very specific and subjective matter. In fact, as Kate Fox explains in *Grayson Perry: All in the Best Possible Taste*, social class is not financially conditioned; belonging to a social class or another would not necessarily be determined by money, at least not by money alone (Crombie, 2012). Fox explains how the English seem to have a kind of radar system which detects the other's social class from a very early age, and when talking about some of the tell-tale signs about class distinctions she mentions: children's names, foods you eat, clothes, the pets you keep, etc. Pretty similar is the account of class distinction given by journalist and consumer affairs expert, Harry Wallop, in his book *Consumed: How We Buy Class in Modern Britain*. This idea of class, not being determined necessarily by money, but by attitude or choice has studied and supported by many (Mount, 2004; Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007; Warde, Martens, & Olsen, 1999).

However, we know they must live around the same area, and we know they are presented as middle-class. If we look the definition of 'the middle class' up in the dictionary we find, these are described as educated individuals who hold professional positions, whereas a working class person would be described as someone who has less education and who has a manual job. Just considering these criteria we could come to the conclusion that some of the boys and their families can be categorised as working or as middle class. It is true that living in the suburbs tends to be associated with the middle classes. Nonetheless, Neil's house seems to be relatively modest, and Jay's dad's job is a working class one.

Thus, these types described here are of those who could be said to feature both, middle and working class individuals who coincide in the same school, and who seem to differ in many ways with the students found in *Bromwell High*, *Little Britain's* Vicky Pollard's school and those to be found in *Teachers*, the comedy drama I will analyse in the following section, that despite being a 'normal' comprehensive school, does not seem to be a little inferior to the teaching institution presented in *The Inbetweeners*.

CHAPTER 7. TEACHERS.

7.1. Philtre/filter(ing) (out) Teachers

As we have seen when we discussed Rita's situation and aspirations, education and teaching are sometimes conceived as the philtre through which people can improve or considerably change their situations. Also as Rita seemed to discover, it is not quite like that. In this section I will analyse the philtre/filter(ing) out of *Teachers*, through the analysis of the comedy drama *Teachers*. As the title of this section indicates, in this series we find the lack of philtre that some teachers have. We find in this comedy drama a disenchanted staff, where teachers do not seem to be terribly vocational about their job, and students bully each other on a fairly regular basis, without anything being done about it. As well as this, teachers seem to be pigeonholing each other abiding by prejudices which result in them filtering each other out.

This comedy drama focuses mainly in the life of a bunch of very unmotivated secondary school teachers. It is set in Bristol, in the fictional secondary state school of Summer Down. The setting changes in the fourth series when some of the teachers, including the head mistress Claire Hunter, start working at Walkins Comprehensive School, given that Summer Down has burnt down.

7.2. What came first the teacher or the student?

Already the school presented here does not really appear as the ideal educational institution. However, the basis for what is to come in the series is set in the first six minutes of the first episode. In the opening scene we are presented with the main characters Simon Casey (a literature teacher), Susan Gately (psychology teacher), Kurt McKenna (technology teacher) and Brian Steadman (PE teacher) drinking in a bar, while holding a conversation on how they would deal with Brian's head on Jenny's body⁶⁸. Jenny is the English teacher whose backside the boys fantasise about throughout the first series, also known as the 'Ice Queen', and their conversation goes as follows:

⁶⁸ See annex II for a list of characters and images.

Kurt: Ok, I've got one. What if you could swap your head onto someone else's body?

Brian: How about my head on Jenny's body?

Kurt: Genius! Would you let me have a go? From behind obviously.

Brian: Fuck off.

Kurt: At least let me look at your arse.

Simon: If anybody gets to look at your arse, it should be me. It's my birthday (inebriated)

(Teachers, Series One, Episode One)

Because it is Simon's birthday, he demands the rest have to go wherever he wants them to, which they do. So they end up breaking into school highly inebriated, breaking the window of Jenny's classroom, stealing a little sculpture of Shakespeare's bust and leaving a sheep in its place; a clear example of lack of responsibility on the part of the staff. On the other hand, drinking in the pub is the staff after school ritual, which they all follow dutifully, thus complying with the image of the English individual who enjoys drinking (Langford, 2001; Norridge, 2008; Duffy, 2001) and going to the pub (Fox, 2004) in earlier sections.

This was perhaps Simon's attempt at rebelling against the fact that it is his twenty sixth birthday and he will not be able to use his 'young card' any more. Throughout the whole series he seems to be concerned about appearing young and hip, in fact he is very relaxed with the students to the point he lets them do almost anything in class: wear piercings, girls do their nails, people talk to each other, etc., he even shares cigarettes and joints with the students in the playground. He wants to be the cool teacher and often acts as if he was John Keating in the film *Dead Poets Society*. He is also relaxed about his work and can be seen marking students essays in the pub, while drinking, and even being aided by his also slightly inebriated boy friends. Apart from his reputation, another one of his obsessions seems to be how much he dislikes Jenny and how much he adores her buttocks, the latter being something the boys seem to agree on. Needless to say then that discipline is not one of his priorities, as it is not either to provide a good standard of education for his students.

The morning after breaking into school, Simon rides to school on his bicycle with his shirt un-tucked, and this is the first daylight image we get to see of the school:



Image 9. Source: *Teachers*, Series One, Episode One, 04:42.

Clearly maintenance is deleting the blurbs painted over letters on the school's gates plaque, which left the headmistress name reading as 'Mrs. C. [blacked out]'

The first images of the school inside do not improve matters, we can see broken glass, a sheep in a classroom, and students running and screaming everywhere. As the camera runs through the school and takes us to the staff room, the first image we see is that of Bob Porter, an English teacher who will stay throughout the whole series and whose first ten words are: 'Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck!'

On the other hand, students run wild along the corridors and their school uniform etiquette is clearly very relaxed. The general atmosphere found in the school is one of considerably unmotivated staff and very misbehaving and discouraged students. In the series however, it is not clear whether teachers are unmotivated due to the students' discouraging behaviour, or whether students' misbehaviour is partially induced by the teachers' lack of motivation for their job. Whichever way, students are seen bullying each other and teachers walk by without taking any notice. Kids are cemented on the floor from the knee down, pulled by the legs through the school corridors unconscious, being chased, they beat each other up, smoke on school grounds, go through the corridors on skate boards, and they even listen to music during lessons while some girls do their nails.

In fact, it seems students are even expected to be like that, or at least that is what Simon seems to think. He seems to be really freaked out when he meets his tutor group in Series Two and they are really well behaved, they do not talk or interrupt Simon while he talks, they pay attention, and they seem to like school. But Simon is even more

astonished when the bell rings and they do not move until he tells them to. He is so shocked and disappointed that when he meets his friend Susan in the break, he says disgruntled: ‘I’ve got the fucking Midwich Cookees for a tutor group’ (Series Two, Episode One).

Teachers on the other hand, and as we will see, do not seem to be enormously concerned about the students’ wellbeing and education. At this school, teachers are also making bets to guess who will be on a sick leave with depression next, and they all seem to dread having to cover for room 8F. At one point Susan has to cover for this room, before going in she breathes deeply and when she opens the door, a gust of air pulls her hair back at the time a horrible noise comes out of the room, a sound that could be said to resembles that of a cave full of Orcs.

Their profession to begin with is not presented as a desirable one. Kids themselves do not want to become teachers just based on the wages teachers get (Series One, Episode Two). Although some students are featured occasionally, they are not really featured, so we cannot get to know much about them, apart from Kayla, Liz’s daughter, who is a bit of a bully and Grint, a blond half bold boy who is very studious and who seems to be object of Kayla’s occasional bullying. Consequently, and given that this comedy drama focuses mainly on teachers and the staff that works in a school, I will focus on the adult images given in this series and the different types of Englishnesses reflected by them.

7.3. The PE teacher as ‘the missing link’

As it is the case with the PE teacher in *Bromwell High* Mr. Phillips, Brian Steadman, the PE teacher in this series is presented and perceived by the rest of his colleagues as not being the sharpest tool in the shed, as we are about to see. In fact, the title of this section is inspired in Penny’s words. When showing a new member of staff the school grounds, they get to the football pitch and they see Brian. At this point Penny introduces him by saying that ‘when he’s not pretending to be a footballer, he teaches geography’, to then add that ‘Brian is the living proof that PE teachers *are* the missing link’ (Series 2, Episode 10).

Brian’s reputation as a dumb PE teacher seems to precede him, given that he is not believed to be the most adequate person to take advice from either. An example of this is Susan’s comment when she sees Brian and Simon talking, at this point she

addresses Simon in surprise and disbelief saying: ‘Are you taking advice from a PE teacher?’ (Series One, Episode Two). In this case, the objection would not be so much about Brian, but about the fact that he is a PE teacher and this implies it cannot be a very informed one.

Later on in this same episode, Brian’s work as a PE teacher is underrated, as can be seen in the following extract, when Simon is complaining about the fact that Jenny is going for Head of year six:

Brian: She’s not that bad! (Referring to Jenny)

Simon: She’s not in your year, whilst she makes our lives hell all day, you’ll be safe running round a field or whatever.

Brian: I don’t just run around a field!

Kurt: No, be fair, he does sometimes stop to blow a whistle.

Brian: I work my bollocks off.

Simon: Yeah, right.

Brian: You won’t be saying that when I start teaching A-level next year.

(Teachers, Series One, Episode Two)

Everyone chuckles when Brian seems to be convinced that he will be teaching A-level. The next image we see after this conversation is Claire’s reaction to Brian’s petition, which is in fact very similar, although it is necessary to point out here that she does not chuckle, she actually laughs out loud.

However, and despite his reputation and that of PE teachers in general, Brian proves everyone wrong on a parents’ evening. Whilst some teachers (Simon and Kurt) panic because they do not really know the names or the children and dread meeting the parents given that they will probably not know what to say about the students, Brian is the complete opposite, he seems very confident and proud of all the preparations he has made. Nonetheless, parents do not seem to be interested about his subject and how well or not their children do in PE, and the only parents who approach him ask him about where the toilets are.

7.4. The PE teacher as ‘the dense Northern twat’

It has already been established that Brian’s lack of intelligence is inexorably related to his condition as a PE teacher, whether it be because he chose to study PE due to his intellectual limitations, or to the fact that the degree itself promotes ignorance does not seem to be addressed. However, on one occasion, Brian’s lack of apparent brightness is

linked to his northernness, in fact he is referred to by some of his students as ‘a dense northern twat’ (*Teachers*, Series Two, Episode Nine).

Again in Episode Two of the Second Series Penny shows her slight dislike towards Brian, coupled with a very patronising attitude towards him, whom she believes to be a mildly inferior being, as this conversation suggests:

Penny: I apologise for calling you a thick northern dickhead behind your back.

Brian: I didn’t know you called me that.

Penny: Hence the term “behind your back” (pulling a face)

(*Teachers*, Series Three, Episode Two)

Once again, the fact that he is a northerner comes associated with a lack of intellect, which as we will see in the following episode does not seem to be the case with all northerners. It is clear that in Brian case, being northern does not seem to be a positive thing, however, not all northerners are labelled in the same way.

Episode Three of the third series is devoted to Brian’s northernness and his lack of wit. It all starts because Liz, the school secretary, blames Brian for her daughter’s underperformance in Geography, the other subject Brian teaches in the second series together with PE. Brian is very affected by this and becomes very concerned about the fact he may be/sound boring to students, given that Liz has threatened him with telling Claire, the headmistress. As usual Brian resorts to his good friend Kurt for advice, and their conversation goes as follows:

Brian: How can I make my voice more interesting?

Kurt: Ah, I don’t know, try chucking in a few gear shifts, changes of emphasis. Go up at the end of sentences.

Brian: Yeah?

Kurt: But the only definite way to make it more interesting is to shut up all together.

Brian: You fucking sarky, stinkin’ southern poof!

Kurt: (Rising tone) No. You fucking, sarky, stinking, southern poof! (Correcting his intonation)

(*Teachers*, Series Three, Episode Two)

In this conversation we can see how in this case the southerner is called a poof, with no apparent reason, given that Kurt at no point gives the impression of not liking women, the complete opposite, he seems to be obsessed by the opposite sex and with the possibility of having any kind of intercourse with women. This idea of the southern puff is not unique to this series, in fact it repeats itself across the media. Just to give an example, in Guy Ritchie’s *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*, there is a point at which Barry calls the Scousers ‘northern monkeys’ and they call him ‘southern puff’.

This idea of the North of England as being considerably different to the South of has been dealt with by many (Disraeli, 1998; Wales, 2000; Holder, 2005; Featherstone, 2009).

Going back to Kurt, and his devotion for women, in that same episode he tries to give up smoking because he thinks that way he may sleep with one of her student's mum, which, on the other hand, he has high unfounded expectations of. His high expectations come from the fact that she has three children who seem to be from different ethnicities, which leads him to come to the conclusion that she must be an easy deed.

Brian, still concerned about his boring sounding voice, decides to ask one of the children about this, and the child's apparent honesty upsets Brian and makes him even more concerned about his "problem", as can be seen in the following exchange:

Brian: Little twat! (Referring to a child)

Lindsey: What was that all about?

Brian: I asked his honest opinion about my voice and the little fucker gave it to me. (He sighs). If you were Kayla's dad would you be blaming me for the fact she's doing badly in geography?

Matt: If I was Kayla's dad? If I was Kayla's dad I'd probably be in prison for child murder. Possible wife murder too.

Lindsey: Liz isn't so bad.

Matt: Kurt shagged her and he's still scared of her.

Brian: More scared, actually. (He sighs). What am I gonna do about my voice?

Lindsey: How the fuck should we know?

Matt: Maybe the problem isn't that your voice is boring.

Brian: No?

Matt: Maybe the problem it's just that it's northern, that flat kind of droning northern thing, you know.

Brian: Yeah?

Lindsay: I think Matt may have something there.

Brian: Hang on a minute (addressing Lindsay) You're northern.

Matt: She's Geordie, it's different.

Brian: So where the fuck does that leave me?

(Teachers, Series Three, Episode Two)

His friends shrug their shoulders and give him no answer, but from their conversation we can see how they are playing with him and taking advantage of his naivety. This can be seen not only from the looks on their faces, but also from their argument. There is a double edge to what Brian's friends are saying, on the one hand they are suggesting that northerners are boring, but on the other hand they are disqualifying this argument by saying that not all northerners are the same; different northern accents have different kinds of associations which would mark them as funny, boring, unintelligent, etc. This

is an issue widely discussed both in the academic arena (Bishop, H., Coupland, N., & Garrett, P., 2005 and Honey, 1989) and more popular spheres such as the web.⁶⁹

Short afterwards, in an attack of impatience and exasperation, Kurt screams at Brian telling him to stop worrying about his northernness. He is really short of patience because he has not smoked in a while and does not feel like playing the game, so he just tells Brian that the problem is not his voice or his accent, but the subject itself:

Kurt: You teach fucking Geography, probably the most tedious subject in the history of subjects. Historically taught by the most tedious fucking teachers, you're supposed to be boring. Live with it (in a loud irritated tone).

Brian: I'm gonna get completely wrecked tonight.

(Teachers, Series Three, Episode Two)

Brian's reaction towards his "problem" does not seem to be terribly productive or geared towards any kind of constructive change, and definitely not based on any kind of intellectual reasoning or considerations. A little while after, already in the pub, Brian seems to still be concerned about his accent, and he starts asking Matt to give him some advice. Consequently, they start all over again, although this time Matt seems to retract his argument. The way Matt does this is by putting the blame on Brian, who as usual, ends up being convinced by his colleagues' arguments:

Matt: I did not say be less northern, why would I say that?

Brian: You said my voice was boring because it was northern.

Matt: No, I said you had a flat, boring northern voice.

Brian: See? That's what's confusing me, please tell me what I can do about my voice.

Matt: You shouldn't have to do anything about your voice. This isn't really about your voice, this is about other people's reaction to your voice.

Brian: What? (Looking confused)

Matt: Maybe it's their problem not yours.

Brian: But my voice is boring.

Matt: Boring to who?

Brian: Everyone apparently.

Matt: Or maybe just southerners. Look, just because some people have a problem with your northernness, doesn't mean you have to change.

Lindsay: Yeah, you're being marginalized because of where you come from.

Matt: It's fascist.

Lindsay: Racist.

Matt: Right, it's racist. You have to start actively defending the right of northerners to be as dull and northerners as they fucking well like.

Brian: Right.

Matt: You know the one person who might be able to help you? A person who must have already been through all this sort of thing many times.

Brian: (pointing towards Lindsay) Her?

⁶⁹ A quick search on the web would provide plenty of examples of British accents and stereotyping, where Birmingham accents tends to be the least favoured one.

Matt: Liz. She's been there.

Brian: Been where?

Matt: At the sharp end of prejudice.

Brian: Ah, ok. Good, yeah. Cheers mate.

Lindsay: You're quite evil underneath it all, aren't you? (She says to Matt smiling when Brian goes)

(Teachers, Series Three, Episode Two)

Matt, just smiles at the time he lets the smoke come out of his nostril, in a very devilish looking way. Finally, Brian has been fooled once again, at the time he is being ridiculed. Matt encourages him to actively defend northerners and vindicate their dullness.

Brian's friends have now completely shifted the argument in a way that will cause Brian more grief than anything else, proving once again he is easily tricked and manipulated. On the other hand, the fact that they all 'understand' that Liz will know what it is like to be 'at the sharp end of prejudice', reveals the existence of some assumptions which will be made more specific in the conversation held between Brian and Liz. Not only does Matt assume that Brian will immediately understand and share the idea that Liz understands what it is to be discriminated against, but Brian goes up to Liz without any hesitation looking for some understanding.

Brian is so convinced about the fact that he is being object of unfair prejudice, that he seems to leave aside the fact that Liz is not the best tempered of people and he goes up to her for advice. To start with Liz is not very receptive towards Brian, and shows her scepticism about the fact that she might be able to help him. And it is in this climate that he goes straight to the point, and says:

Brian: I've become the victim of bigotry and prejudice, what do I do?

Liz: Why exactly do you think I can help you?

Brian: Because your are... you know.

Liz: What? Disabled?

Brian: No... are you?

Liz: No... Gay?

Brian: No, what I mean is, you know all about injustice, people making assumptions about you.

Liz: Assumptions? What kind of assumptions?

Brian: Like you're a mugger or a crack addict.

Liz: Anything else? (Now Liz is very angry and her face shows it)

Brian: A single parent living in a council state. We're on the same boat. You're black in a white society, I'm northern down South.

Liz: Am I stupid Brian?

Brian: Well... no.

Liz: Do I have a pervert for a best friend? Non-existent personality? And an extremely dreary northern voice?

Brian: No, I don't think so.

Liz: Well, let me make something very clear to you, I am a clever, beautiful, fascinating woman, in a society of idiots. You are a lumpen northern halfwit, surrounded by relative intellectual heavyweights, there is nothing to compare in our situations.

Brian: Well, that's a bit...

Liz: What?

Brian: Blunt.

Liz: But true.

(Teachers, Series Three, Episode Two)

From this exchange, it is made clear once again that Brian complies with the already mentioned image of the not very bright PE teacher. As Liz puts it, Brian seems to be the 'lumpen northern halfwit' amongst the group of friends, who are described as 'relative intellectual heavyweights'. Liz is clearly under the impression that Brian is blatantly being manipulated by his more 'intellectual' friends.

In addition, this extract openly reveals some of the characters' understanding about the society they live in and their presumptions in relation to social class and ethnicity. First of all, the fact that Liz is an individual who suffers prejudice is unquestioned, which proves that there is a clear shared awareness about this, which in turn implies that there is also a shared implicit understanding of the reasons why this must be the case. This extract makes this explicit. Brian puts into words the reasons why he immediately understood Liz would be in the same discriminatory situation as him; because she is black, people might probably make value judgements and might think she is 'a mugger or a crack addict', added to which is the fact that she is also a 'single parent living in a council state'. Brian goes as far as levelling their situations, she is 'black in a white society' and he is a 'northern living down south', something Liz does not seem too impressed about.

On the other hand, when Liz is asked for advice in order to fight bigotry and prejudice, the first two things she asks Brian are whether she is disabled or gay, to be able to understand where he is coming from. This implies there is an understanding that people are prejudiced against in both these cases. And in fact, we will see examples of both these cases later on in the analysis of this series.

So far we have dealt with some examples of prejudice with regard to PE teachers, northerners, ethnicity and class, but there are more to come. In fact, prejudice seems to be an important part of life in the school, as can be seen in the next section.

7.5. Race Awareness Week: exercising/exorcising (in)tolerance

In this section I will mainly focus on the sixth episode of the fourth season of this series. This episode depicts a whole week in the school routine at Watkins Comprehensive, when staff and students celebrate Race Awareness week. During this time a multiethnic staff room is encouraged to promote tolerance and understanding amongst an ever more multiethnic student community. However, prejudice and stereotyping seem to be the protagonists of this episode. So that what it is meant to be an exercise of tolerance and understanding turns into an exorcism of intolerance. Intolerance is accusingly frowned upon by teachers, however, it is clear these good intentions seem to end up being an exercise of intolerance.

This episode begins in the pub as often happens in this series, where teachers spend their evening chatting and drinking. As they are all sitting at a table, Ewan (Head of English)⁷⁰ starts reading from the local paper where an exhibitionist with the same name as Ben (the Religious Education teacher)⁷¹ makes it into the news. Ben complains about the fact that many criminals have his name, Benjamin Birket, and starts saying he wants to change it. Penny explains how hard it is and goes through the lists of things that need to be done to change your name. When questioned by Lindsay about the reason she knows the process so well, she explains she took her stepfather's name when her mum remarried because she wanted to 'piss her dad off'. When her colleagues find out about her dad's surname they do not react in the most tolerant of ways, and the following conversation reveals their prejudices:

Lindsay: What was your real dad called?

Penny: Jim.

Lindsay: I meant your surname.

Penny: Eichmann.

Ben: Eichmann?

Lindsay: (with a face of slight shock) E-I-C-H-

Penny: M-A-N-N, Eichmann.

Ewan: Eichmann as in Head of the Gestapo Eichmann?

Damian: Found guilty and executed for numerous war crimes Eichmann?

Penny: I'm not related to the actual Eichmann (she smiles), or I don't think I am.

Ben: Hang on, why haven't we noticed this before? Blonde hair, blue eyes, pale skin.

Damian: Fuck me! You're a Nazi!

(Teachers, Series Four, Episode Six)

⁷⁰ He incorporates into the series in the fourth season after the Summer Down school burns down and many of the staff start working at the new school, Waltkins Comprehensive.

⁷¹ He is also working at Waltkins Comprehensive when the teachers from Summer Down move to their school.

And with these words and a face of disgust, Damian (the Food Technology Teacher)⁷² sentences her as a Nazi as the image below reveals:



Image 10. Source: *Teachers*, Series Four, Episode Six, 49:46.

So throughout the whole episode Penny keeps trying to prove to the rest of her colleagues that she is neither a Nazi nor a racist, because of her colleagues' constant insinuations. An example of this can be seen in the conversation they all have at the canteen, when Ewan seems a little surprised about Penny's choice of food:

Ewan: What's the salad for?

Penny: Spicy food disagrees with me.

Lindsay: She hates all foreign food (referring to Penny).

Penny: I can't help it if I have a sensitive digestion.

Ben: You might have an ulcer or stomach cancer, which is probably more likely.

Damian: German stomach, that's the problem, it's always been their weakness.

Ewan: What do you mean?

Damian: That's why they keep losing wars, they insist on boiling everything for hours, it slows them down.

Penny: I'm not German.

Ewan: No, but you descend from the Eichmann's family.

Ben: Maybe you have a Nazi stomach.

Penny: Don't be ridiculous.

Ben: Sniff that (he puts a dish to Penny's face)

Penny: urgh...

Ben: Nazi nose!

Damian: Let's get this straight, you descended from Nazi blood, you don't like foreign cuisine, and you think buying a Thai woman is perfectly acceptable.⁷³

⁷² Also a Walking Comprehensive teacher when the others arrive.

⁷³ Penny is accused of not condemning Bob for looking for a bride on the internet, an instance we will discuss in more detail later on in this thesis.

Penny: Well, obviously I'm a racist then (she speaks in a loud annoyed tone, so the whole canteen stops to look at her) I was being sarcastic.

(Teachers, Series Four, Episode Six)

From this extract it is clear that she is an object of prejudice because of her father's name. She needs to reassure the others she is not German, in an attempt at letting the others know she is not intolerant or racist. Ironically enough, this ethnically diverse educated group of friends are willing to show their prejudices against Germans and anybody with a German surname, given that if you have German ancestors you are supposed to be racist. Even though, there are times when they seem to be enjoying the game of making Penny feel uncomfortable, and showing herself up, in her continuous failed attempts at proving she is in fact tolerant. On top of this, Damian, the food technology teacher, comes up with his own theory of why the Germans 'keep loosing wars', a theory which goes unchallenged by any of the other teachers, as does Ben's about Penny's Nazi stomach and Nazi nose.

Penny has to keep justifying herself and her tolerance towards ethnic minorities throughout the whole episode. Nevertheless, she does not seem to manage terribly well, especially due to the fact that she, at times, seems to question herself. As is the case when she is discussing with Ewan the re-grading of some of her students' essays, Kayla's and Grint's, as Ewan explains she gave a higher mark to Kayla than Grint so the latter thinks she's 'got it in for him'. Her first reaction is to ratify the fact that if she has done that then this is proof of the fact that she is not a racist. However, she seems outraged about the fact Grint may think he is being disadvantaged and tells Ewan it is ridiculous, to then add that if she's got it in for anybody it is Kayla, because as she says 'she's an abnoxious little cow, [pause] who just happens to be black'. Before she mentions the fact that Kayla is black she seems very conscious about what she is about to say, given that this will not help her quest of cleaning up her image of any trace of racism. Although she seems to be perfectly aware of the implications that this will have on her alleged racism, she also seems annoyed by the coincidence.

Nonetheless, Penny's efforts to clean her image seem to be aggravated by the fact that Claire, in an effort to involve the staff, has given the teachers the task of talking to someone from a different ethnic group. Once this conversation has taken place it is necessary to write it down on the form given, to then give it back to Liz, who will pass it on to Claire. For Penny, carrying out this task seems to be especially difficult given

that Damian and Liz refuse to say a word to her⁷⁴. In this slightly tense atmosphere the staff are having a drink in the pub after school and they are all talking about Bob's situation and his engagement with Ping, who apparently was 'bought' on the internet. Penny, without giving it much thought adds that Ping was probably conceived so that she could be sold later on in life. To this very prejudiced comment, the rest remark once more about her lack of tolerance and dare her to get a black friend, something which she accepts willingly.

The following day on the way to school, Penny explains to Lindsay the reasons why she believes she would be a very good friend to any black person, which basically end up coming down to one. When questioned further, she explains that she would be a very good friend to a black person because she would be able to keep a secret: 'Like if they had a drug problem or they'd murdered someone' to then add 'so black people should jump at the chance to get to know me'. Although she may want to mean well, her prejudices, once more, let her down.

Shortly afterwards in an attempt to prove how intolerant the world around her is, as if that would redeem her of her own faults, she remarks on the lack of tolerance visible in the school, a conversation in which others get involved. This conversation proves once more the existing assumptions amongst the staff in relation to race:

Penny: Do you realise that out of all the ethnic groups, this school only employs two types: black and Chinese... and whatever he is...

Lindsay: He may be mixed-something. You could always ask.

Penny: I don't want a mixed-race friend. If I'm going to do this, I'm going to do it properly.

Ben: You know why ethnic minorities don't like to enter the teaching profession, don't you? Laziness.

Damien: Are you calling me lazy?

Ben: No, I'm saying black people find it hard to adapt to the laziness. Finish at four, three months holidays. You don't have that sort of work ethic (addressing Damien). For us, it's just natural.

Damien: I'm as lazy as any of you fuckers.

Ewan: He is!

Ben: OK then, I admit, you're an exception.

Damien: (ironically) Thank you.

(Teachers, Series Four, Episode Six)

First of all, it is remarkable the way in which Ben talks about the English as lazy, and it is a comment that not only goes unchallenged, but it is ratified by Damien proclaiming

⁷⁴ They are both black, and although it is not explained in the series, I would suggest they are Afro-Caribbean English, given their taste in food, as we will see a little bit further on in this section.

himself as lazy as the next one. This would fit in with Langford's idea of the English as sluggishness at work. On the other hand, rather than accepting a more tolerant approach, Ben concedes that Damian is an exception to racial attitudes towards work ethics. Racial differences are definitely an issue in this conversation, and they matter. Penny on the other hand is determined to do things 'properly', which means she is not interested in having a mixed-race friend, as if that gave 'less' value to the person's race. She discriminates this 'mixed-something' member of the staff as a possible friend completely on the basis of him not being racial enough. This on the other hand could be seen as her understanding of racial, as anything other than what she is: the non-white individual as the 'other', where supremacy is clearly given to the white non-racial individual. In this case normality is attributed to the white race, the non-examined race, as Dyer points out in his book *White* (1997).

Finally Penny decides to approach Mr. Chong, whom Bob refers to as Cato. However, things do not seem to go too well, because Mr. Chong gets very angry and storms out of the room after throwing a book on the table. Penny, who is almost shocked by his reaction, goes back to the group of friends surprised and annoyed by the fact that once again she has not managed to make a 'racial' friend.⁷⁵ Soon enough, it is clear why her attempt was a failed one, and why Mr. Chong was so angry. We learn that when Penny approaches him she does not address him using his real name, given that she finds out what his real name is afterwards, as can be seen from this conversation:

Penny: (Addressing Bob) When was the last time you called Mr. Chong Cato?

Bob: To his face, never. I warned you, miserable fucker!

Liz: (Talking to Penny) What did you just say to upset Paul?

Penny: Paul?

Liz: Paul Chong, Head of Maths.

Penny: Well, what sort of stupid fucking name is that for a Chinese person?

(*Teachers*, Series Four, Episode Six)

Penny has clearly called Mr. Chong Cato, the derogatory name Bob uses for him. However, she refuses to take responsibility for this, and she takes the blame off herself to put her mistake down to Mr. Chong's 'stupid' name.

Penny seems concerned about what her colleagues and friends may think about her, nonetheless, her concern about race does not seem to be present in her list of

⁷⁵ I chose to use 'racial' instead of referring to an individual from an 'ethnic minority' given that I am using the terminology Penny uses. For her the important thing was that this individual was 'racial' enough, whether he or she belonged to an ethnic minority or not was besides the point.

priorities. Proof of this can be seen straight after the morning meeting in the staff-room. Teachers have been given guidelines about things to say to their students, and Penny needs to ask her students a question, however, she does not seem to bother about asking the question or about the possible answer.

Penny: Before I take the register there's something I'm supposed to ask you (her face shows certain disbelief in what she's doing, while she looks for the piece of paper she needs to read, as if she didn't see the point in that) Oh, here it is. Does anyone here come from an ethnic/non-European background be it black, Asian or mixed-race?

(*Teachers*, Series Four, Episode Six)

The response on the part of the students can be seen in the following image:



Image 11. Source: *Teachers*, Series Four, Episode Six, 54:57.

All students but one raise their hands, the only not raising his hand is the one I have marked with the red circle, who turns round to face the same reality as Penny, who on the other hand does not seem to think of this as anything of any significance, as she shows when she answers: 'OK, well done to all of you, now let's move on'. From this, it would be difficult to ascertain the nature of her reaction, and to associate it to either a tolerant or intolerant attitude. Her response could be put down to both, a view of people being equal regardless their ethnicity or origin, or a complete lack of concern about the whole racial awareness issue. In any case, she proves not to be passionate about this issue in the slightest. Nonetheless, from the character's trajectory in the series it seems more coherent to think it is the latter, not as a racist reaction but as a general attitude of insensitivity. This insensitive trace in characters will be explored later on in this study, as it seems to be a recurrent theme.

Throughout this episode, and despite Penny's seemingly good intentions, she keeps showing herself up, given that she keeps making mistakes with people which can be put down to her assumptions about race. In one instance, Penny tries to talk to a black student, who coincidentally had bullied Kurt while he was still alive and working at Summer Down, it is then that she reveals some of her racial assumptions. Penny tries to make casual talk with Brandon. The student is mildly surprised about her niceness, but he answers back in a rather passive way. As Penny shows interest in him, she asks about where he is off to and she finds out he is going to games, she then tries to be nice to him, nonetheless she does not seem to be very successful:

Penny: I bet you're a fast runner.

Brandon: No, I'm crap.

Penny: You must.

Brandon: No, I'm crap.

Penny: You must be good at other sports, aren't you? What about basketball? You must be good at basketball.

(Teachers, Series Four, Episode Six)

This conversation ends abruptly when Damian pulls her away in a reproachful way, alleging she is talking to this student just because he is black, and she should not really be doing that. In her conversation with the student Penny allows her racial assumptions to show once again. In this instance, the image as the black individual as supposedly being a good sports person comes up again. However, this whole episode is full of racial assumptions on the part of most of the teachers.

Nonetheless, the most affected character by these assumptions seems to be Penny who ends up in very uncomfortable situations, when she is only trying to be as politically correct as possible. At times it seems anything she says can be read as a sign of racism, as can be seen in the following conversation, where she goes to the usual smoking area to socialise with the others:

Penny: Oh, where is everyone else?

Damian: Hiding, from you. (Penny gives a forced smile and there is a slight uncomfortable silence)

Damian: Why aren't you talking?

Penny: You're not talking either.

Damian: Yeah, but I haven't got anything to say, and you always talk, whether you've got anything to say or not. (Silence)

Penny: You don't think I'm just standing here with just because you're n... well, you know...

Damian: What?

Penny: A person of colour.

Damian: You mean black.

(*Teachers*, Series Four, Episode Six)

Up to this point the two friends are alone, as can be seen in the picture below, where the physical distance between them is remarkable, especially considering they are having a ‘friendly’ conversation. At this very moment the rest of teachers appear all at once and take part in the conversation.



Image 12. Source: *Teachers*, Series Four, Episode Six, 1:15:43.

Ewan: What’s black?

Damian: Not me, apparently I’m a person of colour.

Lindsay: When did that happen?

Damian: You’d better ask Penny.

Penny: I’m just using the correct term.

Ben: What does that make us? People of no colour?

Penny: No, we’re Caucasian.

Lindsay: What about someone who’s half-Caucasian and half person of colour? What’s the correct term for them?

Penny: Mixed race.

Lindsay: What about someone from India?

Penny: They’re Asian.

Lindsay: OK. What about someone who’s half-Indian and half-Chinese?

Penny: Mixed race, obviously.

Lindsay: But China and India are both in Asia, so does that make them half-Asian and half-Asian?

Penny: Yes.

Ben: So when you go for an Asian meal, do you call it an Asian meal or an Indian?

Penny: An Indian.

Ben: But you could be getting Chinese food.

Ewan: Oh, this is very confusing.

Penny: Yeah my point exactly.

Lindsay: When was that your point?

Penny: It’s always been my point. Excuse me, I’ve got a class to go to.

(*Teachers*, Series Four, Episode Six)

This extract clearly shows the existing difficulty of using appropriate terminology in the English language to refer to racial diversity⁷⁶, however, and despite her best intentions, Penny feels again she is the one being judged. Despite her efforts to be politically correct and use the ‘correct’ terms, she does not manage to go unquestioned. This conversation amongst the friends can be considered as proof of the way in which English language and terms do not fit the existing racial diversity in England, where, using the examples that appear in this conversation, someone who is half-Caucasian and half person of colour would be put under the same label that someone who was half-Indian and half-Chinese, mixed race. If we were to think about it, these two individuals may not have anything else in common other than the fact they may have been born in Britain.

A little later in the pub, Penny is frowned upon once more. While Ping, Bob’s fiancée goes to get the drinks, Penny offers to go and help her, something the rest seem to be a little surprised by. At the bar, while waiting for the drinks, Penny tries to help Ping to say friend, something Bob’s fiancée does not seem to find easy. In order to help her Penny presses Pings cheeks strongly, without much success. When they go back to the table with the drinks, Penny asks Ping to say friend, in an attempt at showing the others she has managed to make a ‘racial’ friend. Ping still has not mastered the pronunciation of the word, and when Penny grabs Ping’s face to try and help her pronounce the word again, she ends up hurting her. In pain, rather than saying the expected word ‘friend’ Ping says ‘fucking whore’. Everyone chuckles, and they all look at Penny disapprovingly when she answers this: ‘I didn’t want you as a friend anyway, you plate faced bitch’. Penny’s rage has let out a racially charged insult which denigrates a physical racial characteristic.

The next occasion in the episode when Penny feels uncomfortable about her assumptions, and the implications she may have about people’s racial differences is in the canteen, when they are all going through what Claire intended to be a ‘culturally diverse menu’ in search of something slightly less diverse:

Liz: Oh, for fuck’s sake, can’t we just have some good old-fashioned food again? What the fuck is a schnitzel?

⁷⁶ In my opinion, this could be said of most languages, it is not something inherent to the English language.

Penny: Well, I'm sure there's something for you. Why don't you have some rice and peas?

Liz: Why would I want rice and peas?⁷⁷

Penny: You wouldn't. Of course you wouldn't. Sorry, I wasn't suggesting...

Liz: Suggesting what?

Penny: Nothing.

Liz: Maybe I will have some rice and peas.

Penny: She doesn't really want rice and peas.

Liz: How about some fried chicken and yam.

Penny: Now, you're being stupid

Ewan: Rice and peas, please.

Penny: Yes, he can have some rice and peas.

Liz: Why can he have rice and peas and I can't?

Penny: Because Because you want chips, good old-fashioned chips. Everyone eats chips, they're universal, I eat them, you eat them, culturally non-specific chips.

Liz: Get out of my fucking way! (Storming off with the rice and peas)

Penny: She took the rice and peas! You all saw her, I offered her chips, but she went for rice and peas. It was her decision! (Raising her voice at the time she seems to be a little distressed)

Damian: Excellent! Rice and peas (with an obvious expression of joy in his face).

(*Teachers*, Series Four, Episode Six)

Again, Penny is made to feel a fool on the basis of her racial assumptions which could be said to be both founded and unfounded. On the one hand, she assumes that Liz will want rice and peas given that it is a typically Anglo-Caribbean meal. Despite challenging this assumptions Liz (in yellow) does end up preferring to have that dish as does Damian, which in the end makes Penny feel confused and frustrated. As can be seen in this image taken from the series, Liz seems angry at Penny's assumptions, while Lindsay (in red) shows her shame on behalf of her friend, who is feeling rather uncomfortable in the present situation.



Image 13. Source: *Teachers*, Series Four, Episode Six, 1:19:14.

⁷⁷ A typically Jamaican dish.

Despite Lizz's initial reaction, her and Damian seem to be more than happy to have rice a peas.

Penny's frustration is finally put on the table when all the friends gather together in the pub. Penny complains about the way in which she feels she is being discriminated against on the basis of her name, and shows her discomfort about the way they all assume she must be racist because of her dad's surname. They deny the accusation, as they did with Brian when he was very concerned about his northernness, although this time they end up openly saying she must be racist, on the basis of not very scientific or proven facts as it happens:

Ewan: We said you were Aryan, descended from Nazis and didn't have any black friends, but we never called you a racist.

Lindsay: You jumped to that conclusion all on your own.

Penny: So, you don't think I'm a racist?

Lindsay: Well, we never said that either.

Ben: You know what your problem is? You're too white.

Penny: I'm not whiter than any of you. Well, except you (addressing Damian), but I've always thought of you as white anyway.

Damian: Why would you think of me as white?

Penny: I don't know, you're just like one of us.

Damian: OK, now *I'm* calling you racist.

Ben: Even if she's racist, it's not her fault.

Penny: Thank you Ben. Why isn't it my fault?

Ben: Because you're blonde.

Damian: And that's an excuse, is it?

Ben: I've got brown hair because my great-great-great grandmother was raped by a Portuguese tailor. Blonde people on the other hand are all inbred.

Penny: I'm not inbred.

Ben: Oh, come on, the only way you can keep that hair colour is to reproduce with a small circle of people. Sooner or later you're bound to wake up next to your brother or sister, and everyone knows inbred people are racist.

Penny: So people just assume I'm racist? That's not fair.

Lindsay: Nothing ever is. It's like black men having bigger cocks than white men. It's a fact of life.

Ewan: Actually that's a myth.

Ben: Is it?

Damian: No, it's true.

Ben: How much bigger? I mean, percentage wise? Because 5% I can deal with, but if it's closer to 20%...

Penny: Are you saying people are prejudiced against me because I'm Aryan?

Lindsay: No, that's what you're saying.

Ben: Actually, I did say that this time.

Lindsay: Sorry, I just always assume she misses the point.

Penny: That means, I'm a minority, and because I'm a minority, I'm being discriminated against! I'm a victim of racial prejudice (she says full of joy in her face).

(*Teachers*, Series Four, Episode Six)

Going from top to bottom, in this conversation the first thing that can be observed is the bare cheek of the friends who, once again, have manipulated a colleague for their own entertainment. While Penny felt guilty and in the need to constantly justify herself to her friends, they were allowing her ‘misunderstanding’ to grow, at the time she kept making a fool of herself. Every time she made a mistake, her assumptions about racial differences were on show.

This conversation also reveals existing prejudices about people who are considered too white, as Ben suggests. According to him, the fact that Penny is white and has blonde hair is a well-known sign of inbreeding, which consequently and inexorably implies she must be racist. Ben justifies that being white, as he is, is acceptable given that he is not too pure a white. Although this assumption about people who are too white does not seem to be very welcome on the part of the affected individual, the next one is not only welcomed but confirmed by Damian, who seems more than happy to admit that black men do have ‘bigger cocks’, and conveniently so if I may add. This is something that will keep Ben’s mind occupied for a while, given that throughout the rest of the episode he seems to be obsessed with Damian’s crotch, and keeps asking him to show his penis, so that he can check. Ironically, when by the end of the episode the boys decide to go to the loo at the same time to have a look at another black man’s penis, they are shocked at the size of Bob’s penis,⁷⁸ who unknown to the rest had just felt the urge to empty his bladder. There goes one myth busted for the boys.

With regards to assumptions about white and black people, it is worth mentioning the way in which Penny claims she considers Damian as white, just like one of them, which she adds as something positive. It is necessary to notice the way in which white is presented as a sign of normality again. Being part of the group means being white or as one, as if blackness was a sign of significant difference. To be accepted you need to be white, or be considered one. Despite Penny’s good intentions, unsurprisingly Damian seems to get offended by this. In fact, he takes this as a comment which could only come from a racist person. However, as was made clear earlier, he wanted to be just like one of the rest, when he claimed to be as lazy as any of the others.

Nevertheless, this conversation changes the situation completely in Penny’s eyes, given that now she is the one who feels under the sword of prejudice and for that

⁷⁸ Although we never see an image of the Bob’s genitals, we are invited to assume he has a very big penis, by the look on the boys’ faces.

reason, and interestingly enough, she believes herself to be a minority now, with all the social implications that entails. From this point onwards in the episode, Penny interprets any act and event occurring to her as a product of prejudice and discrimination towards her and her own kind. However, when Lindsay tries to suggest to her that Bob is in her minority too, Penny offers some very personal reasons to exclude him, as the following conversation reveals:

Lindsay: Sorry, you can't discount Bob from your minority just because he's got a pink face.

Penny: Why can't I?

Lindsay: It's ethnic cleansing.

Penny: It's *my* minority, I get to choose who's in it. Those are the rules.

(*Teachers*, Series Four, Episode Six)

From this exchange, it is clear that Penny either does not clearly understand what being an ethnic minority means, or she chooses to ignore it. On the other hand, there is something that makes Penny want to abandon this 'minority' she willingly put herself into before. By the end of the episode, she gets a mysterious note from another Aryan in her pigeon hole offering to meet in the sports hall. When she arrives there this is what she finds:



Image 14. Source: *Teachers*, Series Four, Episode Six, 1:31:10.

Faced with this reality, Penny decides she does not want to be part of the Aryan community anymore and deserts the 'minority'. This is further proof of her lack of knowledge and awareness about what being a minority really means and implies.

Following with the idea of prejudice and assumptions as far as race is concerned, it is worth mentioning that this whole episode devoted to racial awareness proves most characters are the subject and object of race related assumptions. The first example of this can be found at the very beginning of the episode when Claire informs everyone in their early morning meeting about the fact that they will be celebrating ‘Race Awareness Week’ and about the organization of events:

Claire: I’m informed that the canteen staff will be doing all they can to offer a culturally diverse menu. Involve your tutor groups please. Liz will, of course, be coordinating events.

Liz: Why “of course”?

Claire: Well, because you’re... (after a pause) the secretary.

Claire: Thank you everyone. Mr. Waller, could I see you for a moment, please? (Addressing Damian) I’m concerned the canteen staff might be overstressing themselves with the menu this week. Could you offer them some guidance for me please?

Damian: What, like I have to chop up a mango? (In indignation)

Claire: Precisely.

(Teachers, Series Four, Episode Six)

Judging by this conversation, it is clear that Claire, the Headmistress, is the first one to have certain assumptions about racial differences, and unashamedly so. When Damian asks her, indignant, about the reason why he is being asked to help out the canteen staff, she does not bat an eyelid when she answers, ratifying herself in her assumptions. This implies she is convinced that he, out of the whole staff room, is the most appropriate person to help the canteen staff, presumably because he is black and thus, he will invariably be able to show others how ‘to chop up a mango’. It is clear too, that Liz was the ‘best’ person to be coordinating events, as Claire explains, probably for the same reason, however, when questioned she quickly comes up with a less compromising answer, and alludes to the fact that Liz is the secretary. However, the pause she takes before she replies implies this was not the reason she had thought of in the first place.

Straight after Claire’s introduction and explanatory comments on the week ahead, still in the staff room, the teachers are talking about Bob and how they all believe he is a racist. Teachers talk about the way in which he supposedly ‘bought’ his wife on the internet. At this point Penny seems to argue his case, and suggest he is not racist, he cannot be racist given the fact that his future wife is foreign, something the other friends do not seem to agree with, and which they interpret, as has already been mentioned, as another sign of Penny’s own racism. She does not frown upon this ‘clear’ act of racism, therefore she must be racist.

Bob did actually ‘find’ his fiancée on the internet, however, at no point does anybody question whether Bob’s acts are a consequence of his sexism, his racism, or simply of his desperation to find a partner. From the third series, when his wife leaves him, Bob proves to be obsessed and lost without a partner. Ironically enough, while his possible racism is being argued without him knowing, in a parallel conversation, Bob is talking to Mr. Chong about the advantages of having an oriental partner in these terms:

Bob: Boy do these Orientals know how to show you a good time? So, it’s like the word “no” doesn’t exist. Good stamina, all night and never breaks a sweat. It must be all the rice she eats, soaks up all the moisture. Yeap, I recommend an Oriental woman to anyone.

(Teachers, Series Four, Episode Six)

Mr. Chong does not seem to be impressed by Bob’s comments, in fact he seems to be a little disgusted by his presence alone. On the other hand, his explanation about Orientals not sweating sounds so outrageous that we are led to believe his is probably lying. In fact, further on in the episode we find out that Ping, his fiancée, does not want to have any kind of intercourse with her future husband. This means, everything Bob says must be based on his assumptions about Oriental people; their insatiable desire for sex, their compliance to please, and the way in which their diet and their eating rice ‘must’ affect their perspiration.

Claire too lets her prejudices show once more in one of the school morning meetings. She is announcing the fact that their head speaker for assembly has called in sick and she gets slightly frustrated by the fact that the speaker’s name is posing her some difficulties to pronounce. In this instance, she freely expresses her thoughts allowing her racial assumptions to show, as she seems mildly concerned about what may have happened to the speaker and says:

Claire: It’s nothing too serious I hope, I suppose it could be malaria, or some sort of tropical flu. Anyway, you can all inform your tutor groups that we’ll be rebooking Agamen...

Carol: Agamemnon.

Claire: Agamemnon Patagot...

Carol: Panagotta.

Claire: Panagotta Po...

Carol: Pons.

Claire: Well, he’s not fucking coming anyway! If indeed it is a he. I’ve no idea, that’s all!

(Teachers, Series Four, Episode Six)

On the one hand, Claire is clearly having some problems remembering and pronouncing Agamemnon's name, something which is particularly annoying to her, given that the person helping her is Carol, someone with a considerable speech impediment, and who most people, except Liz who works with her, often do not understand. Once again, Claire proves to have a very specific type of black individual in mind, someone who is likely to have very specific kind of diseases, unlike the more "normal" common illnesses any white person would have.

The last assumption, which I will refer to in this section, is one that begins as a misunderstanding on the part of a teacher, which could be said to be the consequence of sheer ignorance. I am talking about Lindsay's assumption about a child, which does not imply any kind of racial judgement or prejudice, on the contrary, it shows a certain lack of professionalism and a considerable degree of negligence. I am talking about a misunderstanding which has serious consequences for a child and his education, derived from a very embarrassing mistake on Lindsay's part.

Following Claire's instruction for the week, Lindsay needs to ask the students if any of them have any ethnic roots. There is only one child insistently raising his hand, and although Lindsay tries to ignore him, in the end she has to say something to him, and their conversation goes as follows:

Lindsay: You're not ethnic Gangis, you're special (full of tenderness in her voice and face)

Gangis: My parents are Mongolian.

(*Teachers*, Series Four, Episode Six)



(*Teachers*, Series Four, Episode Six, 55:30)

She reacts in horror when she finds this out, as can be seen in this image. She feels awful about the fact that she has been sitting him at the back of the class with a packet of crayons, because as she tells Ben, he told her ‘he was Mongol’. Ben reacts very understandably and reassuring towards her, and tells her, that it was an ‘easy mistake to make’ given that ‘he does have a big face’. As we mentioned earlier, this would be a case of prejudice against disabled people: because she believed he was a special needs student, she just gave him some colours, assuming there was nothing that could be done to teach this child.

First of all, it is important to consider the fact that she did not associate the word Mongol to its correct meaning, that is, a citizen from Mongolia, but to the derogatory politically incorrect and very offensive meaning which refers to someone with Down syndrome. Added to this is Ben’s attempt to reassure her by saying that Gangis’ facial characteristics could have led anybody to make the same mistake. This would be the second time we hear about Asian people having a round face.⁷⁹ Ben’s comment implies that Mongolians can easily be mistaken for people with special needs individuals, due to their face size. If one is to look at this instance and looking at Lindsay’s face, it is possible to say that her face seems rather large and round too. This would im

As has already been shown, these teachers seem to be very prejudiced against people of different ethnic groups. These prejudices and assumptions seem to spring from certain pre-conceived ideas of what people should be like, resorting to stereotypes. In this episode it is possible to see certain race assumptions and conceived stereotypes of Oriental people, Germans, and black people or ‘people of colour’, as Penny refers to them.

Issues of religion also have some presence in this series in episode eight of the same season, when Ben decides to convert to a different religion or credo every day, at a point in his life when he believes he is going to die given that it was predicted on a Ouija board. Ben explains he is going to ‘suck up’ to all the Gods in the hope that he can be saved. In doing so, one day he offers his very peculiar view about Jews; he goes to school wearing a Yarmulke, and when questioned about it, he explains the details of his ‘sucking up’ and says: ‘Being a Jewish comes naturally to me. I get depressed. I complain a lot. I’ve always liked the word “goyism”’ (*Teachers*, Series Four). And once

⁷⁹ We have already mentioned the instance where Penny calls Ping a ‘place faced bitch’. [Is this phrase correct? Where did you mention it?]

again, when he presents this stereotype of the Jew individual he is unchallenged or question by anybody.

So far we have dealt with assumptions and preconceptions these characters seem to have about ethnicities and peoples, not only outside their close circle but between themselves as well. These assumptions however, do not seem to remain something solely related to ethnicity, it is possible to envisage narrow mindedness with relation to sexuality and gender too, which is what I will deal with in the following section.

But before moving on, it is important to bear in mind the fact that, given that we are dealing with comedy, this is an ideal place to present these prejudices, which in real life would be completely unacceptable, given that as we have already mentioned, comedy allows for things which are politically incorrect. On the other hand, the fact that they are presented as comic scenes implies that apart from intending to be funny, they need to be recognised in order to be enjoyed. Thus, we can assume that these situations, albeit fictional and farfetched must be familiar and recognisable for the general public this comedy is aimed at. If we consider Freud's understanding of jokes as expressions of cultural aspects which are taboo in a society, it is possible to see how these terribly politically incorrect prejudices can be 'enjoyed' and laughed at through comedy (Freud in Kamm & Neumann, 2015).

7.6. Sexing it up: complying and/or breaking with stereotypes

This section will deal with sex and sexism, as the title implies. On the one hand these series presents us with a group of friends quite active sexually, although it is true not all characters have the same opportunities to be that active. And on the other hand, we find individuals who seem to be very much conditioned and biased by sexual stereotypes, as the following lines will show.

On more than one occasion it is possible to discern preconceived ideas about the different sexes. In fact, in the first few minutes of the whole series, when the main characters are first seen in the staff room, the morning after breaking into their own school, we find the first example. The minute Simon walks in, late, the following conversation takes place:

Susan: You really do look like shit.

Simon: I'll be fine after you've made me a coffee.

Brain: I'll have one too actually.

Kurt: Tea, please.

Susan: (Looking at her breasts) Of course! I have tits, I'm better qualified!

(Teachers, Series One, Episode One)

Although in the end she refuses to make anybody any drinks, she seems slightly annoyed by this sexist assumption that she should be making them drinks. Nonetheless, it could be argued this instance could be the consequence of the boys' sheer laziness. However, not much later, it is Susan herself who seems to be perpetuating sexist myths, when in the following episode, she claims all men do is think about sex:

Susan: Men think about it every 6 seconds apparently, the other five they try to think about something else until they can think about sex again.

Simon: Not all men are obsessed with sex.

Susan: No, some are dead.

(Teachers, Series One, Episode Two)

Simon does not answer back, it is not clear whether it is because he agrees with Susan or not, given that this conversation takes place in the cubicle with the door closed while smoking.

Stereotypes about men keep appearing throughout the series. Especially those related to men's behaviour towards expressing feelings. In episode thirteen of the last series, there is one such reference to the different nature of boys as compared to girls. In the usual morning meeting, Claire is telling the staff she is concerned about the academic underperformance of boys. She explains the matter as follows:

Claire: Good morning everyone, I've been thinking about boys. As we all know, boys are underperforming. Academically. This, according to a new research document from the education authority, is because boys are emotionally repressed, which quite frankly I could have told them for nothing. Anyhow. If we could demonstrate that we're trying to do something about it, we might be able to apply for a grant. So I ask you all to take every opportunity to encourage the boys to express their feelings (some male members of staff make a moaning sound). Something male members of staff might benefit from trying too. I'm sure you don't want us women thinking there's only one thing you're good for (her facial expression implies she is most likely thinking about sex).

(Teachers, Series Four, Episode Thirteen)

First of all, by saying the research was a waste of time, Claire is not suggesting she is exceptionally perceptive, by her tone of voice and her body language we can tell she thinks it is almost common knowledge. This implies certain gender performing expectations. Secondly, her interest for overcoming this problem seems to depend on the chance of getting a grant, and she is very clear about it, she is not so much concerned about improving the situation, as about looking like they are doing something in order to obtain financial benefits. Again, and as I have already mention in relation to

the teaching staff in this series, education standards or students' wellbeing do not seem to be the priority.

So far we have dealt with male stereotypes from a female point of view. Nonetheless, it is also possible to find a male perspective of what men 'should' be like. In the third series, in episode nine, Simon is trying to help Brian to make up with Kurt, and suggests he should go and talk to him, tell him how much he misses him, and perhaps express his feelings about how important their friendship is for him. However, Brian says he cannot possibly talk to Kurt and tell him he misses him due to his male condition, by saying: 'I'm a bloke, I bottle things up'.

When looking at the opposite sex, that is, what women are supposed to be like, there is one instance in the series, when a male perspective of women is offered, or I should say Ben's perspective. The boys are talking about the way Penny made a pass at Ewan but he did not accept, and this is the conversation they hold:

Damian: What was it like?

Ewan: Based on the first 10 seconds, it was, it was OK.

Damian: Well, if it was OK, then why did you pull out?

Ben: Did she kiss like a horse?

Ewan: She's a good kisser, I just didn't fancy her.

Ben: 'Course you didn't. (Everyone stares at him in inquiry). She made the first move.

Ewan: So?

Ben: So, she's contravened sexual etiquette, which means she's pushy. And men don't find pushiness an attractive quality in women, especially when it comes to sex.

(Teachers, Series One, Episode Two)

In this instance Ben's statement is neither agreed on nor opposed by any of the others. Although Ewan shows some scepticism towards Ben's assertion on the negative implications of a woman making the first move, he does not contradict him in the end.

Ben inadvertently raises the question of gender performance and normality (Butler, 2004). He talks about what is expected of a woman, according to him. Penny's feminine performance on this occasion, and from Ben's perspective goes against the norm. In fact, her and Jenny are the female members of the group whose feminine performativity is never questioned by the boys. Despite the fact that Jenny does not seem to be too friendly at the beginning of the series, the allure of her buttocks seem to put her in a safe place within the arena of gender performativity. Penny on the other hand, is always friendly, she is also physically attractive, and unlike Jenny, she takes full advantage of her prettiness. She starts at Summer Down as an inexperienced Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT). She often uses her charms to try and get her way; she flirts

with male superiors to get out of the fact that she is not a very professional teacher, and she even does it with the students, in the hope they will not notice her lack of preparation. She has an affair with one of her colleagues, Matt, and with a sixth former. She loves having the attention of the opposite sex and she is often convinced her looks and her breast augmentation make her the centre of male attention, and on many an occasion that is the case.

Susan on the other hand, presents a very different kind of image. She often acts as a kind of mother figure to the boys; Simon, Kurt and Brian. She is not physically unattractive, however, the boys do not look at her as a possibility for sex. The boys seem to look at her as one of them. It is for that reason that Brian will be even more shocked when the chance to sleep with her appears.

A very similar image of femininity is presented in the character of Lindsay, the biology teacher who appears in series four. In many ways she fills the emptiness Susan leaves, and although she is not the shoulder the boys cry on, they often turn to her as the more sensible one in the group. She integrates easily in the group, especially with the boys, who see her as one of them given that she out drinks them. The boys do not consider her physically attractive. Lindsay, unlike Susan, defies the general standards of feminine physical attractiveness put forward in our contemporary society by the media, due to her large size. Nonetheless, at one point, it is precisely her closeness with the boys and her ability to share their fun that makes her and Matt have a fling, although this is soon ended.

The rest of the female characters that appear in the series, seem to comply with the norm and there is not anything specifically peculiar or different about them. It is true however, that this normality I refer to here, is the one presented in the series which is presented from the male heterosexual perspective. In fact when a gay character appears in the series, John Paul Keating, also known as JP, despite the good impression he causes at the beginning, he is slightly rejected and feared by the boys when they find out he is gay. In fact, the group even make gullible Brian question his masculinity on the basis that he is comfortable and happy around JP.

Going back to the topic of sex etiquette, it was clear in the existing studies on Englishnesses seen earlier that sex did not seem to be a very English trait. In fact, sex is presented as something not only not featured, but as an urge which an English character would probably not seek or would even avoid. However, when watching this series it is clear that sex is very present amongst these characters' everyday lives. Often, when sex

seems to be somehow absent from people's routines it is down to the lack of opportunities, rather than an option. In fact it could even be said that any opportunity is taken.

Examples of this high sex drive are visible throughout the whole series. In fact, the boys seem to be obsessed about sex. Any slight show of appreciation or kindness of the opposite sex is interpreted as possible sexual insinuation. An example of this can be seen in episode three of series three, which we have already mentioned, when Kurt, a heavy smoker, gives up smoking because he thinks one of his students' mums will have sex with him, just because she is kind to him.

Another example of this sexual drive is presented through Simon. He starts off by trying to seduce his future mother in law. His dad brought a female friend home, and it was only after he had already made a move that he finds out she is going out with his dad. He soon meets Maggie, and after a while they move in together and decide to give a house warming party, where they all get very drunk and his long lusted after colleague Jenny ends up sleeping with Brian (episode 5). It is not long afterward that Simon finally manages to have sex with Jenny in the school cupboard room, where they were accidentally locked for a few hours (episode 8). In fact, this room is known for being used by students to have sexual intercourse themselves, together with the toilets.

Sex amongst members of staff is presented in the series as something relatively common. In fact, apart from the relations already mentioned. Liz sleeps with Bob, and later on she sleeps with Kurt too, who seems to be traumatised and scared by the experience as Brian mentioned at one point. Ewan sleeps with Bob's fiancée. Claire the headmistress shows her interest towards Ewan, who ends up being pimped out by the school when the female Ofsted inspector arrives, in an attempt at bribing her into giving a good report of their less than perfect school.

It is also worthy of mention that during the Christmas party most of the staff seem to be on the lookout for the possibility to have sex (Series Two, Episode Ten). Most are successful: Penny and Matt, Kurt and Liz, Bob and his wife (who have sex in the toilets), several couples are seen dancing and kissing on the dance floor, even Carol is seen hugging a science teacher, who everyone calls Rat Boy. Up to this point Carol seemed to be very standoffish with everybody, especially the opposite sex. It is also true that her looks, her manners and her way of talking do not help matters for her social life. Liz is the only person who understands her perfectly, and Kurt, during the short period of time they have a relationship. Susan also asks Brian for sex in this very direct way:

Susan: I can't believe I'm about to ask you this, and I'm probably going to regret it for the rest of my life, but...

Brian: Is this a wind-up?

Susan: No. It's the act of a sexually frustrated woman who's had too much to drink. Shag, yes or no?

Brian: Yes (pause). Please (pause). Thank you.

Susan: I'll just get another drink, maybe quite a few.

(Teachers, Series Two, Episode Ten)

Jenny is in fact the one who encourages Susan to make the move, based on the fact that Brian is a good choice given that he would be 'thrilled', and he 'is enthusiastic, full of energy, not without imagination and he'd be very, very grateful'. In fact, Brian does not seem to disappoint Susan, although it is not something she wants to repeat. Brian keeps insisting for a repeat the following day and she keeps turning him down. This episode proves how sex drives are important and how alcohol and Christmas parties are used as a vehicle towards fulfilling this desire.

At one point Jenny (series two), who is now living with Susan, has a little argument with her due to excess sex. Susan is fed up with the constant daily noise Jenny makes when having sex with her partner Alec. Despite the fact this does not change the girls make up in the end. Although in the end, routine gets the better of Jenny's and Alec's relationship and they end up splitting up.

In fact, a voluntary abstinence from sex is seen in the series as something very laughable. By the end of the episode, the day after the Christmas party, Kurt is questioned about whether he ever had sex with Carol while they were going out. However, they are really asking for confirmation about the information Liz had given everyone suggesting otherwise. Finally, he has to end up admitting the truth and he confesses they did not. The rest seem to be puzzled by this fact and ask further, in search of an explanation for this. While the newly reconciled couple, Kurt and Carol, are holding hands, Kurt explains that despite the fact they had been going out for a while, they did not have sex because they wanted to save themselves. After of few seconds of restraint, they all start roaring with laughter, and they do not stop for a long time, given that they are still seen laughing uncontrollably in the boys' house, supposedly quite a while after.

This image of a group of sexually active friends, who actively look for any opportunity to have sex, and who do not understand an individual's decision not to have

sexual intercourse, would not fit the already mentioned description of the English as a people who seem to be disinclined to such mundane matters.

7.7. Not geared up for sensitivity or expressing feelings

Though there are constant samples of insensitivity on the part of most characters, I will only focus on some of the more remarkable ones. One of the most extraordinary examples is found in the third series, in an episode when the Headmistress has planned some 'activities' for teachers to socialise between themselves in the staff room. Teachers are put in groups, they are made to wear badges with their name on, and they need to talk to each other; however, this does not seem to work. To the point to which in Simon's group a teacher is dead, and the others in the group had not even noticed, added to which is the fact they had not even bothered to look at his badge, so they do not even know his name. When the man is being taken away by the pertinent services, Claire's unmoved reaction is the following:

Claire: How am I supposed to organise cover at this time of the day?

Brian: What?

Claire: Well, who's going to take his lessons tomorrow?

(Teachers, Series Three, Episode Two)

Clearly Claire's concern is not towards this deceased member of staff or his possible family, but towards the need of having to organise cover for his classroom, which will now need a teacher. Brian on the other hand seems to be completely oblivious to this fact.

In this same episode Penny too shows her more 'charismatic' self with a student of hers who is in tears and who confides in her. The student tells her that her father hit her mother really hard and the police came round, and now she is scared and extremely sad to which Penny manages to answer 'Oh dear, that must have been awful' while looking at her watch. It is break time so Penny cannot wait to go, and she does not show the slightest sign or proof of affection, or that at least she cares. It is true however, that at schools in Britain, as a teacher you are meant to keep your physical distance with students, and students often do not even know their teachers' name, they address them by their surname. This is further proof of the physical and emotional distance set between teachers and students, something which may seem striking for many, especially

for Spaniards, a very touchy-feely people. Nonetheless, Penny does not pursue the issue further or ask the student ever again how she feels.

Only the previous episode shows, again, the insensitive side of the staff towards one another. This time it is Bob who gets the short end of the stick. He comes into the staff room absolutely distraught by the fact his wife has just left him. When he announces this, people go on as normal without even looking at him. Faced with such indifference Bob goes on to explain that she has left him for the satellite man. Finally somebody seems to react, and all he gets is Kurt's: 'His wife's got satellite?', with a face of wonder and puzzlement, giving no importance to Bob's feelings about what proves to be a very traumatic experience for him.

In his desperation to go back with his wife, Bob humiliates himself repeatedly, going back to his old house, begging and asking his now ex-wife to take him back. Liz takes pity on him and ends up sleeping with him. However, Bob's reaction to this affair ends up putting Liz off, given that he is announcing to everybody that they are now a couple. Liz tells him she does not want to see him anymore and Bob is distraught again.

Bob starts going through a tough period emotionally. When one day in the staff room Susan notices Bob's mental state, she urges the boys to go and talk to him to try to comfort him or cheer him up, and the result is the following:

Brian: All right?

Kurt: How's Liz? (Bob starts crying)

Brian: Hey, hey... easy there mate (tapping Bob on the back).

Kurt: You're gonna crash your jacket.

(Teachers, Series Three, Episode Four)

From this exchange it is possible to see the lack of sensitivity or tact shown by the boys. Nonetheless, and driven by their best intentions, later on in the day they go to visit Bob in the office where he is temporarily living until he gets a place, and they try to see if they can do anything for him. This is what they say in their honest attempt at cheering Bob up:

Brian: Has Liz agreed to shag you again?

Bob: No, she fucking hasn't.

Kurt: Do you want us to go?

Bob: I don't care.

Brian: Have you got any larger?

Bob: Help yourself (the boys dutifully obey and stay with him).

Brian: Are you a bit depressed?

Bob: No, I'm on top of the world.

Brian: Really? I'd have thought...

Kurt: Course he's depressed.

(Teachers, Series Three, Episode Four)

So far their attempt at cheering him up is clearly not working, so they change their strategy. They start putting themselves down, criticising each other, and making his affair with Liz look like something that people will see as a grand event:

Brian: So people will say, 'oh, why did Liz shag Bob much more than she shagged Kurt? I Know, 'cos Bob's cock is enormous, whereas Kurt's is tiny.

Kurt: They won't say that (looking rather disappointed and sad).

Brian: There will be graffiti all over the school "Bob's got an enormous cock".

Bob: (Now smiling lightly) I had you down as a couple of wankers but, deep down, you're not too bad.

(Teachers, Series Three, Episode Four)

After this "uplifting" conversation for Bob, he seems to be feeling better and decides to go to the pub with the rest. Once there he starts asking if anybody has got a spare bed or a sofa he might use for the night. The others' response is to try and evade the question, and they all start looking down or in their bags. This in itself is not necessarily proof of insensitivity, but it is proof of the fact that even if they care and feel sorry for him, no one is prepared to do anything to help him, if it means bringing him home.

Apart from the already mentioned examples of these characters' apparent lack of sensitivity, it is also relevant to comment on the way they are hardly ever seen in the series talking about their feelings or their emotions. Although at times they may discuss or talk about someone else's discontent, or emotional discomfort, they do not seem to bring themselves to do much about it. In series four for example, when Bob finally manages to 'sort out' his love life, by getting a wife over the internet, the group of friends notice that Bob's fiancée seems lonely. The girls comment on the fact that they should go and talk to her to make her feel at home, but in the end they do not do anything and nobody says a word to her. Complying with the image of the unsociable English individual that Langford put forwards (2001).

Not long after this instance, Lindsay, Damien and Ben are smoking in the toilets, as they usually do, and they see Bob, who does not smoke, lighting a cigarette and beginning to smoke. Bob starts coughing uncontrollably and looks as though he was going to choke. The friends' reaction is as follows:

Lindsay: Should we do something?

Damien: We could shut the door? (They close the door)

Ben: Yeah, that's better.

(Teachers, Series Four, Episode Six)

They do not see Bob now, but he is still coughing loudly. It is clear, that their main concern is not their friend/colleague's wellbeing, but not having to put up with his coughing and his struggle to breathe.

Another example of this can be seen when in Series Three, after having left to life overseas, Simon comes back to school to see his old friends (Episode 7). When he arrives and Brian and Kurt see him, they are clearly very happy to see him, and the most expressive utterance they manage to say is: 'Fuck, it's Simon', and they punch each other, rather than giving a hug or even shake hands or 'touch' each other in any kind of way. Thus, proving that they are not touchy-feely a characteristic typically English according to Duffy (2001), Orwell (1947) and E.M Forster (1967).

Related to this physical and emotional distance these characters seem to show, it is also remarkable the way in which, despite the fact that in the end they are all very sociable and go to the pub on a daily basis, where they chat and drink, at the beginning of series four, when some of the staff move to Walkins Comprehensive, Damian and Ben proved to be very unsociable. They did not want to talk to the new teachers, in fact, at the beginning they would reprimand Ewan for talking to them and they would even sit at separate tables in the pub. This image of the unsociable individual mentioned by Langford (2001), represented in the characters of Damian and Ben, would also be related to a certain lack of trust of outsiders, also identified by Langford.

7.8. Teaching staff at a state school: a brief reflection

From what we have seen so far, the characters in these series do not seem to have mastered the art of having feelings of empathy or understanding towards others, let alone trying to help anybody outside what is considered the politically correct comfort zone.

We have been dealing with adults teaching at a state school who, in general terms, do not seem to be terribly bothered about their students' education or well being, so much as they are about complying with the Headmistress' demands. From this, we can infer that educational standards are not going to be too high. This would put both, Summer Down and Walkins Comprehensive not very high in the scale of state schools.

From better to worse, these schools can be said not to be as bad as Bromwell High, but worse than Rudge Park from *The Inbetweeners*.

If we compare the aforementioned educational institutions, the image of the multi-ethnic school, which seems to be a little underperforming and rough, is repeated. If compared to Rudge Park, standards are worse in this series, students are more ethnically diverse, and it is also rougher. Although in this series the protagonists have been the teachers, while they walked around the school or in the classrooms we could see this diversity.

Going back to the main focus in this series, the teachers, we have found a multicultural staff working at an even more multicultural and ethnically varied student population, who do not seem to feel at total ease with issues related to gender, ethnicity, and who even struggle with the language to be used when referring to these. A group of ethnically diverse individuals who 'proved' their Englishness despite this diversity, given that they are presented as not being very touchy-feely, sluggish at work, unfamiliar and not prone to giving affection, a little unsociable with those they do not know, a group of adults who are reserved, who swear and who very much enjoy going to the pub and drinking. Nonetheless they escape the English stereotypes in many other aspects given that none of them seems to enjoy gardening, sports, house-keeping, they do not show traces of eccentricity, prudishness, hypocrisy, melancholy, sadness, they do appear charitable at all, in fact the complete opposite, when it came to help out someone in their close environment, they do not appear to feel morally superior and there are no evidence of the fact that social classes play a role in these people's everyday life. This however, can be due to the fact that both teachers and students seem to share similar backgrounds.

CHAPTER 8. FRESH MEAT.

8.1. Introduction

In this chapter I will be analysing the comedy series *Fresh Meat*. This is a Channel 4 production which was aired from September 2011 to December 2013. This series deals with the life of six students from very different backgrounds. They all attend the fictional Manchester Medlock University, and share a house off campus at 28, Hartnell Road. According to Channel 4, this is a comedy drama which deals with the ‘...hilarious, and often painful, truths of being a student’ (Channel 4,2015).

As has been the case before, this comedy presents us with different characters which (re)-present different types. However, the existing differences between the different types found here are more noticeable this time, than they were in the comedies studied before. When dealing with state schools, if we take into consideration the fact the school a student goes to is determined by his/her home address, one would probably expect to find similar types within the same demographic area, or if we are dealing with independent schools, student would probably come from similar financially able backgrounds. When it comes to universities things change dramatically. Given the fact that A-levels’ results determine which university students go to, the amalgam of types of individuals to be found at the same university is considerable.

Therefore, in these series the characters converging in the same house come from very different parts of Britain and from different backgrounds. We find Josie, JP, Oregon, Kinsley and Vod who start off as freshers, and Howard, who is in the house when they arrive. We learn further on in the series that he started doing Philosophy and then changed to Geography, but we do not get any clear information about how long for.

They have another housemate, ‘Paul the invisible man’, who occupies one the rooms upstairs, but nobody ever sees him. At one point in the series, his parents come to the house to ask Howard to look after him, because he is a little depressed. Howard led by his passion for CCT cameras decides to set up a few to check on him, the result: some very ‘strange’ videos of him masturbating, which we know must be awkward by the look on people’s faces when they get to see it, however, this is never shown on camera or on the web.

There is something, however, common to many of them and that is a constant concern about popularity, fitting in, being cool, or being considered cool, and finding someone to have sex with. None of the housemates seems to be very communicative as far as emotions or feelings are concerned. The only times characters need counselling help they go to the counsellor without telling anybody in the house about their emotional needs. In fact, when JP's dad dies, he acts as if he was absolutely fine about it, joking and acting cool with his mates and even the counsellor, as can be seen from what he says to her on one occasion when he wants to make an appointment:

Counsellor: Can I help?

JP: Yeah, I was just er... Thinking that maybe me and you should... go for dinner sometime next week.

Counsellor: Right.

JP: Because I mean, I get it. You're really into me, you know. Don't bother denying it. I make you wet, which is fine. We just could go to dinner, talk about my dad. If, I mean, if you want to, 'cos I know you're like ... obsessed with that whole dad thing, even though it's fucking boring.

Counsellor: (Unimpressed) I could do a session on Monday afternoon.

JP: Yeah, that'd be good.

Counsellor: Two o'clock?

JP: Yeah. She wants me (he says as the counsellor slams the door back to a close).

(Fresh Meat, Series One, Episode Seven)

However, when he is alone, he cries inconsolably about his loss in the privacy of the bathroom. Despite his feelings he tries hard to hide them from everyone, complying with the image of the English individual who is reluctant to talk about his/her feelings (Duffy, 2001; Orwell, 1947; Forster, 1967).

Another aspect, most of the housemates seem to share is their lack of concern about cleanness, all except Josie, who seems to get very worked up about this, despite everyone else's indifference. When Sabine, the Dutch exchange, shares the house with them for a while, she complains about it, but in the third series, indifference towards mess and dirt seems to escalate to new levels, as can be seen from the following image:



Image 15. Source: *Fresh Meat*, Series Three, Episode Seven, 1:27:05.

This series, as does *Bromwell High*, also has a web page where to further explore the characters. In this case, however, there is a lot more information, and it is oriented to older individuals, and more specifically, university students: it is possible to visit the main characters' rooms, to find letters, video CVs, leaflets, amongst other things, and it is even possible to look at their mobile phones, their notes, chats, photos, and videos. There is something remarkable about this webpage, and that is, that in all of the boy's and girls' phones we find a 'COUNSELLING' section. Here, we find some comic videos of the university counsellor, who dealt with JP and Vod when they needed help, but we also see real links to different official pages, where to find useful and authentic information. These links lead readers to the NHS, the UK government, students' union pages, pages where to manage a students' budget, how to find some work to earn some money while studying, and blogs amongst others, where anybody can find authentic information and help for life as a university student.

To begin with I will talk briefly about the different characters, to set the scene for what is to come. Due to the fact that Channel 4 created a web page for users to be able to explore the students rooms, their mobile phones and in some cases even their computers, we can have a deeper knowledge of the characters than that offered in the series. Then I will move on to discuss the different aspects involved in their university students' lives, which have been used to create the joke and which, for this same reason, reveal a lot about Englishness and the English.

8.2. Some early adulthood university student' types

8.2.1. Howard

Howard is a rather enigmatic character. We do not really get to know much about him, given that he does not share anything about his personal life with any of the housemates, or in fact anybody. He is Scottish and he is not a fresher, this we know from the beginning. Howard is presented as a rather eccentric and strange individual. In fact the following image is the first image we get to see of him in the series:



Image 16. Source: *Fresh Meat*, Series 1, Episode 1, 0:01:05.

This is what an unaltered Vod finds when she arrives to the house, and this is the conversation that takes place:

Vod: Hi. Hello?

Howard: I was, er... Um, it was on my hand.

Vod: What?

Howard: (Clears throat) I just haven't spoken to another human being in some time. Wind drying. Peking ducks.

Vod: Right.

Howard: Sorry, I've just got used to wearing trousers of the mind.

Vod: Well, maybe you should tuck your cock away, while I make us a nice cup of tea?
(*Fresh Meat*, Series 1, Episode 1)

Throughout all the series Howard will maintain this freaky image, while Vod will keep being the impassive cool character who does not seem affected by hardly anything. Whether Howard's origin is coincidental or not is not something I will dwell on here,

but what I believe is important to bear in mind is the fact that Howard is the most strange, introverted, freaky and weird character in the series, as can be seen in the following examples put forward bellow.

Howard is in the house when all the housemates arrive, so he is the one who shows them around. When asked about how long he had been in the house we assume he has been there for two years, however, he does not really give a clear answer. Furthermore, in an attempt at trying to break the ice a little, Josie asks him about his old housemates, and whether they had moved on, to which Howard answers in a rather enigmatic way with: 'That is what we must assume'. If still in any doubt of Howard's unusual personality, on the website devoted to this series, Howard is described as an 'eccentric recluse' (Channel 4, 2015).⁸⁰

If we go further into this character's life, having a look at this phone, we learn that he is very interested in new technologies and surfing the web, and more specifically in finding information about others, which as he says, is 'freely available on the internet' (Channel 4, 2015). In fact, he creates a dossier of every single one of his housemates,⁸¹ where he not only evaluates the housemates' character, but also the impact their appearance on social networks may have on their future careers, considering what future employers might make of this cyber identity.

Looking into Howard's room we can also find his CV,⁸² eight clips of his *Howard FM radio station*, some CCTV footage of some changing rooms, where he is trying clothes on while Vod tries to give him some advice, a questionnaire anybody can take which will determine your 'vibe' (created and evaluated according to Howard's criteria), and his Good and Bad list, where he 'does a favour' to humanity by putting things in their correct column. In this list, anything qualifies, from A4 paper, thick gloves, formula one racing, aubergines, anime, and ergonomic keyboards, which can be found within the 'Good' column, to A3 paper, The Body Shop, Lord of the Rings, the graffiti artist Banksy, South America, and courgettes, which are under the 'Bad' label.

After looking into this character's profile there is not doubt that he is presented as a weirdo, who just so happens to be Scottish, which is clear from the moment he opens his mouth given that he has a very strong Scottish accent. Whether this is

⁸⁰ Retrieved from: <http://www.channel4.com/programmes/fresh-meat/profiles/all/howard>.

⁸¹ To see the profiles go to annex III.

⁸² To see his room visit: <http://freshmeathouse.channel4.com/#/howards-room>.

coincidental or not is not possible to determine. However, what we can say is that the strange one in the series is not English.

8.2.2. Oregon

Her real name is Melissa Shawcross. Although on Channel 4, she is described as coming from a middle class family, it is possible to go further and assert she comes from an upper-middle class background. She always has money in her account, which her parents put in for her, when she asks for it. She lives in a very big house in the countryside and her father does not work because he does not need to. We also know she spent a year off after school, not working but travelling around the world. This standard of living suggests her parents must be better off than the average middle-class family. However, she makes a huge effort from the beginning to break away from that image, and portrays herself as someone who she is not. To begin with, she calls herself Oregon, and hides from the others the fact that she has a car. She tells Vod her father is on the dole and she hides the fact that she lives in a ‘fucking massive’⁸³ house and she has a horse. We can say that she represents the unwilling-upper-middle-class individual, who does not feel at ease with her comfortable financial situation.

Oregon is a very good student, and very conscientious about her work, but she is extremely worried about appearing boring, and seems to be constantly concerned about what others may think of her. Pulled by her cool appeal, Vod seems to become Oregon’s best friend, someone whom Oregon admires and listens to. In fact, Oregon follows Vod’s advice without really questioning anything on more than one occasion. She clearly identifies with the image of the ‘bad’ working class individual, as can be seen from the way in which she tries to hide her family background to others.

Throughout the series she maintains the same image of the cool wannabe student, joining in as many petitions and protests as she can, and she ends up becoming the elected president for the Student Union, which rather than being a glorious achievement, ends up being an arduous burden given that the union is in deep debt. It is possible to see the videos she prepared for the campaign by looking at her phone, where she proves how driven and determined she is.⁸⁴ This image of the hard-working English person clashes slightly with the already mentioned person who is lazy (Langford: 2001).

⁸³ This is the way Vod describes the house when she sees it (Series One, Episode Six).

⁸⁴ To see the content of her phone go to: <http://freshmeatunlocked.channel4.com/#>.

Looking into her room, on the already mentioned Channel 4 website, we can access her computer where we can see the page she opens for submission for her magazine Chutzpah, which although having a Jewish name (for funding reasons), is not actually Jewish. Despite her efforts, this page does not seem to be very successful and after opening the page on 21st September 2012, she has to close it in less than 24 hours due to the cyber bullying she begins to suffer.⁸⁵ Despite her efforts to be liked and popular she does not quite manage to succeed. With this character, we are presented with someone who is work driven, ambitious and who desperately wants to be popular and 'in' but, despite her efforts, does not seem to manage it.

It is also possible to see a video of the band she and Kinsley created, as interviewed by their manager JP, and a copy of their music video 'Ember to a Flame'.⁸⁶ Together with this, we can also find a copy of her video CV, where she talks about herself and performs some of her poetry, which we can also see is harshly criticised when someone steals her laptop and uploads the video on YouTube. Although we will get to know more about this character as we go further into this section, we can already say that Oregon presents herself as someone who has probably attended either an independent school or a good state one. We know hers has been a good education by her attitude towards academic matters and her manner of handling them; throughout the series she proves to be a bright and hard-working student.

8.2.3. Vod

Her name is Violet Nordstrom, but she introduces herself as Vod. Looking at her CV, we can see that her email is fukyouiwillnotdowhatyoutellme@gmail.com. So far, it is possible to see the kind of character we are dealing with. According to the information offered by Channel 4, she is 'fiercely independent and exudes cool confidence' (Channel 4, 2015),⁸⁷ she tends to be the heart and soul of the party, and as well as drinking to excess, she indulges too much in both soft and hard drugs, to the point she has an overdose once and needs to be taken to hospital.

Although she is going to the same university as the others, Manchester Medlock, and taking into account the good reputation this university seems to have, she proves to

⁸⁵ To see the page go to: <http://freshmeathouse.channel4.com/#/oregons-room/forum-page>.

⁸⁶ To see the music video go to: <http://freshmeathouse.channel4.com/#/oregons-room/ember>.

⁸⁷ To see Vod's full description: <http://www.channel4.com/programmes/fresh-meat/profiles/all/vod>.

have very low academic standards. In fact, it is only after being encouraged by Oregon that she reads her first book ever, and she is really taken by this. However, when the results on the essay she writes about the book come back to her, and despite her enthusiasm and effort, they are pretty bad. Furthermore, the university threatens to throw her out due to her very poor performance. In the end, with Oregon's help, she manages to stay.

She comes from a very disadvantaged family situation and, according to Channel 4, has 'the type of fractured background Oregon wishes she could have invented for herself' (*Fresh Meat*, 2015). Although we see her mother at one point in the series, from her physical aspect, it is possible to tell that her father probably has Afro-Caribbean origins. This is the kind of character that we would most probably find at an average or underperforming state school.

She does not ever show her feelings, and from episode one, we are led to believe she might be 'queer'. Although we only see her having sexual relations with men throughout the three series, in the first episode, when the girls are having a chat about the boys, we can infer something about Vod's sexual orientations from the following conversation:

Vod: [...] Are you girls banging tonight?

Oregon: Er... I dunno, are you?

Vod: Maybe. I like to strap one on early, get one under my belt. But that's just me.

Oregon: 'Course.

Vod: Some good looking guys here... and girls.

Oregon: Oh yeah, totally.

(*Fresh Meat*, Series 1, Episode 1)

From this conversation we can see that she has looked not only at boys, but at girls too. Looking deeper into the language used, when she says she likes 'to strap one on early', one could read it as a further reference to lesbian sex. This could be a pun in relation to the noun 'strap on' which refers to a strap on dildo. In addition to this, looking at her physical appearance, her clothes and the vibes she gives, if compared to the other girls in the house, she does not seem to be concerned about looking girly; she does not usually wear skirts or dresses, and she hardly ever shows any flesh,⁸⁸ she often wears men's clothes and her mannerisms and her gait could be considered as more masculine than feminine. In fact, the one time she tries to be more feminine, in order to go out with a boy she really likes, she over does it so badly that it does not look natural, she actually

⁸⁸ This is by no means an indication of what a woman should look like in order to be feminine; I refer here to the performative expectations there seems to be with regard to this specific of feminine image.

looks closer to a transvestite, in what could be said to be an act of the over-performativity of gender, following Butler's ideas on femininity (2002).

8.2.4. Josie

Her name is Josephine Jones, she is from a small town in Wales, and she is a dentistry student. She is presented as one more in the house, given that there is no real difference between her and the others, unlike Howard, who stands out for his strangeness. Nonetheless, at one point she is described as being Welsh, as opposed to British, as I will show a below. She is very anxious about the time ahead of her, and is very cautious about what student life has in store.

She is going out with Dave, a boy from the same village as hers, who comes to visit her on a couple of occasions. Early in the series they get engaged. However, when he is about to move to Manchester to be able to live with Josie, he finds out she has slept with Kinsley and JP, so they end up splitting up. After that, she starts drinking even more than she used to at the beginning. In fact, having a look at Howard's phone on the Channel 4 website, she is described as a 'Welsh Geordie' whose 'degenerate lifestyle' includes 'the big three – drink, drugs' and 'mild fornication' (Channel Four, 2015).⁸⁹ In fact, she does seem to have a problem with alcohol consumption as we can see by her phone, where we can see her 'Booze Tracker', to find out she has drunk over ten times the average recommended amount. Although, as we will see, drinking alcohol is a very common practice amongst most of the house mates, and Josie represents the extreme, she almost seems alcoholic at one point, when she seems to need to drink in order to socialise.

Josie's problem with alcohol only gets worse and she ends up being thrown off the course for going to a practical exam with a hangover, and drilling through a patient's cheek. Although she tries to hide this from her housemates, in the hope things will sort themselves out and she will be allowed back on the course, she ends up having to tell the others, and moves temporarily to Southampton to start Zoology. She claims animals too have teeth and Zoology is almost like dentistry, nonetheless she really dislikes animals as we find out later. However, she misses the housemates too much and she does all she can to go back to Manchester to do Pharmacology, which she manages to do in the end.

⁸⁹ Retrieved from: <http://freshmeatunlocked.channel4.com/#!/howard/notes/housemates-dossier>.

Josie and Kinsley seem to connect in a special way from the beginning, and this mutual attraction between the two will be a recurring theme until the end. Although they seem to separate a little when Kinsley starts going out with Josie's class mate Heather, the existing sexual tension between them two is the instigating force that ends up bringing them together. However, theirs is not an easy relationship to maintain, given that Josie wants to be independent and wants to enjoy university life to its full, including all the possible people she might meet on the way. All in all, she would represent the image of the naïve, anxious young adult, who faces the same insecurities and difficulties as the rest, needing to be accepted and fitting in.

Thus, although we know Josie is Welsh, it is true that she conforms to some English traits, such as enjoying going to pubs and drinking. However, and pretty much the same way most characters studied here, she does not show any kind of disinclination towards sex.

8.2.5. Kinsley

As we learn from the very beginning in the series, Kinsley spent most of his youth looking after his sick mother, until they got her a guardian dog, for him to be able to go to university. He is willing to embrace almost everything university life has to offer, except alcohol and drugs. He starts off as a Geology student, but after being kissed by a very attractive girl on the drama course, he changes courses. Ruth, who was playing a trust game with her girl friends, is led to kiss Kinsley, on seeing this JP says drama is the best possible course to take, and suggests they should change courses. Under the allure of being surrounded by pretty young ladies willing to do those kinds of games with him, Kinsley ends up changing courses. But finally, despite the attractive female classmates and the chance of physical contact and even sex with them, he decides to go back to Geology.

He presents us with the image of the shy middle class boy, whose anxieties are more related to being accepted and fitting in than with his future career, unlike some of the other house-mates. This is clear from the way in which he so easily changed courses. However, it is not long afterwards that his inability to perform and keep up with the rest lead him to change back to studying Geography.

We know from the information offered by the series' webpage that Kinsley did not have any female friends when he was back home (Channel 4, 2015), in fact in series

one, he confesses to Josie that he is still a virgin. Something that soon changes: he sleeps with Ruth hours before he sleeps with Josie for the first time, which puts him in a complicated situation when Josie finds out.

He is also slightly hypochondriac and goes through a period of constant self testicular checks. In fact, in his phone we can find several links to real existing pages on testicular cancer and to an episode of the Channel 4 programme called *Embarrassing Bodies*, which is devoted to testicles.

Although he starts being very shy, he soon changes and becomes the hipster wanna be he still is by the end of the series. He is clearly different from his flatmates in the way he enjoys nights out, but in the end, like the rest of his friends, except Howard, he seeks popularity and acceptance. He seems to be more traditional and prudent than the rest. Although his tendency not to drink would not be amongst the characteristic English traits identified in earlier sections, his prudishness, and reserved manner would.

8.2.6. JP

His name is Jonathan Pembersley and he is a public school boy who is very proud of it. He studied at Stow, a public school located in Buckingham, where school fees per student vary from 24.000 to over 42.000 pounds per academic year, depending on whether students are boarding or not.⁹⁰ He is a proud rower, or at least had been, given that once he starts university he does not seem to practice any sport. In his room he keeps a rowing machine and a cricket bat, together with some very expensive paintings and various other valuable ornaments.

Very much unlike Oregon, who does not want anybody to know or think she comes from a well off background, JP is constantly reminding everyone about his privileged upbringing and the infinite amount of possibilities this upbringing has in store for him and his 'kind'. Precisely for this reason, the others do not really like him at first, in fact, at the beginning Josie and Kinsley even try to get him out of the house. However, as the series develops, he begins to show a more human side to him, especially after his dad dies and his mother sells their family home in Cornwall. In the end, it is precisely thanks to JP that all the housemates manage to stay together, given that he buys the house in order to keep his friends close. He represents the epitome of

⁹⁰ This is not a fictional place, it is an existing school and the information offered here has been retrieved from the school's official webpage: <http://www.stowe.co.uk/>.

the upper class individual, and is a constant reminder of the differences between the different social classes, as he sees it.

8.2.7. Other temporary housemates

There are other characters featured in the series that share the house with the others but for a limited period of time. Here I refer to Sabine, Heather, Candice and Javier.

Sabine is the Dutch PhD student who never really fits in with the others, and who is thought of as being weird. She is rejected from the beginning and the only reason the flatmates allow her in the house is because they need the money for the rent. As we will see later on, she is seen as the weird individual who they have to share the house with. This would be the way this series presents us with a group of English people who do not trust outsiders (Langford, 2001)

Heather is Kinsley's girlfriend and from her physical aspect and her story we know she has relatives in Hong Kong. She first appears in the series as Josie's best friend in class, but soon becomes attached to Kinsley to Josie's distress, who even breaks Heather's arm in a self defence lesson. Despite her clear ethnic diversity, this is not an issue ever remarked on. She is just one more around the house.

Candice is the last housemate to come to the house. She is a naive, home schooled fresher whose parents wanted to put her in a house with more veteran, and supposedly mature, housemates. This soon proves not to be necessarily the case. Nonetheless, Oregon tries to take her under her supposedly cool protective wing, but she soon becomes an independent Gothic feminist with very strong views and ideas of her own. Interestingly enough she is also doing English, as are Oregon and Vod, but in a pub quiz, where most of the housemates take part, Candice proves to know more about English than Oregon, who supposedly should have more knowledge than her after having been at university studying this topic for a year. In this case, home schooling is presented as offering better education standards than those received by Oregon, who we assume must have attended a good school. Candice represents the image of the young and rebellious individual whose self determination makes her a very active member of society, a characteristic which is not possible to reconciled with the supposed sedateness to be found in the English people (Langford, 2001).

8.3. Posh talk and posh pride

Just as a ‘pep talk’ is meant to enthuse and inspire people into cooperation and effective and successful work, so ‘posh talk’ in this series is viewed as something distinctive of a specific type of character, who is proud of it, and who enjoys and fosters some kind of brotherhood between those who share this way of talking. In this section, I will first of all focus on the manner of speech and how it is represented, to finish talking about this seemingly existing brotherhood, which we have already mentioned in relation to the expression ‘old school tie’, which came up in the Dave Gorman podcasts.

Going back to the series, JP represents the living proof of someone posh, who talks posh, who repeatedly calls himself posh, and who is happy with people calling him posh. He is very proud about being posh, and calls himself so on many an occasion. As it happens, he manages to tell Kinsley he went to a ‘public’ school within the first minute of his appearance in the series. The boys meet in the men’s toilets, where they hold a rather awkward conversation. They are together inside a cubicle, where JP is trying to get Kinsley to try some coke he has bought off ‘a guy’. He basically just wants to check if it is actually coke and it is not poisonous. Although Kinsley is reluctant, he does drink out of JP’s alcohol flask, and unimpressed asks about the not very nice drink he has just had, it is then that JP drops in the name of the school he went to: ‘Port... and, er, vodka, and Baileys. At Stowe, we called it the Stoweminator’.

From the very beginning he manages to let people know about this privileged background, something he is unashamedly proud of. An example of this is when the housemates want to call an ambulance because Vod has had an overdose, and JP opposes it because he is afraid they might go to prison, his argument being: ‘I’m not going to prison. I’m posh and pretty. They will batter me both ends’ (Series One, Episode Six).

He is so full of himself he does not even think he might be being impolite, or unpleasant. JP’s character is known for his arrogance, something that comes so natural to him that he does not realise he is, in fact, being rude. An example of this is to be found in the first conversation he ever holds with Josie, he is trying to chat her up:

JP: Anyway, bollocks to me, it’s all about you. I bet you’re from somewhere, really normal, like, er, ... Coventry’

Josie: Aberbeeg.

JP: Exactly! Somewhere like that. Brilliant! (Josie does not seem to be very impressed and in fact she has to try hard not to laugh)

Josie: Er... Sorry. (She leaves with the girls for a recharge)

(Fresh Meat, Series 1, Episode 1)

JP's rather un-charming way of trying to pull says much about him. First of all, it is clear from this conversation that he believes himself 'not to be normal', as opposed to Josie, who is in fact, and apparently to his delight, 'really normal'. Quite telling is also the fact that she does not seem to be bothered in the slightest by JP's comment. This might imply, that this 'normal', 'not normal' reality JP is talking about does not sound to Josie as anything close to her reality, or at least not something to get worked up or offended about. In fact, she has to try not to laugh at JP on his face.

This kind of attitude, about considering themselves as different to the normal people, is shared by JP's old school mates, Old Stoics like him, whom he meets in Manchester. They get talking and there is a lot to be said about their conversation:

JP: So, what are you guys doing here?

Ralph: Well, mate, I couldn't get into Cambridge. Probably lost out to some fucking muggle on a scholarship.

JP: Awesome, where are you living?

Ralph: We're in Toytown. What hall are you in?

JP: Er, I'm not in halls, I'm actually in a shared house.

Ralph: Uuuuhh, sorry to hear that geeze, what's it like being out in the 'burbs' with the normals? It's probably all "Bella Pasta, lights out by ten".

JP: No man, my house is awesome, it's full of hotties who all love to suck and fuck.

Ralph: Are you serious?

JP: Oh, they love to hump, like, the whole time. For them, on Wednesday it's like a Saturday. Yeap, I've humped one of them already, probably hump another one tonight, all my bitches want to suckle on my fuckle stick.

(Fresh Meat, Series 1, Episode 2)

To begin with, the adjective 'normal' comes up again, this time in a pejorative manner. Ralph refers to the 'burbs', the suburbs, which are in fact areas associated to middle-class housing. Added to this, he implies, living with the 'normals' is probably very boring and cheap. JP, however, who is all about boasting and being cool, is obsessed with sex, so he shifts the way the conversation is going towards his favourite topic, sex. Nonetheless, JP does not contradict or deny Ralph on the fact that he is living with 'normals', he just implies that it is cool living with them, they are not bad at all. Ralph's slight anger about the fact that he could not get into Cambridge is also relevant. We can tell from his words, his tone of voice and his facial expression that he is not happy about the fact that a 'fucking muggle',⁹¹ who was probably a 'normal', took a place at his first

⁹¹ According to the MacMillan online dictionary a 'muggle' is someone who is not very skilful or knowledgeable. This word has its origin in J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter books and refers to people who

chosen university, a place that he believes should have been his. Nonetheless, the fact that this ‘muggle’ has a scholarship implies that he/she has proved the academic excellence necessary for it. British universities have a number of scholarships they have to give to students coming from educational institutions other than the feeder ones. The fact that he chooses the word ‘muggle’ to describe this other as opposed to him, implies he refers to someone who he does not consider an equal, and is in fact quite lowly compared to him. JP does not even seem to listen to this comment, he is so pleased about having seen them that he asks straight away where they live, and so their conversation ends.

JP is so pleased to have seen these Old Stoics that he goes straight to Kinsley and Josie to share his happiness with them:

JP: Fuck a doodle doo! I’ve only just gone and bumped into “King” Ralph! I was at school with him, the guy is a ledge.

Kinsley: Amazing (uninterested).

Josie: JP, we’re kind of in the middle of something.

JP: I mean, what are the chances of all of us Stowe boys just rocking up at Manchester?

Kinsley: Quite high given that it’s a good university and you’re probably all privately educated.

(Fresh Meat, Series 1, Episode 2)

Kinsley and Josie are not even interested in what JP has to say. However, in Kinsley’s answer, it is possible to see that to him, the fact that Old Stoics meet up in Manchester seems like an unquestionable fact. This, as he explains, is down to their private education, which is understood must be good. He does not even flinch or bat an eyelid – it is just the way it is.

It is a reality, that in England, good A-level results determine which university a student can attend, therefore, the better the results the more chances there are to get into a good university. As we can see from this extract, this fictional Manchester Medlock University seems to be a good one, and it is therefore presented as a place where a high number of privately educated students are likely to go.

Along these lines, these ‘public’ school individuals seem to be in a similar category. In fact, and despite the fact that JP is an old Stoic, he was thought to be an Etonian boy once. It is Sam, a girl JP ends up going out with for a very short period of time who makes this mistake. They meet in the house in the first meeting of the Dry

are not magical or are not involved with this world. In this instance I believe muggle is being used in relation to the meaning associated to the Harry Potter series.

Slope Skiing Society, a society only fit girls are likely to be accepted in.⁹² She starts by befriending Howard, to then have a relationship with JP. But before this relationship starts, this is the instance in which she calls him an Etonian:

Sam: All right JP? You shot any interesting animals lately, you big Eton mess?

JP: Ha! Not many, Sam. How about you? (Trying to mimic Sam's accent) Has your mam got an inside toilet yet, you blue-collared beaut? So, Wednesday night.

Howard: Erm, yeah, thanks JP. I was just wondering if you'd like to come to Vod's wedding with me? (addressing Sam)

Sam: Yeah.

Howard: I mean, it's not a real wedding, it is legal, but the party will definitely be real.

JP: Well, I'll be there – so not totally legal.

Sam: Yeah, well, all right, then. OK.

(Fresh Meat, Series Three, Episode One)

At no point does JP contradict Sam, about the fact that he is not an Etonian, or about being a hunter. In fact, he marks the difference between them both by calling her a 'blue-collared beaut', at the time he changes his accent to sound more working class. When in fact, hers is not a strong accent, her speech could be said to sound more like that of a middle class well educated individual. It is important to remember that if she is studying at Manchester Medlock, a supposedly good university, she must have had a good education or at least good results in her A-levels. Added to this JP tries to make a joke about the fact that she is inferior to him, by asking her if they already have an inside toilet, when in fact, nowadays, it is rare not to find an inside toilet. This widens the breach between them too, showing once more how little JP seems to know about the aforementioned 'normals'.

Sam's only real contact with JP up to this point has been a brief conversation at 28 Hartnell, so we must assume, she must have deduced from his accent that he was an old 'public' school boy. Thus, this conversation sheds some light on the image of the 'public' school individual; someone, who has a specific way of talking, and someone who enjoys hunting.⁹³ However, it is relevant at this point to mention that 'public' school individuals are able to set each other apart by means of their speech, something Sam could clearly not do. To illustrate this I will give an example related to Etonians, and how they can recognise each other even if they did not coincide at school; anybody who has studied at Eton knows that teachers are called 'beaks'.

⁹² To see the Society's selection criteria and people's response go to Annex V.

⁹³ A hobby mainly associated with upper classes.

Linked to this idea of speaking ‘posh’ and developing a specific speech depending on the school you go to, there also exist differences in speech that allow you to discern whether someone has studied at Cambridge or Oxford. For example, to go to any given university implies you will be studying or doing Dentistry, English, Geography, etc., however, to go to Oxford or Cambridge results in you ‘reading’ English, Geography, etc. In fact, there is a conversation between JP’s mother, Diana, and Vod, in which this manner of talking is exemplified. All the housemates go down to Cornwall for the weekend, and at seeing Vod struggling to read *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, JP’s mother tells her she should read an adapted version of the text, which she might have in the attic, as she ‘read English at St. Hilda’s’, one of the colleges at Oxford University (Series Two, Episode 4).

Thus, as we have already mentioned, apart from their supposed good education, ‘posh’ people are also characterised in the series by their speech. It is important at this point to remark on JP’s distinctive accent. We know his family home is Cornwall, but he does not have a Cornish accent, in fact he, his friends and his family, regardless of where they are from, share similar speech traits; aspirated language, they tend to eliminate the pronunciation of diphthongs and swcha, tending to pronounce an elongated vowel, and final consonants tend not to be dropped dutifully linked to the next word. Together with this, the young ‘posh’ characters – JP and his friends – tend to play with language in a very particular and distinctive way. And the first explicit example of this different way of talking can be found in a conversation between JP and Heather, Josie’s girl friend. They are all in the pub and Heather comes to the table with all the drinks:

JP: Great work with the glass fillage. All pillage, no spillage.

Heather: Sorry, I don’t speak posh.

JP: Well, welcome to your first Bante-natal class. I’m your tutor – Bantonio Banteras. (Heather giggles)

(*Fresh Meat*, Series 2, Episode One)

Another very explicit instance about ‘speaking posh’ takes place a little afterwards in series two, when Kinsley and JP are talking about Heather’s arrival from Hong Kong:

JP: When’s Heather coming back from “Honkers”?

Kinsley: Tomorrow, and please don’t call Hong Kong “Honkers”. I know you’re posh. You don’t need to remind me.

(*Fresh Meat*, Series 2, Episode Four)

The use of the adjective ‘posh’ is accompanied by a tinge of criticism, it is not intended to be a complement. However, JP is not affected in the slightest. In fact, and as I have already mentioned he uses the term ‘posh’ to talk about himself and his kind on several occasions with pride.

Another example of ‘posh’ talk and character can be seen in the second series, when JP welcomes an Old Stoic, Giles, who has just arrived at Manchester Medlock University. At this point, the housemates need someone to rent a room given that Paul the invisible moved out at Christmas. They are discussing the different options they have, and the different people they might rent the room to. At this point JP suggest they could rent the room to Giles, to what the others react quite promptly and strongly; they clearly do not want another ‘one’ like JP, and they express that overtly. To try and convince the housemates, he says that Giles ‘is not even that posh’ and at this precise moment Giles calls out ‘J-Penis, toga, toga, toga’ in this attire:



Image 17. Source: *Fresh Meat*, Series 2, Episode One, 14: 54.

His argument is straight away invalidated and JP has to keep his mouth shut. This, however, can be considered proof of the already mentioned supposed eccentricity of ‘posh’ people.

Nonetheless, and going back to the idea of speech and education the last example I am going to mention here takes us to the morning after the ‘toga, toga, toga’ episode. It is mid morning and the boys, JP and Giles, are waking up:

JP: Mega Toga!

Giles: (laughs) Toga Maximus.
JP: Toga togissimus.
Giles: In vino veritas.
JP: Nota bene! (both laugh)
Giles: Oh, dude. I think I might take a shower.
JP: Oh, word of warning on the water pressure, boy – that thing’s flow is as weak as a sucker MC⁹⁴ with adenoids.
Giles: You need a power shower man. (JP laughs). What?
JP: Power showers, like in Walpole?
Giles: Oh, fuck, I’d forgotten.
JP: Probably for the best! I mean, it was all dorm rules. “No speaky, no squaky”
Giles: He shoots, he scores!” (Both chuckle)
JP: Oh, bloody hell, strange days.
Giles: Well, it was fun, though, wasn’t it?
JP: Yeah, fun... if you’re a bender!
Giles: Yeah, yeah...
JP: Oh, come on. I know it was only power showers and it was all dorm rules, but if you think about it, it was a bit fucking gay!
Giles: Yeah, don’t... There’s no need to be...
JP: Oh, don’t be a homo!
Giles: Well, JP, er... (he laughs) the thing is, mate, um... I *am* a homo.
JP: Ah... (he shouts in a mocking way and in disbelief) Gaylord!
Giles: Seriously, man.
JP: Don’t bend me, queeroid!
Giles: I am! I’m... I’m gay.
JP: Stop saying it, you’ll turn gay!
Giles: Well, I *am* gay.
JP: Yeah, well, I’m gay too! Yeah, I’m glad to be gay. What a gay day! (Still in a mocking manner and disbelief)
Giles: Yeah, I’m actually gay, though (he is serious now).
JP: Dude, this one is getting kind of old now.
Giles: Yeah, I’m gay, JP, I like men.
JP: (In shock) What? You don’t actually mean you *are* gay?
Giles: Yes, I’m gay.
JP: Fuck! Seriously?
Giles: Yeah. I’m gay. I’ve always been gay. The power showers...
JP: The power showers weren’t gay (in a slightly angry tone).
Giles: What? Wanking each other off?
JP: Don’t say it! Dude, no need to say it!
Giles: Look, it’s ok, JP. For you, it was just a stage. For me, it was the whole deal.
(Fresh Meat, Series 2, Episode One)

The first noticeable thing in this hangover conversation between the two boys is the use of Latin. First Giles plays around with the superlative case of the word and JP answers with a pun of the same case, when he says ‘Toga togissimus’. Straight after, they use Latin correctly to talk to each other. Giles says that ‘with wine one always says the truth’ to what JP answers ‘well said’. The fact that they can use Latin correctly is indicative of the superior education they have received. Immediately after this, the

⁹⁴ Master of Ceremonies.

conversation drifts to what the boys did as boarding students, to end with JP's shock and disbelief about his good friend and 'Old Stoic' being gay. In fact, after initially putting some distance between the two, it takes JP a while to adapt and to adjust to this reality in order to accept his friend and feel comfortable with him again. At the beginning, and based on their relation when they were at school, JP has a little sexual crisis in which he seems to be confused and fearful about being gay himself, but later on he realises his fears are unfounded and that is the moment when he totally accepts Giles. Interestingly enough, this is pretty much the same reaction that Brian had when he found out that his friend and work colleague was gay.

Although this section has been devoted to posh pride, it is important here to remember the fact that not all financially able characters are happy to show their assets. In fact Oregon, as I have already mentioned, does all she can to appear as humble as possible. Moreover, when she first moves in the house, she avoids telling everyone she has a car, in order to maintain the image she has created for herself. She wants to try to avoid being judged in the same tape way as JP. However, it is actually JP who calls her posh when he finds out about her upbringing. The housemates go to see Vod, who has been hospitalised due to a drug overdose, and at a moment they are both alone Oregon tells JP, she is having a bad week because her horse, Roulette, is dying:

JP: Hei, I kind of love the fact that you had a horse though. You're one of me.

Oregon: Well... no, I mean, well, I'm not. Not really. Um... you know, we had him on loan for the first few years and, er.. then – then we bought him really cheap, and... his tack was always second-hand. I don't even wear proper boots, I just wear trainers and fuck up my feet.

JP: Oh, edgy. Grunge horse. Gotcha. You big posho (with a big satisfied smile on his face)

(Fresh Meat, Series One, Episode Six)

Oregon does not identify with a 'posh' identity; she actually does all she can to disengage from that image. Owning a horse implies having a considerable amount of money to pay all the expenses, the equipment for both, the horse and the rider, and keeping it. She has Roulette at home, which means she lives in a big enough house to be able to keep the horse, which also implies having a considerable amount of money. That is why JP calls her a 'big posho', which to him seems to be comforting; he feels good knowing there are more like him.

Oregon tries to avoid telling this to any of the other housemates. However, this situation is not long lived. Shortly afterwards, Oregon and Vod drive JP home because his dad has had another heart attack. On the way to Cornwall, with a very out of it JP in

the back of the car who is on acid, Oregon receives a message from home telling her Roulette is about to die and she needs to do a detour to say goodbye to him, her childhood mate. Although Vod is reluctant at first, she ends up accepting, half in shock at the fact Oregon has ‘an actual horse horse [...] with hooves and a saddle, and a massive horse face’. From this day onwards Oregon can no longer hide her past. When Vod sees the house she is in shock again at how big the house is, and Oregon denies again the ‘accusation’ of being posh:

Vod: This is *your* house?

Oregon: Yep.

Vod: It’s fucking massive.

Oregon: It’s not that big.

Vod: No wonder you needed a horse, you couldn’t get round it on foot. I thought you said your dad was unemployed?

Oregon: Yeah, he is. He’s retired and he’s not rich. It’s just all in property.

Vod: Property?

Oregon: Yeah, not it’s not liquid. Um, none of it’s liquid.

Vod: Oh, yeah, fair enough. Yeah, it’s like if you’ve got a load of money, but it’s in the bank, you’re actually poor.

Oregon: It’s not the same.

Vod: Did you get invited to the Royal wedding?

Oregon: I’m not posh, OK?

(Fresh Meat, Series One, Episode Six)

Oregon denies being posh and leaves the car. When the still highly intoxicated JP wakes up and sees the house, he just says: ‘Oregon is a massive posho’. Nonetheless, Oregon will deny being posh one third time, when Vod finds out Oregon’s real name is Melissa. This leads to the girls having an argument and Vod recriminating Oregon for lying to her:

Vod: Melissa? Who’s Melissa? [...] You’re Melissa? (She says in surprise)

Oregon: Technically, legally.

Vod: Oh, so, is there anything else? Are you really the Duchess of Chester? Do you sell your own range of sliced organic peacock? Seriously, who the fuck are you and what’s with all the secrets?

Oregon: Look Vod, I’m really sorry.

Vod: I know, I shouldn’t have trusted you. I thought you were my mate.

(Fresh Meat, Series One, Episode Six)

Vod feels let down by Oregon’s lies, and starts being a little mean towards her friend. It is worthy of mention the kind of things Vod suggests or accuses her friend of: being a Duches and selling organic peacock, presumably because to her eyes that must be something posh people are and do. Although at first sight, and taking into account the

aforementioned discussion between the girls, it might have looked as if Vod did not like the fact that Oregon was actually posh, this last conversation shows that Vod's only problem is the fact that Oregon lied to her. In fact, Vod gets on really well with JP throughout the series, despite his poshness and arrogance, so it is clear she does not have anything against those who are better off than herself. What this does show is Oregon's perception of what it means to be 'posh' and her strong desire to separate herself from that image.

This shows that despite an individual's desire to identify with a social class different to his/hers, at times, others will label us differently, proof of the fact that identity had to be dual.

8.4. Posh is still more: lording it on

Linked to the aforementioned idea of the 'public' school individual receiving a good education is the idea of 'posh' supremacy. These supposedly 'posh' characters are represented as being more financially able and better connected, hence the title of this section, which on the other hand seems to be JP's motto, as I will show here. Despite the negative connotations associated to the word 'posh', as we have already seen, every time JP uses this term to refer to himself, he does so in a positive and enhancing manner, lording it over others. In fact, the mere existence in the series of the distinction between 'posh' people and the 'normals', itself implies a degree of superiority on the part of the former, given that 'normality' is used here in a pejorative way.

This superiority is portrayed as pertaining to two spheres: a merely economical one and a social one, which entails networking and having the appropriate kind of contacts. JP himself puts it this way when he is talking to the other housemates, considering the possibility of going to Southampton to a freshers' 'traffic light party':

JP: Damn straight I'm coming. There are officially no hotties in Manchester. It's a duff year, a bad vintage, hence why I'm starting afresh, rolling out the big guns: my natural assets.

Vod: Your beautiful breasts?!

JP: Money and connections. Yeah, baby. All aboard, and I will buy you a latte, and I will take you to a place on the King's Road, where Prince Harry got a hand job of an assistant manager at Abercrombie & Fitch. Look out, motherfuckers, I'm pulling out my privilege.

(Fresh Meat, Series Three, Episode 1)

In this instance he openly talks about his privilege, ‘money and connections’, something he believes will aid him in his trawl for women.

In fact, he does not have any problems spending money. Already his first day in the house only serves to corroborate this fact. When he arrives and he sees his room, he notices that his is the worst, so he just barges in the house, bribing Vod into the best room and paying his way into acceptance. When he offers Vod money to swap rooms, Josie and Kinsley seem indignant, and JP says he has ‘strong moral objections’ about the way JP is going about paying his way in. Nonetheless, he seems to be finally convinced by JP’s monetary reasons:

JP: All right, Knutsford.⁹⁵ How about I also agree to pay for Sky+ HD, with sport and movies?

Kinsley: (Nodding) My moral objections have largely been addressed
(*Fresh Meat*, Series One, Episode One)

JP’s financially privileged position is clear from this moment onwards. However, this is constantly restated by the fact, he is always buying drugs, and paying for things remorselessly. This proves that he does not have to worry about money in the slightest. In fact, as I mentioned earlier, he even buys the house they live in, to keep the housemates together at one point.

There is another instance in which JP seemingly inadvertently boasts of his financially privileged background. It is during a weekend in Cornwall, when he takes all the housemates there for a ‘study’ break, where not much studying goes on. JP is very sad when he finds out his mother is selling the house, the house where he grew up and where he has so many childhood memories. So just before they all leave, JP starts a fire where almost in tears he burns many of his childhood things, and full of melancholy cries about his loss, and Oregon tries to cheer him up:

JP: Well, that’s it then, my house is gone.

Oregon: You still have a house... in Manchester.

JP: Plus, the villa in Tuscany, and the apartment in Dubai (he says sobbing).
(*Fresh Meat*, Series Two, Episode Four)

⁹⁵ JP refers to Kinsley as Knutsford, because when they met, and JP tried to agree to see Kinsley again, he said it would not be possible because he was actually doing Agricultural studies at Knutsford University. Kinsley lied in order to try and get rid of JP, which he finally is aware of when he sees him in the house.

Oregon, who was trying to comfort JP, ends up pulling a face in a gesture of slight regret, given that her words of support turn out in yet another show of JP's very superior financial situation.

Added to this privileged life 'posh' individuals are able to enjoy thanks to their very financially comfortable position, is the conviction life will put them where they deserve; in a job with great responsibilities and power. JP seems to believe there is a high position in life in store for him and his kind, which they openly say on more than one occasion. The first example of this bold belief is presented in a conversation between JP and Howard, when the boys are about to enter a room to buy some drugs from a dealer none of them know:

JP: Can't... just... you go in? I mean, you've got so much less to loose than I do.

Howard: Why do you keep saying that?! (angry, but not raising his voice)

JP: Because it's true? Look Howard, I mean, I'll probably end up being Prime Minister or something one day. I don't wanna be, it's just... that kind of shit happens to guys like me. But what difference does it make to you? If you get sent down, so what? You've got your Xbox. You get three meals a day. No offence, but I think you'd actually fit in quite well with the nonces.

Howard: How could that *not* be offensive?

(Fresh Meat, Series 1, Episode Four)

Not only does JP believe he will probably end up ruling the world, but he also shows he has no qualms about sharing his thoughts with someone he believes to be quite lowly compared to himself. JP explains he is not trying to offend anybody, however, and as Howard says, it is impossible not to feel offended by JP's words.

This image of supremacy, validating the title 'posh is more', comes up on more occasions throughout the series. The next example can be seen in a conversation between the boys, when Kinsley, who has been offered an internship by BP, is thinking about turning it down and both JP and Howard are interested in it. Kinsley is outraged at the fact BP have used a photo of him and they air-brushed his soul patch:

Kinsley: I knew it! They just want some drone. They want me to sell my soul to the devil.

Howard: I think they want to sell your soul patch to the devil.

Kinsley: I'm not an oilman. They can stick their internship up their arse.

JP: Exactly! So... Give me the invite. Come on, I'm what BP want.

Howard: No, you're not.

JP: Well, off course I am.

Howard: What's a tension-leg drilling platform, then?

JP: It's a... type of platform.

Howard: (smiles) What does BP stand for?

JP: Britain... Petrol.

Howard: Wrong.

JP: OK, Howard, you may have more actual facts than me, but I've got stuff that BP need.

Howard: Like what? (He says in disbelief)

JP: People with my accent make foreigners shit themselves. If I'd been born 40 years ago, I'd be running India.

Howard: India was independent 40 years ago.

JP: Yeah, well, maybe if I'd been around, it wouldn't be.

(Fresh Meat, Series 2, Episode Three)

Once again JP boasts about his superiority with regard to those who do not speak like him, those who are not posh. In this instance however, and contrary to what Kinsley pointed out earlier about the good quality of private education, JP shows to have little knowledge about the topic in question. Interestingly, he also proves not to have much knowledge about the history of the old colonies in India and Pakistan,⁹⁶ apart from the fact that, when they were first colonised, they were ruled by 'posh' British people. It is also remarkable that despite the unyielding faith that JP seems to have in himself, he actually thinks he would have changed history.

This idea of privately educated individuals as the ruling class comes up again in the third series when Ralph goes for the presidency of the university student union, as do Oregon and Vod. He meets a very disillusioned JP who has had his heart broken by the beautiful Sam, who does not seem to be bothered by anything, and in this state Ralph talks to JP about his plans, convinced that he can count on JP's support:

Ralph: J-penis, how goes it? I'm standing as a Tory candidate. First steps on the inevitable road to Number 10. Well, not sure I want a career in politics really, but it keeps the old man happy. Well, of course I can count on your vote?

JP: No.

Ralph: Sorry, what was that? I thought for a moment you said "no".

JP: That's right. I don't do anything for anyone any more. I'm all about number one.

Ralph: But, dude, that is exactly why I'm standing. I represent everyone who's only interested in themselves.

JP: Can't talk, got a potato. Later!

Ralph: But, w...

JP: (Already on his way out) No.

(Fresh Meat, Series Three, Episode Eight)

This is in fact a very different image of JP than usual. Throughout the series he is totally devoted to his Old Stoic friends and to their 'brotherhood'.⁹⁷ In this case he clearly

⁹⁶ In 1947 these territories became independent and partitioned into the mainly Muslim-majority state of Pakistan and Hindu India.

⁹⁷ There are several examples of this existing 'brotherhood' throughout the series, which will be explored in a section to follow.

states his total indifference towards Ralph and what he is doing, to Ralph's surprise. This extract, however, reveals some very specific political ideas and associations with the privately educated or posh type. First of all, and as it has already been mentioned in relation to JP, the 'posh' type believes his, is the path to power, to ruling and thus to politics. Ralph, someone born in the cradle of privilege and money, stands as a Tory candidate, a party which, according to him, represents all those who are 'only interested in themselves'. Ralph's political ideas are hinted at a little further on in this last episode of the series, when all the candidates do a speech in order to try and gain students votes, as we will see in the following section.

Although it is clear that all these are exaggerations put forward to make the audience laugh, it is really interesting to look at the farfetched images offered, because they inform us about the existing associations that need to be understood to understand the comedy. From this extract we can see that there are implicit beliefs in the English psyche that posh people rule Britain and with very specific ends: to favour themselves. After all, the former would be an undeniable truth if we were to believe the news. In January 2011, BBC One aired a programme called *Posh and Posher: Why Public School Boys Run Britain*, where journalist and broadcaster Andrew Neil (2011, 19 February), in an interview to the Lib. Dem. Education Minister Sarah Tether, explains and questions MP on how they face the fact that MPs no longer represent society, given that 10% out of the 119 ministers of the coalition went to one public school, Eaton, and 66% had been privately educated, in a country where only 7% of the population can afford to go to a private school. The Education MP admits that that is a problem. Besides, she acknowledges that they are talking about a pattern that repeats itself in all spheres of life. In fact she says that: 'in journalism at the top end of business, we also see similar patterns, that if you come from a wealthier background you're more likely to get a good education and you're more likely to reach the top'.⁹⁸

Continuing with the idea of politics, I will devote the next section of this thesis to the analysis of the representations of politics offered in this series.

8.5. Re-presentations of politics at university

⁹⁸ This part of the interview has been uploaded on YouTube by the BBC, and can be retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6oteooktZQI>.

In this section, as the title implies, I will analyse the few occasions in which politics is referred to in the series. The first clear glimpse of politics comes through the university student elections, where Ralph, Oregon and Vod are standing. In these elections, and as I have already mentioned, Ralph is standing as a Tory candidate, and we have already had a little insight about what he believes he is standing for and his reasons for doing so. However, we get to learn more about what he really thinks after Vod's 'fake' statement.

As I have already mentioned, both Oregon and Vod are standing for the presidency, the former in a genuine attempt at being successful and winning the elections and the latter as a rebellious act towards her friend. The girls have an argument and Vod feels vindictive, so she decides to get on Oregon's nerves by proving she can be more popular than her. So, it is with this aim in mind that Vod goes to the different political delegations in order to see who she can bless with her collaboration. The first party she goes to see is Labour, and this is the conversation that takes place between her and the representative:

Vod: (Clears throat) I'm running to be the next president of the Student Union. And I'm thinking of being ... Labour. What's in it for me? Sell it to me.

Labour representative: Normally, we vet candidates rather than have candidates vet us.

Vod: Oh, right, typical politician, twisting everything around.

Labour representative: Are you familiar with our policies? You need to be able to articulate why people should vote for us.

Vod: Oh, right, so it's all about good grammar and elocution lessons. I should join the Tories, is that what you're saying?

Labour representative: I'm not saying that, no, you're twisting *my* words.

Vod: Am I? Or are you twisting my words?

Labour representative: No, you're twisting my words.

Vod: You see, this is why everyone thinks Blair's a cunt. Forget it!

(Fresh Meat, Series Three, Episode Eight)

She seems clearly disillusioned by Labour, although she proves not to know much about their policies. In fact she sounds like she pretty much guides herself by popular opinion. Quite telling is the way in which she explicitly says that elocution and good grammar is what Tories are all about. She is clearly drawing her conclusions from the image of the private school individual whose speech is appropriate and well articulated. Again, we go back to the idea of the superior education, where elocution is given an important role.

The next party she goes to see are the Conservatives, where she does not ask any questions, and she limits herself to give her negative opinion of the party, when she

says: ‘Obviously, I’ve got a problem with the whole anti-Europe thing, ‘cos I like to go to Amsterdam a lot. Also, I hate everything about you... Just came in to have a go’. After trying the Green Party and realising that the fact that she loves KFC is ‘a bit of a deal breaker’, she goes to the UKIP office, where she sits, looks around and says ‘nah’ as she leaves. Although she does not seem to have a deep knowledge of politics, she does have a clear idea of what she does not like⁹⁹. Finally, she ends up going solo.

Vod’s only motto in her campaign is ‘cheap chips’, which makes her extremely successful. When the two friends finally make up, Vod is not interested in winning the elections, so she needs to shed off some votes. In a desperate attempt at losing popularity, and while giving her final speech, she starts saying as many things as she can think of to be unpopular. She starts off by saying that if she gets elected she will burn all the books in the library, adding that she will ‘bang’ CCTV cameras into every dorm to later on publish ‘a weekly report of who’s screwing who’, she says she will take down all disabled ramps. However, with each statement, she gets cheered even louder. Even Ralph seems to be keen on her as he says ‘Yeah! Fuck, yeah!... Am I allowed to vote for another candidate?’

At this point Vod is now desperate to say something so that people stop liking her, so she seeks advice from Oregon whose answer is: ‘homophobic rant’. This is a piece of advice Vod shows to be very reluctant to accept, but which she ends up taking much to her dislike.

Although we do not get to hear Vod’s words, her tone of voice and facial expression show the pain she is in after saying what she does. When she finishes her speech with the words ‘... And that is what I would do to the gays, if I was elected’, she is almost in tears, out of the sheer difficulty of saying the things she has said, especially considering she herself is ‘queer’. We can infer what she has just said is probably very politically incorrect and wrong by Oregon’s face, as can be observed in the following image:

⁹⁹ For a detailed report on her notes on each political party see Anex IV.



Image 18. Source: *Fresh Meat*, Series Three, Episode Eight, 0:32:33.

Consequently, she is booed, and people go up to her to call her a homophobe. Nonetheless, not all seems grim for Vod, despite the fact she seems to be hated now by those who loved her only a few minutes ago, she seems to be able to take advantage of her situation to her personal benefit, as we can infer from her conversation with Oregon straight after the talk, as a student walks past Vod and calls her a homophobe:

Oregon: Are you OK?

Vod: Uff, yeah, just had a very hot dyke having a go at me, but I gave her my number and I think she's going to "educate" me, so it is all good (she winks).

(*Fresh Meat*, Series Three, Episode Eight)

Despite the popular rejection towards Vod's speech, Ralph seems to be deeply impressed to the point where he says: 'Wow, I mean, wow. I... I totally agree with that. I would never say that out loud. I mean, this is the problem with modern politics, there are no more personalities any more, no racist or homophobic personalities'. He clearly agrees with Vod's 'homophobic rant' although he would not dare to put that into words. Ralph's is the only representation of a Tory available in the series, even if he is just a Tory politician in the making. As I said earlier, these gags are based on stereotyped farfetched, outrageous images of reality that are created for a comic purpose. However, it is also possible to infer the assumptions behind these gags, in this case about the Tory candidate, who is very intolerant, narrow minded who hides behind his hypocritical facade.

8.6. Social class/(h)es

Although social classes have not been explicitly referred to in the series, it could be said that the words ‘muggle’ and ‘normals’ refer to the middle or working classes. Given that this is a term used by Ralph in conversations with JP, we can understand that they refer to non-upper class people. In fact, for them, ‘muggles’ and ‘normals’ seem to be the perfect terms to use, given that as we will see they do not distinguish between working or middle classes, anything other than upper class would be under the same category.

References to the implications of belonging to a privileged socio-economic group are made throughout the series, despite the fact they may not be referred to using the term social class. During the first week at Manchester Medlock the boys realise they are not going to any beginning of the year Hall parties, so they decide to organise their own. However, since Oregon has not told anybody she has got a car, they all have to come back from town carrying a lot of bags, and at this precise moment Vod instruct the others about what having a car as a university student means:

JP: I can’t believe none of you have a car. Nothing! Not even a Fiat Panda. Take these (he says as he gives his bags to Howard).

Josie: Yeah, I notice that *you* don’t have a car.

JP: Wrong, actually. I’ve got a BMW X1. I just can’t drive it at the moment, got points on my licence, because apparently I was speeding, apparently I was drunk.

Vod: Students who have cars are dicks.

Oregon: Yeah! (Pause) Why?

Vod: Cos they’re not students, if you’ve got a car and a satnav, you’re a ponce whose dad works in the city and sells nerve gas to fuckheads.

JP: Cars are cool, everyone knows it. That’s why even lesbians like *Top Gear*.

(*Fresh Meat*, Series One, Episode One)

First of all it is important to take into account the word Vod uses to describe students who own a car: ‘ponce’, which according to the MacMillan Online Dictionary is ‘an insulting word for a man who behaves in a way that seems more typical of a woman, especially a man who is very concerned about his appearance’ (2015). If we look this word up in the online Urban Dictionary, we can see that the ‘top definition’ refers to a man who tends to wear more fashionable clothes and tries to act in a more ‘polished fashion’, which is not necessarily a derogatory term (2006). Whereas the second definition describes ‘an individual who attempts to fake having intelligence, class or culture’ (2004). Vod is clearly not being complementary towards students who own a car, and she criticises the fact that they have a lot of money, because their parents give

them everything they need. This image of the well off student is associated to that of a male who does not necessarily present a terribly masculine image of himself, someone fake. This is similar to the image of the ‘southern poof’ we discussed earlier on in this thesis. In fact Vod even goes further saying that this ponce’s father probable works in the city, again going to London implies we are dealing with southerners. This is quite striking considering Vod’s accent is cockney, however, she seems to be able to put a barrier between different kinds of ‘southernesses’. Vod explains they are not students, according to her criteria being a student implies not belonging to the wealthy upper classes.

Going back to the topic of social class, there is only one occasion in which the word ‘class’ is used. In this case, it is JP who uses it, leaving on show once again his ignorance and lack of tact. Some students are going to London to take part in a demonstration against the rise of university fees, and JP decides to join them, thinking he can get a free ride to London to go to a rugby game. He obviously has never been in anything like it before, so he is a little excited:

JP: So, how awesome is this? Class war! You should have brought Dave. He’s a ... miner or something, isn’t he?

Josie: He’s a heating engineer.

JP: Exactly.

(Fresh Meat, Series One, Episode Five)

JP’s only experience of public protests is what he has probably read or studied about them at school, and so he is clearly thinking about the miners’ strikes back in the 80s, hence his comment on Josie’s boyfriend when he says he is a minner. Still when corrected by Josie about Dave’s job, JP’s response implies that for him anything which is not a top job fits into the same category, thus being a heating engineer and a miner would be in the same category.

Very shortly afterwards, when Josie notices that JP has the intention of boarding the bus with the rest of the students, she shows her surprise and discontent about him being there, to which he eloquently¹⁰⁰ lies in the following way:

Josie: What are you even doing here, JP? This isn’t your thing.

JP: Look, this whole class warrior bullshit is really pinging my nads.¹⁰¹ No, this people aren’t like me. Yes, most of them are divvos and chavs. But that doesn’t mean that we

¹⁰⁰ I say ‘eloquently’ because he clearly fools Josie, given her apology.

¹⁰¹ According to the online Urban Dictionary, ‘nads’ refers to the testicles.

can't agree on something every now and again. I'm not some idiotic dick who doesn't know what's going on in the world. Alright?

Josie: Yeah, I'm sorry.

(Fresh Meat, Series One, Episode Five)

Josie clearly believes him and lets him get on the bus, but JP has deemed himself 'the idiotic dick who doesn't know what's going on in the world' by simply not caring. Again, his use of the words 'divvos'¹⁰² and 'chavs' shows, how anything other than people like him are considered as the other. In this case, 'divvo' is not specific to a social class, but 'chav' is. As we have already seen, the latter refers to the 'not working' working class. It is a term associated to boys and girls who do not go to school because they are not interested in education or in working. Thus, the use of the politically incorrect term 'chav' could not be used to describe the rest of students in the bus.

In the end, JP is asked to push a girl on a wheelchair and he feels compelled to help. He still has not forgotten the rugby match he wants to go and see, but he gets trapped inside a police cordon, and when he tries to get through, he gets pushed by a policeman. He feels so offended that he gets a little carried away and ends up like this:

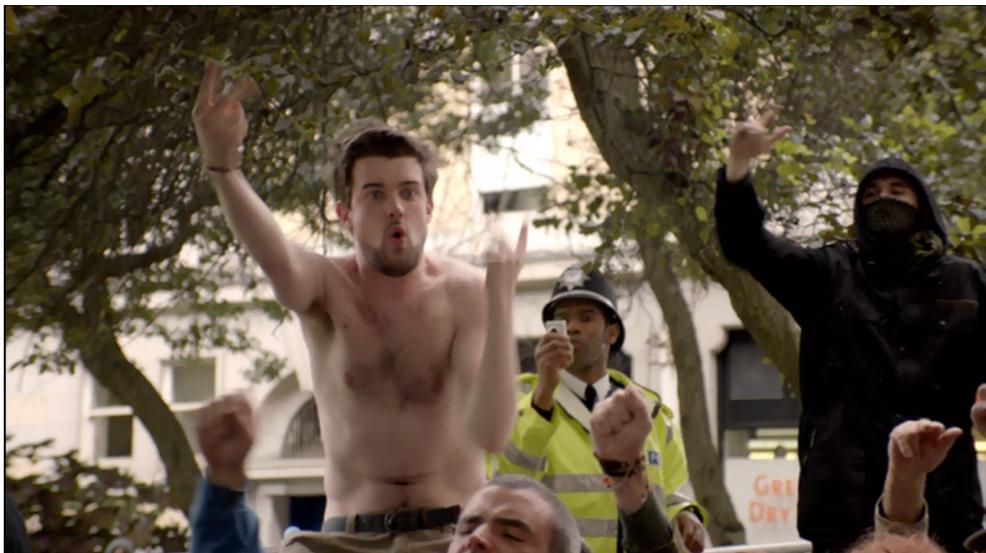


Image 19. Source: *Fresh Meat*, Series One, Episode Five, 0:34:58.

This behaviour gets him arrested and he ends up having to go to court. Ironically, and as he says at the time, he does those rude gestures to policemen, he only 'wanted to watch the rugby'.

¹⁰² Although the subtitles write 'divvo', this is not a registered word in the dictionary. Nonetheless, the word 'divo' can be found in the online Urban Dictionary as the equivalent of a male diva.

So far, it seems we have mainly focussed on the image of the ‘posh’ individual as presented by the object under scrutiny itself, the ‘posh’ person; we have discussed the presented differences between ‘posh’ people and the ‘normals’, the differences in speech, money and education and their apparent superiority, as presented in this comedy drama. Because of this believed advantaged position, we have seen JP and his friends showing their lack of tact and rudeness towards others. We have reflected on how their thoughtless comments have made others uncomfortable, or simply indifferent. However, we have not discussed the ‘normals’ prejudices about ‘posh’ people in an explicit way. The first example of this comes in the last series when Candice, the new house mate, decides to organise a thematic fancy dress party for Howard’s birthday, where guests have to dress up as a famous person whose name begins with H, and JP turns up in this attire:



Image 20. Source: *Fresh Meat*, Series Three, Episode Seven, 0:34:58.

The housemates’ reaction is not great as can be seen from Vod’s face and their conversation:

Josie, Kinsley and Candice: Oh God!

Vod: Oh, what? Come on! (She leaves)

JP: I know, classic, isn’t it? (Very pleased with himself)

Kinsley: Why do posh people *always* dress up as Nazis?

JP: I’m not a Nazi, I’m *the* Nazi. The über-Nazi.

Josie: Why would you want to dress up like a Nazi?

JP: It’s funny! Hitler’s funny, isn’t he? (The others do not seem to agree) What if I zhuzh up the hair and just make it like a normal Nazi?

Candice: The normal Nazi doesn’t begin with a H.

JP: I would be Prince Harry. Are you genuinely saying that this isn’t a brilliant idea?

Kinsley: JP, what if there are some Jewish people here tonight?

JP: Kinsley, Jews have a great sense of humour, they're famous for it. You can definitely make fun of a Jew.

Kinsley: Jewish people can make fun of themselves, are you Jewish?

JP: Do I look Jewish?

Kinsley: Not right now.

(Fresh Meat, Series Three, Episode Seven)

JP's lack of tact is put on show once more, however this time, Kinsley's assumption about 'posh' people are also spoken out loud. He assumes that 'posh people always dress up as Nazis', a generalization he makes after Prince Harry's appearance at a friend's fancy dress party wearing a swastika armband, back in 2005. This could be said to be a generalization made after two known incidents of the same thing, a posh person dressing as a Nazi. JP on the other hand does not seem to understand the others' disapproval of his costume, and despite the housemates comments, he reasserts himself on what a 'brilliant' idea his is. On the other hand, this kind of behaviour would go along the lines, of the already mentioned eccentricity of upper class people, as perceived by those who are not upper class.

Another known characteristic of this social class, which has already come up in this thesis, is linked to the idea of an existing brotherhood amongst those privileged few. In this series, they are presented as a tribe, a tribe where belonging is associated to profound understanding, that only the members of that group share. As we have already seen, when Ralph was going for the presidency, he counted on JP's vote; he took for granted he could count on him, and that is why he is so shock when JP ignores his request. In the conversation that follows, being posh is presented as something deeper than social. JP is talking to his Old Stoic friends, complaining about how hard it is for him to be surrounded by people who do not understand him. It is at this moment when being posh is presented in this way:

Ralph: That is exactly why you need to join the Stowe-Aways.

JP: Yeah, I'm desperate to get back on the Bantersaurus. The three of us, back together. It would be like a Bermuda Triangle of banter.

Toby: Bro, you do realize there's a bit more to being a Stowe-Away than banter?

Ralph: Yeah, it's not just about going to a Chinese restaurant and doing a shit in a pint glass.

Toby: It's partly about that.

Ralph: Well... Look, it's about being a Stowe boy. It's about solidarity. You're posh JP. You'll always be posh. It's in your DNA. It's... it's like an ethnicity, like being black or Hindu or fucking Jedi. *We* are the minority. *We* have to stick together. Posh pride, bro.

JP: Yeah, I've got fucking gooseflesh, yo.

Ralph: Now, before I can anoint you as the newest member of our elite dining circle, I have just one question for you, and that is, would you be willing to smoke a pipe of my pubes?

JP: Yes I would... pube me up boys, pube me up (he says apparently pleased with himself).

(Fresh Meat, Series Three, Episode 1)

They are talking about forming up a gang to muck around. However, Ralph talks about being ‘posh’ as a matter of belonging, of identity, he goes as far as to linking it with genes. He goes even further by putting themselves in a minority, which would involve having to fight for their rights and their place in society, when in reality, and as we have already argued, they are actually amongst a privileged few, whose brotherhood grants them only but advantages. Despite the obvious ironic tone of this conversation, JP does seem to be really moved and he believes the ideal and romanticised image Ralph is presenting him. However, JP does not seem to be getting too many advantages from belonging to this minority, quite the contrary. In this instance JP is asked to smoke public hears. In fact these two, so called friends, take advantage of him constantly and do not treat him well in the slightest. On one occasion, Ralph lies to JP and tells him they are going to throw a private party and they all need to put a specific amount of money, and in the end JP is the only one who finances it all. So contrary to what this conversation may suggest, these individuals belonging to this minority do not seem to look after each other. So their brotherhood does not seem such. By looking at the storylines presented in this comedy series, we can tell that, despite his arrogance and lack of tack, JP is a committed individual who is prepared to do almost anything for those he believes to be his friends, despite their social class. However, it is also true that he seems to have a very idealised and unreal image of the supposed code of chivalry ‘his kind’ are meant to abide by.

Nonetheless, the existence of this “brotherhood”, as we have already seen, seems to be a known fact. It is Howard who comments on this in the series. As stated earlier, he has meticulously studied each housemate on the web, and has created a dossier with all the information he has found free on the internet.¹⁰³ In the last point of each housemate’s dossier, he includes a section on the potential impact the housemates’ web presence could have on their future. When it comes to JP’s dossier, and despite the fact he does not seem to be very good at all at securing his identity, Howard concludes that despite the bad image JP presents of himself on the internet, this will have no impact on

¹⁰³ To see the housemates’ dossiers go to Anex III.

his future career, due to the ‘protective bubble of the ‘old boys’ network’ he exists within (Channel 4, 2015).

It is true that human beings tend to associate themselves with others, especially those they feel there is some connection with. JP is a clear example of this. We can often see him seeking acceptance and company from Old Stoics, giving them a hand when he can. At one point, and as we have already seen, he takes in an Old Stoic and dorm partner, Giles. We know he started his studies in Exeter and then he decided to move to Manchester Medlock University, so JP offers him to say in his room to begin with until he finds a place. We can see JP’s good intentions as he instructs Giles in what the living is like ‘up there’, as they walk around a supermarket. It is clear from his comments that Giles is surprised at how cheap everything is, but we can also see JP’s assumptions and ignorance about the North and its people, amongst other things:

Giles: Exeter was shit, to be honest. There was loads of “rah, rah, rah” type geezers, you know?

JP: Oh, man, tell me about it, I hate those geezers!

Giles: It’s literally impossible to spend more than a 20 in here (expressing surprise).

JP: Now, listen, young Padawan, there are things that I must teach you if you are to succeed in the land of the 2 pound pint.

Giles: The cheat codes for North of Hendon?

JP: You see, the northerner is trusting and loyal, like a gun dog, but when riled, they become mistrustful and easily confused, like a sort of angry hen. Now you must also learn their tongue. “owt” is any, nowt” is none, “ta” is thanks, “mint” is good, “tea” is supper, “dinner” is lunch, a “barn cake” is a sort of bap, a “bap” is a tit, and “tit”... is a tit. Now the northerner is a friendly sort by nature, but will become irascible if they feel taunted, so until you have ascertained their level, it’s very important to pretend to be one of their own.

JP: (He approaches a man getting in his car, speaking in what is described in the DVD as a ‘Manchester accent’) All right, our kid? Will you take us down Withington for a quid? (The man ignores him completely)

Giles: JP, is he a cabbie?

JP: They’re all cabbies in the North Giles, for a price!

(Fresh Meat, Series 2, Episode One)

It is curious, to say the least, to see how the boys seem to agree on how disagreeable it is to find a place full of “rah, rah, rah” type geezers’. It worth mentioning here that the expression ‘rah rah rah type’ refers to ‘public’ school individuals. Thus, this first part of their conversation could be interpreted as a either desire on their part to mix with people other than their own; with those unlike them, or as their inability of recognising themselves in the expression ‘rah, rah, rah’. This last one however, seems a little more unlikely, given that JP has acknowledged in more than one occasion his public education and the way his accent derives from that education.

It is also remarkable JP's tone of voice and intonation, when further on in the conversation he starts talking about the virtues and vicissitudes of the North, he sounds pretty much like David Attenborough in one of his television nature shows, as if he was describing a new unknown world to Giles. We are also given information on how expressions and words differ in meaning from North to South, and the existing differences in character according to JP. Nonetheless, in his attempt at sounding knowledgeable, we also get to see JP's prejudices and real ignorance about these supposed canons of the northern type. This differentiation between North and South which has already been mentioned, reiterates in the image of a considerable difference between northerners and southerners as if they were different peoples, with their different 'dialect' customs and manners.

8.7. Learnin', drinkin' and shaggin's the game!

The title of this section quotes JP's first words on entering the house. He introduces himself to the housemates in this manner: 'Alright? JP's the name. Learnin', drinkin' and shaggin's the game!' (Series One, Episode One). JP's words seem to illustrate pretty accurately what the series will henceforth offer; the life of a bunch of university students who heavily engage in alcohol drinking, drug consumption, and whenever possible, having sex. There are constant references to this, both in the series and on the web page Channel 4 has devoted to this comedy drama.

The first reference to the way sex is considered to be part and parcel of university students' life appears early in the series, in episode one. It is freshers' night and the housemates go out on their first night in Manchester. The girls are chatting while having some drinks, after having discussed the fact that it is almost a tradition to sleep with someone on your first night at uni. Josie sees Kinsley leaving the pub with a very attractive girl and feeling slightly disillusioned, decides to make a move in order to have her freshers' first night sex at university:

Josie: Maybe I might... strap a guy on for the night?

Vod: Do it!

Josie: (Looking towards JP) He looks like a safe pair of hands. You know... Clean. A washer. I mean, I'm not sure that I totally liked him...

Vod: Whoa. Don't wanna get into "liking". First night, starter lay – strictly business.

[...]

Josie: OK, right. Good. Here we go. Can't just wait around for ever like a silver ring... ming (downing a shot). So, time to load up and, er... strap on! (She goes in JP's direction)

(*Fresh Meat*, Series One, Episode One)

This conversation implies, that according to Vod, sex is almost like a ritual which must be enjoyed on the first night at university, one with rules such as avoiding liking the person you sleep with. As Vod puts it, the 'starter lay' should be 'strictly business'. Josie and JP end up having sex on that first night, unaware of the fact that they will be housemates. When they find out about this in the morning, Josie seems to be nonplussed, whereas JP on the other hand seems quite happy and content about it. On this occasion, when they sleep together they do not appear to be drunk, however alcohol and sex will prove to be almost inseparable for many characters in the series, as I will show further on in this thesis.

With regard to female sex, from the beginning there is an implication of negativity when a woman is very sexual. As we have already seen, Josie sleeps with JP on her first night at university, something Kinsley would have gladly done had the girl he went home with let him.¹⁰⁴ However, when he finds out about Josie's first night sex, he reacts in a very judgemental manner towards her, making unpleasant comments, using puns to put her down, and to make her feel bad about it. So much so, that she even goes to JP's room to ask him to please tell Kinsley they did not sleep together, something he obviously will not do, given that the fact that he slept with her on the first night will be a recurring topic he uses to boast about his manhood. It is clear from this situation that sex is meant to be something to be proud of as a male, but something some will feel the right to criticise and label as negative for a woman.

Furthermore, there is an instance in which a woman enjoying having sexual relations is described as being 'slutty', a word which has clear negative associations. It is used by Vod to describe herself, in a situation in which ethnicity issues also take a part. She is out in a pub with Josie and Oregon and she wants to 'snog' Riz, a band member she likes, however, as she is a bit drunk she kisses the wrong guy, and she is rather shocked about it:

Vod: We've got to go. I've snogged the wrong guy.

Josie: What?

¹⁰⁴ She was a very pretty catholic girl who managed to sign him into a Christian group, which he soon forgot about.

Vod: It must have been because they were wearing the same jacket. I'm not racist for Asians. I'm not racist, I'm just slutty!
(*Fresh Meat*, Series One, Episode Two)

The fact that unprompted she starts off saying 'I'm not racist for Asians' implies there is something there, given that if it was not an issue, she would probably not mention it at all. In fact, she says it again when she asks Howard to pretend he is her boyfriend to try and keep Mark, the Asian drummer, away from her, as she excuses herself again by saying: 'I was drunk, it was dark. I'm not racist, I just put my hand down the wrong trousers' (Series One, Episode Two). She clearly has a problem with Asian boys and she feels the need to excuse herself for having kissed him unintentionally, so she explains alcohol and darkness are to blame, not her. She feels the urge to justify and 'excuse' herself for what she has done, so she blames it on alcohol and the fact that she is slutty. The curious thing here is the fact that the only time racism is featured in the series, it comes from the hand of a mixed race character herself. Thus, this individual, who would be labelled as a minority by society, is the one being prejudiced against other minorities.

However, Vod is not the only mixed race individual who appears in the series. Heather, Kinsley's girlfriend, also presents interracial physical features. In fact, the actress who plays this character is Sophie Wu: her surname indicates her father is probably Chinese.

Going back to the topic of sex, it seems to be a recurring theme in the series, and most characters seem to engage in it as much as they can. If we were to go through the housemates' sex life featured throughout the series the result is the following:

- JP sleeps with Josie, Vod's mum and Sam (a girl he ends up being obsessed with).
- Josie sleeps with JP and Kinsley while having a boyfriend and being engaged, and again afterwards.
- Vod sleeps with a singer, the plumber who repairs the house loo and Javier, the Mexican man she marries and then divorces shortly afterwards.
- Kinsley has sex with Ruth, a girl he meets in the short period he is doing drama for, and hours after with Josie on the day he loses his virginity. Afterwards he starts having sex and going out with Heather (in this order) while he also sleeps with Josie.

- Oregon has a sexual relation with her English professor Mr. Shales, his son (unaware at first of his relation to her former lover), and an Ukrainian boy who ends up being deported with a bleeding penis, as a consequence of their unculminated sexual intercourse.
- Howard sleeps with Sabine and Candice.

This list exemplifies the active sexual life these characters seem to have, providing further example of the fact that, the images presented in the comedies distance themselves from that of the English individual who prefers a cup of tea to sex (Duffy, 2001).

As I have already mentioned, Kinsley got to university still a virgin, something which seems inconceivable to the rest. In fact, when Josie finds out, she tells Vod and Oregon straight away, ignoring Kinsley's request to keep quiet about it, and they go to his room straight away, giving him words of commiseration and encouragement, as if referring to some strange 'disorder' that they pretend to empathise with (Series One, Episode Four).

As we can see sex seems to be very present in the life of these university students. Sexuality on the other hand tends to be mainly heterosexual; we do not get to see any other expressions of sexuality in the series, although there are hints of the fact that Vod is probably bisexual, and we know Giles is homosexual, something that causes JP some distress to the point he even starts avoiding him. However, this is not really featured in the series.

Looking on the students' phones, accessible in the Channer Four webpage, we can see further references to this topic. Within the section 'Counselling', students have different help pages and one of them is the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) advice page. Although if we click on it, it starts off in a comic tone with a video of the series' university counsellor, who mixes comic comments with more serious ones, it turns more serious further on. The opening paragraph goes as follows:

University is a time of self-discovery, self-expression and, for the serial masturbators amongst you, self-abuse. For some, university means a chance to finally be open about their sexuality. It can be a time of sexual awakening, a chance to throw off your "pussyman" or "meat magnet" reputation from back home and finally accept your real sexuality. (Channel 4, 2015)¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Retrieved from: <http://freshmeatunlocked.channel4.com/#!jp/medlock/counselling/lgbt>.

It is at this point, that readers are referred to several existing useful links for anybody who may be interested. The most remarkable one being the following: <http://www.gaybydegree.org.uk/>, where you can ask about how gay-friendly or not any given university is, and readers get to know about their LGBT societies and how well or not the work (Channel 4, 2015).

Going back to the already mentioned link between sex and drugs, it is relevant to mention here the information offered on this topic on Channel 4's *Fresh Meat* web page, where the link between students and alcohol is made explicit, at the time the relation between alcohol and sex is implied. On accessing any of the housemate's telephones, if we go on to the counselling section,¹⁰⁶ there is a document called 'ALCOHOL: KNOW YOUR LIMITS'. As I have already mentioned, although following with the comic impetus, these pages also offer real and authentic advice to anybody in search of help. The opening paragraph goes as follows:

It's well established that students and booze go together like students and 9p noodles or misuse of the word "literally", but how much is too much? Most people love to down a few, have a dance and unwittingly **bed their housemates**. (Channel 4, 2015)¹⁰⁷

As we can see throughout the series, going out involves getting 'shit-faced' with alcohol or drugs or both. There is also a tendency, on the part of some characters, but specially Josie and her friend Heather, to really dress up and wear very revealing items of clothing, complying with very specific constructions of women. Added to this, Josie seeks being drunk before having sex. Even when she finally starts going with Kingsley, she is not keen on the idea of being intimate with him until she is properly inebriated. In relation to this idea of drunken sex, there is a very revealing anecdote. The housemates go out with Sabine, the Danish woman who rents a room in the house for a short period of time. They are all sitting round a table having some drinks, and Vod asks Sabine what kind of alcohol she is consuming:

Vod: So, what's that, rum and Coke? (Addressing Sabine)

Sabine: No, this is Coke. Well, it's Diet Coke.

¹⁰⁶ To access this section it is necessary to access any phone and follow this path: Medlock University; Helpful advice from you student counsellor. In here together with a section on alcohol, readers are offered information on: bereavement, bullying, budgeting, careers, drugs, friendship, health, LGBT, living away from home, mental health, online privacy, pregnancy and contraception and sexual health.

¹⁰⁷ Retrieved from: <http://freshmeatunlocked.channel4.com/#!oregon/counselling/alcohol>. When clicking on the bold text on the web page, the reader gets taken to the following page, where some advice is given in the event this took place: <http://www.studentbeans.com/mag/en/campus/when-student-housemate-romance-goes-bad>.

Vod: What's that about?
Sabine: What do you mean?
Vod: Why aren't you drinking?
Sabine: I don't really drink.
Vod: How does that work?
Sabine: What do you mean?
Vod: What do you do if you're feeling happy or sad or nervous or bored?
Sabine: I don't understand the question.
Josie: How do you tell people what you really think of them?
Sabine: I just tell them.
Oregon: OK, that's mental.
Kinsley: So, how do you get off with someone?
Sabine: We just go for a coffee.
Kinsley: Yeah, but, how do you have sex with them?
Sabine: We just take our clothes off.
Josie: Without being drunk?
Sabine: Yeah.
Vod: But, you're stoned, yeah?
Sabine: No, it's perfectly natural.

(*Fresh Meat*, Series 2, Episode Two)

This conversation leaves the housemates in a puzzled and shocked state as can be seen in the following image:



Image 20. Source: *Fresh Meat*, Series 2, Episode Two, 46:50.

This is a image of a group of young adults who cannot understand how anybody would choose to go out and not drink alcohol with the objective of being in a considerable state of inebriation. Thus, complying with the image of the English individual who enjoys going to the pub and drinking, although in this case, this alcohol consumption is presented as a necessity for promiscuity.

However, and as the conversation reveals, sex is not the unavoidable end of being drunk or stoned, just a possibility. Thus, drugs and alcohol can be, and are enjoyed at anytime, for many different purposes. In fact, in the first episode of the first series, after they all come back to the house to have some sleep before their first day at university, Vod reveals some of the intoxicating substances she uses, and what she takes them for. Already in bed, Oregon is awoken by Vod, who had forgotten the English teacher had asked them to write a statement about why they wanted to take English, and asks Oregon for hers:

Oregon: (Reluctant) OK. Oh, it's... it's just it's meant to be a personal statement, about, er, you know, what you think of the syllabus and, um...

Vod: I know, it's just... it's late. If I had a wrap of speed and a little bag of weed and some proper coffee and some Pro Plus and a bottle of Night Nurse and some mushrooms and some books, I could bang out a statement in half an hour and it would be brilliant, but I don't.

Oregon: Well, I might have some Strepsils somewhere.

Vod: Yeah, but, I'm still a bit pissed and ... I can't think of why I want to do English right now. I thought I should probably put something about books. This isn't a big deal for you is it?

Oregon: What? No, pff. No, it's not like I spent any time on it or anything. Yeah, I just whacked it out watching telly. I haven't even read it back. I mean, why read something if you've written it?

Vod: Can I just see it... mate?

(Fresh Meat, Series One, Episode One)

Vod reveals her dependency on drugs for anything here, we already know she believes they are necessary when you are happy, sad, bored, when you want to tell someone what you really think of them, when you want to have sex, and now we learn she also needs them to do intellectual work. She explains how she feels she needs a combination of drugs, a caffeine kick and some paracetamol and antihistamine in order to write a great statement.

In fact, all throughout the series drug consumption seems to be a habit some of the housemates share, namely JP, Oregon and Vod. Although JP and Oregon are shown in the series as having enough money to be able to afford this, Vod on the other hand is always in debt with her housemates and she ends up having to take a job cleaning a hotel in order to be able to cope financially.

This series presents us with a group of young adults who are eager to explore and enjoy their sexuality and whose drinking and drug consumption habits seem to exceed the limits of the daily recommended amount. As we have seen Vod was taken to hospital for an overdose, Josie's booz tracker reveals she consumes more than ten times

the recommended amount of alcohol per week, and Oregon and JP also indulge in considerable amounts of alcohol and drugs. This image of the university student who drinks in excess is clearly inspired in reality. Several studies show that alcohol consumption is a concern in contemporary Britain (Webb, Ashton, Kelly & Kamali, 1997; Gill, 2002; Parker, Williams & Aldridge, 2002). The media also presents this as an existing problem in contemporary students university life, and we can easily find plenty of examples, the Daily Mail even ‘informs’ us of the most popular university for drug consumption, claiming that eight out of ten students at Leeds University admit to having at least tried illicit substances (Miller, 2013). The Guardian adverts the way in which, as Vod seems to do, students take drugs, not to get high, but to get grades (Cadwalladr, 2015).

8.8. University types: a brief reflection

Mention here that Vod is Afro-English, her real mum is from Uganda, and her dad English, and she the real person Zawe Ashton first appeared on screen in the Desmonds. This television comedy drama has presented us with a group of university students who are coming to terms with adulthood, the discovery and further exploration of their own sexuality and others’, and the vicissitudes of student life. Mixed with these we find different individuals with very similar goals and who care for each other despite the fact they may not overtly express so, and who not only share a house, but also at times sexual partners.

These characters are close to each other in many ways, but at the same time they come from very different socio-economic and geographical backgrounds. It is also true that not all the main characters are English, despite the fact that the series is set in England, we find that Howard and Josie are Scottish and Welsh respectively, although the latter is called a Welsh Geordie at one point. We have seen how in their construct of their identity, some issues related to social class, sexuality, and drugs were a shared concern, whereas race does not really feature in the series as a major issue. Although there are some interracial characters in the series, race does not seem to be even in students’ minds, except when Vod accidentally kisses an Asian boy and she overtly expresses her disgust. It is also true that these characters do not seem to have many ethnic differences between them, and there are no real distinctions made between them,

with regards to habits, customs, likes and dislikes, despite the obvious existing differences between human beings.

CHAPTER 9. CONCLUSION. DIVERSITY? THAT AIN'T DIVERSE. THEY IS ALL THE SAME.

In this final chapter I will reflect on the versions of Englishnesses we have come across throughout this thesis. It was made clear from early on that to identify Englishness was an unrealistic task and thus, I have widened my range of study to Englishnesses. In doing so, I concluded with the fact that I would need to look into the 'real' and the 'imagined', which I have. The real being the geographical limits of England, its educational system, its people, its language, etc. The imagined has come from the hand of comedy and its producers, directors and actors; they have re-created versions of Englishnesses, within the educational context, which after considering comedy and how it works, have in many ways portrayed a piece of 'reality', thus shedding some light on the object/(s) of study. It is a reality in so far as the series analysed have been aired and watched by the English public, however, we have dealt with fictional material, albeit inspired and based on reality.

In this section, I will pay special attention to the different types we have come across in the different comedies, in relation to the 'ideal' Englishnesses described by academics. I say 'ideal', because as I explained earlier, often, when offering a representation of Englishness, many authors seemed to write about myths, or about a representation of Englishness based in the past, which more often than not ended being an 'ideal' version of Englishness, not because it was presented as something perfect or idyllic, but as something as good as the imagination can create, and that therefore does not exist, at least not the way our mind imagines it.

When I discussed the value of comedy in the study on English identity, I argued the case for how comedy works, how for something to be funny it needs to be recognised, albeit as an exaggeration of a possible reality. Jokes and gags allow for the analysis of assumptions and beliefs that have been unearthed through the study of the comedies dealt with here. I was mainly interested in the gags, given that it is at these moments that spectators are more relaxed, enjoying or laughing at a presented 'reality' which in other circumstances would more likely be totally unacceptable. I therefore believe comedy has proven an excellent source of information, as well as a very entertaining one.

To begin with, we looked at academic works and the Englishnesses offered there. We saw how depending on the aspect, date, figure, or feature we *chose* to focus

on, we could find different re-presentations of Englishnesses. However, and for the purpose of this thesis I focused on Englishnesses which referred to its people, given that it is precisely the English as a society which are re-presented in television comedies.

I focused on comedies within the educational system in order to, first limit this study, and secondly, in an attempt at focussing on one of the most relevant and determining moments in the formation of the individual and her/his personality. I believe, in England, it is education that plays a very important role in shaping and determining the self.

The comedies have shown an educational context which is inexorably linked to social class, and thus to individuals' identities. We saw, how for some, class distinction as something defining of the English (Disraeli, 1998; Langford, 2001; Russell, 2004; Mount, 2004; Holder, 2005). However, it is also true that the representation and interpretation of social classes in Britain is hardly a neat generally agreed on subject. Academics have discussed this issue widely and remarked on the difficulty of arriving to a clear appropriate definition and delimitation of the different social classes in the United Kingdom (Cannadine, 2000 and Marshall, Rose, Newby & Vogler, 1993). In fact many have argued for the seeming decadence of class distinctions in Britain, brought about by a tendency not to use expressions which overtly refer to social classes (Bennett, et al., 2009; Fairclough, 2003; Steinberg & Johnson, 2004). In some cases some have even referred to the concept of class as 'obsolete' in Britain (Marshall, Rose, Newby & Vogler, 1993). Owen presented us with a vision of Englishness where an attempt at not talking about social classes, and stating there are no social classes, had, according to him, reinforced a system of meritocracy, which emphasised individualism and personal ambition. Owen, saw this as the instigating force that moves English society in general to the demonization of the working classes through the image of the chav.

Moreover, the media also presents contradicting images, when it comes to dealing with social classes in England. On the one hand, we can find television programmes such as the already mentioned, *Grayson Perry: All in the Best Possible Taste*, where Perry explores the taste of the three social classes, namely, working, middle and upper classes (Crombie, 2012), portraying a story of social mobility on six tapestries exhibited in the Victoria Miro Gallery in London. On this same topic, journalist and author Poly Toynbee explores the possibility of moving up through British social classes in the radio programme *Class Ceiling*, aired in BBC Radio 4, in

September 2011. Toynbee visits local businesses and schools interviewing people and talking about their life experiences. In this two-episode programme she ends up concluding that it is actually not that easy to move up the social ladder. It is clear in this programme that she considers education to be of paramount importance for this mobility, given that the whole of episode one is devoted to schools and how they may or not help the individual to move up the social ladder. Toynbee concluded by saying that society and education are organised in such a way, that social mobility in England is almost impossible.

Not long afterwards, in April 2013, the BBC came up with the ‘Great British Class Calculator’¹⁰⁸, a test anybody can take in order to find out his/her social class. According to this test, individuals can be put in either of the following seven categories: elite, established middle class, technical middle class, new affluent workers, traditional working class, emergent service workers and precariat. These categories seem to discredit the aforementioned tripartite class distinction.

Nonetheless, the comedies studied here present us with a society clearly divided in social classes, which seems to better fit the already mentioned tripartite division. However, the categories or distinctions made between the different social classes depended on the point of view. As we saw, in *Bromwell High*, there is no explicit mention about the middle classes, however, we knew the girls, Natella, Keisha and Latrina, were working class. It was only when Iqbal, the Headmaster, founded the ‘posh’ school, that we were presented with a clear comparison between working and upper-class individuals and their education. However, if one was to look up in the dictionary at the description of working class, and the individual’s job, we could probably say that the teachers at Bromwell High would be labelled as middle class, nonetheless, there is no explicit mention of this in the series.

When looking at *The Inbetweeners*, a group of middle-class boys who lived in the suburbs, we could see the comparison between themselves and what they perceived as the ‘rough’ working-class individuals they encounter. On the other hand, Will, who presents himself as different to the rest, and on occasions is perceived as such, had been privately educated, which he explains was paid by his very financially able father, and

¹⁰⁸ Retrieved from: <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-22000973>. This survey was created according to some research carried out by Fiona Devine from the University of Manchester and Mike Savage from the London School of Economics. This research, and consequently the ‘Class Calculator’ too, measured class according to the different kind of ‘capitals’ individuals have, whether it be economic, cultural or in relation to social resources.

which supposedly granted him better quality education. Although he was now enjoying and sharing the same lifestyle and choices as the rest of the boys, he believed his education made him different and in fact superior, but definitely better prepared.

If we consider the comedy series *Fresh Meat*, JP and his friends only distinguished two social classes, whatever they were, and the rest, who they described as ‘normals’, ‘divvos’, ‘chavs’ or ‘muggles’. Although they never referred to themselves as upper class, we know they were, given that they went to a very expensive independent school, Stowe. Besides, they fit the characteristics that Jennings (1998) attributes to the upper classes.

Therefore, and despite the fact that these comedies have offered farfetched and outrageous images of the English, they have clearly drawn on issues which are meaningful and charged with social implications for the understanding of the English and their Englishnesses. We have been presented with a society which, if not riddled by social class prejudices, understands all the nuances exposed in the comedies associated to class differences, and the different education standards provided by the various schools, making life easier for those who come from a more advantaged background (Reay & Ball, 1997; Reay, Davies, David, & Ball, 2001). As the comedies have helped to uncover, this is the reality that has informed the comedies in their search for the farfetched, exaggerated funny situation.

In this final section I will look at how those versions of Englishnesses offered by the academic writings studied in this thesis, which were given by those who *officially* set out to define them, compare, fulfil or differ from those offered in the comedies studied here. I say ‘officially’ because their title and/or content explicitly aim at studying the English.

Going back to the idea of Englishnesses, in order to carry out this final analysis, rather than listing all the characteristics and descriptions already discusses in the thesis, I will directly talk about the types found in the comedies in order to see how they fit or not with the already mentioned ‘official’ versions. First of all I will focus on the different English identities offered by the different types, to then finish by reflecting on how these types are dealt with and perceived by others.

Despite the fact that I have focused on the educational environment, further research in other areas of life would help to better define Englishnesses widening the range of study to comedies centred on the English at work, on holidays, working abroad, their family life, health care, politics, etc. As we saw at the beginning of this

thesis, comedy is a very important part of the English world and thus, it is possible to find contemporary English comedies set in almost all spheres of life.

9.1. Ad(d)Opted Identities

As we mentioned earlier in this thesis, the process of formation of an individual's identity is a process of negotiation between what individuals are categorised as, what they choose to identify with, and what they present themselves to the world as. Thus, some personal choice is involved, which implies a selection of aspects the individual wants to identify with, a choice which can be more or less conscious, but which is nonetheless a choice. The characters portrayed in the comedies have shown how some individuals chose to *adopt* certain *identities*, which results in what I refer to as *add opted identities*, which is the addition of new Englishnesses for individuals to identify with or against, in what proves to be the already mentioned never ended construction and negotiation of identity (S. Hall, 1996; Duffy, 2001; Storey, 2010b). By opting or choosing to identify with one identity or the other, individuals define themselves via a process of inclusion and exclusion with regard to others, adopting a specific attitude and image of themselves, which is consequently performed.

Although most of the characteristics discussed in the thesis have to do with personality traits and habits, in the few occasions the physical aspect appeared, it is worth mentioning that the English tend to be re-presented with the physique of the white Anglo-Saxon individual, as found in some of the already mentioned academic works (Rutherford, 1997 and Duffy, 2001). However, despite the fact that other academics did not explicitly refer to physique, I would say that one is to assume we are not talking about individuals from Afro-Caribbean or Asian backgrounds, given that, as we have seen these representations of Englishnesses are rather nostalgic and traditional. On more than one occasion, the characteristics presented as representative of the English can be traced back to Victorian times, in relation to the great people who ruled the British Empire.

Going back to the comedies and the types we found there, *Bromwell High* presented us with the inner comprehensive school types where we found the clever, articulate and hard-working Asian child, Natella; the Chav like type obsessed about her looks, her nails, and having babies, Latrina, who we compared with Vicky Pollard; and the aggressive illiterate, drug dealing mischievous child, Keisha, who just so happens to

be black. All these extreme stereotypes, which as we have seen, are not to be found merely in this television show, are in fact repeated throughout the media. Vicky Pollard also goes to a similar kind of school to the girls in Bromwell High and her group of friends is also ethnically diverse.

In relation to the adoption of identities, it is worth remembering here how Keisha chose to portray herself as a Muslim at a time, without really having much knowledge about this faith, and Vicky chose to speak, what was described as ‘Jamaican’ English, thus identifying herself with the ‘English Caribbean’ individual, whereas her black boyfriend spoke in perfect RP, which implied he chose to speak as a white ‘English’. However, in this seemingly contradiction there is a reality to be mentioned, and that is, that both ‘Jamaican English’ and RP English are to be found within the ‘real’ limits of England and thus must be taken into account when considering Englishnesses.

All these types are set within a poor catchment area, which ‘coincidentally’ happens to have a very ethnically diverse staff and an even more diverse students’ population. An image, that although farfetched, resembles in many ways that offered by the already mentioned documentaries *Educating Yorkshire*, *Educating Essex* and *Educating the East End*.¹⁰⁹ We can see with these examples how ‘reality’¹¹⁰ is actually considerably close to what is offered by the media as fiction in the comedies studied here. Both, these ‘real’ and fictional representations of schools in England feed and help to maintain this image of the ethnically diverse, poor catchment area underperforming school.

Within this context, and bearing in mind we are talking about fictional characters, each of our types could be said to present different kinds of Englishnesses. By looking at the personality traits, habits and manners described in the theory studied in relation to Englishness(es), these working class individuals found in *Bromwell High* and *Little Britain* can be described as three main types. On the one hand, we find Natella, of Asian origins, speaks very eloquently, and her parents run a corner shop, fulfilling the stereotype of the Asian corner shop owner. Her Englishness comes from the way in which she feels special, superior and self-sufficient (Jones, 2003 and

¹⁰⁹ Out of the three documentaries, the school where we find less ethnic diversity amongst students is *Educating Essex*.

¹¹⁰ When I say ‘reality’ I am talking about non-fiction, something which is meant to be a relatively accurate representation of society, which is what documentaries supposedly aim to do. However, I am aware of the fact that any presentation can also be a careful selection of images which would only offer a partial image of a reality.

Langford, 2001). She proves to be very polite and shows very civilised manners (Scruton, 2000; Duffy, 2001; Langford, 2001), she is also very self-disciplined, sturdy and pragmatic (Langford, 2001).

A further type is presented in the character of Keisha, the potential criminal, aggressive, illiterate black child with attention deficit disorder, whose dysfunctional family sells drugs, and who speaks English in a very specific manner. She can also be said to bear some English characteristics. Being the bully of the school, she proves not to be touchy-feely (Duffy, 2001 and Langford, 2001), and although her manners are not very civilised, she is clearly very practical, courageous, aggressive, sturdy, slightly barbarous and is prone to swear (Langford, 2001). Related to this representation of the black aggressive child, we find two characters in *Teachers* who would fit this image, Brandon, a black student who bullied Kurt, one of the teachers, and Kayla, Liz's daughter

The last type presented in the series, within this same educational context, comes from the hand of Latrina and Vicky Pollard, both fitting the description of the English rose (Duffy, 2001), blonde and pale skin.¹¹¹ Both these characters, who represent the image of the female 'chav', show an active attitude towards having babies, without developing any kind of nurturing feeling. Thus, we can perhaps say that they are not touchy-feely characters (Duffy, 2001 and Langford, 2001), and although their manners leave much to be desired, especially Vicky's, they enjoy alcohol consumption (Duffy, 2001 and Langford, 2001) and swearing (Langford, 2001).

The Inbetweeners presented us with a different type of state maintained institution, Rudge Park, which is portrayed as an adequate environment for learning, by everyone except Will. Although there exists some ethnic diversity amongst the students, ethnicity is not really featured in the series, and all the main characters seem to be very fair skinned. Ethnicity does not feature in any way in the series, other than to mark Patrice's awkwardness, the French exchange, and from the hand of the black dealer, who as we saw, was the only one to make an issue of his ethnicity. Moreover, although Simon's beloved Carli's surname is D'Amato, of Italian origin, this is something which is never mentioned or pointed out in the series. The main characters Simon, Jay and Neil, although with very different personalities, have many things in common, none of them are touchy-feely (Duffy, 2001 and Langford), they are very reserved, they enjoy

¹¹¹ Bearing in mind that Vicky Pollard is a man dressed as a woman.

pubs, drinking and swearing (Langford, 2001) and they are very prone to having sex, and very proactive about it, even if they do not always get the opportunity to fulfil their sexual expectations. On the other hand, Will, who shares most of the aforementioned characteristics, shows a certain air of superiority with relation to his colleagues (Jones, 2003 and Langford, 2001).

In *Teachers*, we seem to go back to the comprehensive school, with much more ethnic diversity, where education standards seem to drop in relation to Rudge Park. In this case both the staff and the student population seem to present a considerably ethnically diverse environment, although as we saw, when it comes to dealing with this diversity, situations and conversations turn awkward and uncomfortable. Together with this, ethnic stereotypes are presented and often uncontested. Revealing a group of individuals who, on the one hand do not seem to think of ethnicity as anything of any significance when it comes to talk about people, but who, on the other hand, do not feel at ease when it has to be openly discussed.

In this series we were presented with a bunch of teachers who spend a lot of their free time in the pub, in fact, going to the pub after work seems to be their daily routine, where the dutifully share some drinks (Duffy, 2001 and Langford, 2001). In more than one occasion the main objective seems to be to get drunk, as it seemed to be case at the Christmas party, where another of the objectives seemed to be to find someone to have sex with, something which would defy the definitions of the 'ideal' Englishness described by the academics.

In *Teachers* we also found the image of the not terribly bright 'typical' PE teacher (as it was the case in *Bromwell High*), who on top of that is northern, with a 'boring' northern accent. We are presented with the black teacher and secretary who act and behave as anybody else and who, like others, seem to enjoy Caribbean cuisine. Teachers, regardless their ethnicity, are presented as English, proving that, as the title of this last section reads, 'they ain't diverse, they is all the same'.

Finally in *Fresh Meat* we find the young adult English individuals, who, despite coming from very different backgrounds, seem to have many things in common, such as their interest in sex, drugs, and getting a degree. Nonetheless, social class is overtly dealt with in the series, where more financially able individuals, namely JP and his friends, are presented as supposedly having received a better education at school, something which we are 'told' will provide them with more opportunities in life. However, they do not always live up to expectations.

These series present us with the different types. The ‘posh’ JP and his ‘brothers’, who undoubtedly feel superior to the rest (Langford, 2001), who enjoy alcohol and drugs, who are eccentric, hypocritical (Langford, 2001 and Jennings, 1998), the latter would be a characteristic which defines JP’s friends, not JP). These boys enjoy sports, and more specifically rowing and cricket (Colls, 2002; Norridge, 2008; Langford, 2001). It is worth mentioning here that these sports, together with others such as horse riding, rugby and hockey, are sports usually associated with upper class individuals.

The ‘cool’ Vod coming from a very disadvantaged background, clearly working class, from Afro-Caribbean origins, and as we have seen most probably queer. From the beginning she proves not to be a good student, and from her video CV, shown in the Channel 4 web page, we can tell she did not get really good results in her A levels, so we do not really know how she entered, given that as we have seen Manchester Medlock is supposed to be a good university, something which implies that in order to enter you need good A levels results. Despite her initial poor efforts at working to get her degree, in the end she manages to turn herself around and becomes a more serious student. Although she keeps consuming drugs, by the end she picks up a job as a hotel cleaner in order to be able to finance her studies and her style of life. She is defined by her honesty, and her sedateness (Langford, 2001), however, it is not clear whether the latter is a consequence of the drugs she consumes.

This series also presents us with Oregon, the English-rose looking girl from an upper-middle class background, is characterised by her dedication and passion towards the degree she is studying and her self-discipline (Langford, 2001). The middle of the ground hipster ‘wanna be’ Kinsley who seems to have found his ‘true’ identity at university, where he seems to drop some of his more traditional views on life. He can be described as an honest and self-disciplined student (Langford, 2001).

All of the above mentioned characters share their love of pubs, drinking alcohol (Langford, 2001 and Duffy, 2001) and pulling, as do Josie, the Welsh house mate, and Howard, the Scottish boy. They are all presented as reserved individuals and slightly unsociable, especially towards Sabine, the Dutch student. Added to this, is the way in which none of the housemates seems to be the least worried about some typically English characteristics such house keeping (Langford, 2001), or gardening (Duffy, 2001; Proud, 1994; Fox, 2004; McKay, 2013).

Because these young adults seem to be at an age where they are (re)-defining their sexuality, we also see their reactions to sex and the others’ sexuality, which, as it

was the case with race, although in a considerably lesser degree, is not always treated with complete naturalness. On the one hand, when JP found out his friend was gay he did not really know how to react and he distanced himself from Giles. On the other hand, in relation to Vod, we can infer she is queer, but we never get any explicit or clear information about it, always leaving room to different interpretations. Vod's sexuality is always presented in a rather ambiguous way.

All in all, these different far-fetched types and the way they are presented and dealt with by others reveal some inherent assumptions or fears about the English and their Englishness(es), which prove how England's demographic change has shaped English identity, and those who must be included within this category, which is what will occupy me in the following section.

9.2. (Ex)/(S)treame (of) Consciousness

As has already been mentioned in this thesis there exist many definitions of Englishness, which individuals may identify with either totally or partially, in what I call a *stream of consciousness*. An individual's identity may present itself in the flow of his life, her actions, etc., some aspects are consciously constructed and negotiated, whereas others are acquired without the individual necessarily making a conscious effort to do so.

On the other hand, we have seen how, at times, characters seem to struggle with the overt definition of this identity, turning in what I call *extreme consciousness*, which has presented itself throughout the comedies in three different ways. One of these examples of *extreme consciousness* can be seen in the way certain stereotypes are presented. As we have already mentioned, comedy feeds on the exaggeration and outrageous nature of images, circumstances or events, which are inspired in everyday life. These cases in which stereotypes are taken to the extreme come from the hand of Natella, Keisha, Latrina and Vicky Pollard, where these characters are presented as exaggerated stereotypes, despite the fact that the characters may be aware of this or not.

Another example of extreme consciousness appears in the series *The Inbetweeners*, when they are trying to buy some weed at a concert. Although the boys approach the dealer just because they see him 'deal', he shows his extreme awareness about what he assumes the boys will be thinking about him. The funny thing is that the

boys had not even thought about it and were a little paralysed and puzzled by the dealer's *extreme consciousness*.

The last case where we can find *extreme consciousness* comes from the hand of characters who find themselves in situations where it seems, using the correct terms in the correct manner and in the appropriate moment proves to be of paramount importance, so as not to be politically incorrect or rude. This has happened when individuals had to face issues related with non-heteronormative sexuality and with race and ethnicity. In relation to sexuality, we saw how the boys in *Teachers* struggled to deal with JP's sexuality. When they found out he was gay they did not know how to react, at first they were afraid and they rejected him a little, to latter go back to normal. Pretty similar is what JP in *Fresh Meat* experiences when he finds out his friend is gay.

In relation to *extreme consciousness* and ethnicity, the clearest example of this according to this study, comes from the hand of Penny in *Teachers*, who seems to constantly struggle for the correct behaviour and words, and who, to her 'torture', does not seem to be able to strike the right balance. Consequently, her colleagues constantly pick on her as a racist, whether they are serious about it or not is besides the point, given that Penny really felt under pressure and kept making failed efforts to escape the image of a racist individual. In doing so, she was trying to run away from an *ex-stream of consciousness* associated to a less ethnically diverse and less tolerant Englishness from the past.

Or is it? Perhaps this lack of tolerance is in fact associated with more traditional and intolerant versions of Englishness, but looking into the media, it is not necessarily the case that these are relegated to the past. It is not hard to find articles dealing with some parts of society's lack of tolerance and prejudiced attitudes.¹¹² Together with these, there are plenty of examples in the press about the dangers of the ethnic-minority ghettos forming around Britain.

British history reveals that many waves of immigrants have arrived on British soil, and have conquered, settled and mingled with its people, creating the England of today. Looking at a BBC page on the history of Immigration in Britain,¹¹³ we can see

¹¹² Just to give an example The Guardian published two articles in 2013 under the following headlines: 'What's the truth behind white flight? Data suggests many white people just can't stomach the diversity of cities, but it's more complicated than that' and "'Post-racial' Britain and what lies beneath the surface. Optimism about our multicultural society is a good thing, but a now BBC investigation has uncovered the subterranean racism of some private landlords' (Muir, 2013 October 13 and December 12).

¹¹³ Retrieved from:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/static/in_depth/uk/2002/race/short_history_of_immigration.stm.

how, according to Roman records, Celtic and Pict tribes populated Britain, when the Romans arrived. The Romans colonised England and brought with them some black legionnaires, who came from the African lands of the empire. When the Romans withdrew from British soil by the fifth century, about four hundred years after, Jutes, Angles and Saxons colonised the South of Britain, together with the Vikings. In 1066 the Normans invaded the UK, a date which is often held as the beginning of England. With the first Norman King, William the Conqueror, the English king who never spoke English, many Jews were invited to go to England to promote and develop commerce, trade and finance. During the middle ages, some black faces could be seen in Britain, but they were often related to entertainment, and they were usually musicians linked to royal entourages.

However, when the Empire began to expand and develop, often, black people were brought to Britain to be shown to the public as a spectacle similar to the one expected in a zoo. However, considering the fact that black people had been seen in Britain since many centuries before, this seems awkward. A possible explanation for this might be related to the kinds of expectations that the British people had about black people, which had been created by the written reports some brought with them from their journeys to Africa, where adventurers wrote about infra human black people, with impossible shapes and forms (with no heads, or no noses, with eyes and mouths in their breasts, etc.) and who eat each other (Fryer, 1984).

As we can see, throughout history, England has been a land where different peoples have lived together, mingled and learnt from each other. If we think about the English language, we can date its birth to the fifth century when we find the first written texts in English (Linsell, 2000). It seems it was around the eighteenth century that the English began to think of themselves as a race, who were united by the nobility and greatness being in control of the Great British Empire conferred them (Kumar, 2003). Up to that point several waves of immigrants had shared similar skin colour and physical characteristics. However, recent immigration waves, which seem to present more 'visual' differences, do not tend to be considered as English. This implies the amalgam of peoples and cultures, which have in more recent history converged on British soil, are somehow being forgotten or excluded. This formation of English identity involves a process of conscious or unconscious amnesia (Mandler, 2006).

An example of how this is so, is not only visible in the comedies, where I would say there is not a proportional representation of the ethnic diversity of the people living

in England, but also in real contemporary England. In fact in the last Census in Britain, when dealing with ethnicity, individuals were divided between white British and others, where whiteness seemed to be the point of reference, in a white ethnocentric manner. Other ethnic minorities were identified such as White and Black Caribbean, White and Asian, White and African and many other minorities. Nonetheless, in London only around 45% of the population identify themselves as White British, against the other ethnic ‘minorities’, being white British still the higher proportion. However, if we were to generalise and talk about white and black people (including all non-white citizens), as it was the case after World War II, we might probably talk about White English as the ethnic minority in London, as it would be the case in the school presented in *Bromwell High*. This is an undeniable reality in some areas in Britain, where we can find some of the already mentioned ‘ghettos’.

Therefore, this conscious or unconscious amnesia presented in the series about the past and present of the British Isles, reveals certain reluctance or awkwardness towards ‘modernising’ Englishness. In the series studied here, when issues of race or ethnicity came up, we either found some stereotypical farfetched images of some off-the-wall characters, or we were presented with the inadequacy of existing language to deal with these issues, or the clumsiness of some individuals who struggled for political correctness. Whichever the case, race and ethnicity still seem to be presented as an ‘issue’ in the everyday life of the English people, as seen in the comedies.

In the above analysed streams of situations and conversations found in the comedies, we have seen how these characters seem to bear some resemblance to the Englishnesses offered by the literature. These characters seemed to, at times, fit the description of the not terribly ‘touchy-feely’ people, and some of them seem to comply with the lazy, inhospitable, self-disciplined, pragmatic and not terribly social individual. They also seem to enjoy clubs, pubs and drinking. Nonetheless, against what it was prescribed by these same definitions, characters also seem to defy these expectations. In fact, sport or a love for sport or gardening are not featured in any of the series,¹¹⁴ order does not seem to be high in the agenda of these characters’ life, and ‘against the odds’ most of them seem to seek and enjoy sex a great deal.

It is also worth mentioning at this point that England or Englishness does not seem to be a concern amongst any of the characters presented in these series, despite the

¹¹⁴ In *Fresh Meat*, we saw how JP and his friends talked about rowing and cricket, however, this is presented as something they did back at school.

possible prejudiced assumptions some may make about individuals of other nationalities or ethnic groups. Nevertheless, and despite the fact that prejudice is not a defining characteristic of the characters analysed in these comedies, it is remarkable the way in which ethnically diverse primary and secondary educational institutions seem to share an image of ‘roughness’, where academic achievement does not seem to be an asset.

Within the parameters of this thesis, we have focused on the individual characters’ identity, which at the end of the day is a performance of an ‘imagined community’, which in this thesis ends up being the performance of a performance, given that the material analysed here is fictional, but has nonetheless been inspired in contemporary English society.

These comedies and the characters portrayed in them, have presented us with an ethnically diverse people, who, regardless their ethnicity, have been representative of some of the characteristics of Englishness we studied in chapter three. Although I believe in many ways these comedies fall short in the representation of ethnic variety, it is also true that the most recent series *Fresh Meat* presents us with an ethnically varied group of students where ethnicity is not an issue. From my point of view, this shows some reluctance and reticence on the part of the media to portray more updated versions of Englishnesses, which are inexorably part of the English landscape nowadays, thus allowing its population to identify with the Englishnesses they contribute to define. However, we have also seen how difficult a task it seems to be to deal with this ethnically diverse reality, and how uncomfortable a task this appears to be. This may be due to an *extreme consciousness* on the part of many English, who want to avoid political incorrectness and thus choose to avoid the issue altogether. A contemporary example of this is the television comedy *Mr. Khan*, aired by BBC One in 2012. When it first appeared this comedy sparked a lot of controversy due to its stereotyping and political incorrectness. However, and despite all odds, it has now produced three seasons.

The comedies and characters studied in this thesis have proved that new versions of Englishnesses need to be considered in order to cater for all English citizens’ needs. Therefore, I believe it is necessary to begin to talk about England and Englishnesses as inclusive umbrella terms in which all English individuals can fit, and feel part of, leaving aside tedious stereotypes which limit individuals and societies toward growing and enriching, and hinder evolution and tolerance. As Gilroy points out, homogeneity is the way forward to living in harmony in a multicultural society (2005), it is important,

he says, to focus on sameness, which can be seen as the inevitable consequence of the British Empire and therefore of its people and their history. Because we are equal in our differences as the characters of these series show. After all, we are all migrants in this planet called Earth.

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ANEX I

Bromwell High. Series 1-2.

Broadcast: Channel 4 (2005-2006)			
Directed by: Pete Bishop			
Written by: Richard Osman, Richard Pinto and Sharat Sardana.			
2005	British Animation Awards	Won	Best Comedy
2006	Gemini Awards	Won	Best Animated Program or Series

Chart 1

Fresh Meat. Series 1-3.

Broadcast: Channel 4 (2011-2013)			
Directed by: Annie Griffin, David Kerr and Nick Wood.			
Written by: Jesse Armstrong, Sam Bain, Tony Roche, Penelope Skinner, Keith Akushie, Richard Pinto, Rose Heiny, Jon Brown and Tom Basden.			
2011	British Comedy Awards	Won	Best New Comedy Programme
		Nominated	Best TV Comedy Actor (Jack Whitehall)
			Best TV Comedy Drama
2012	BAFTA Awards	Nominated	Audience Award (TV)
			Breakthrough Talent (Tom Basden, writer)
			Best Situation Comedy
	Broadcasting Press Guild	Nominated	Breakthrough Award
			Best Comedy/Entertainment
	Monte-Carlo TV Festival	Nominated	Outstanding Actor in a Comedy Series (Jack Whitehall)
			Outstanding Actor in a Comedy Series (Joe Thomas)
			Outstanding European Producer (Comedy Series)
			Outstanding International Producer

			(Comedy Series)
	RTS Award, UK	Won	Best Writer – Comedy (Sam Bain and Jesse Armstrong)
			Best Scripted Comedy (Sam Bain and Jesse Armstrong)
2013	Broadcasting Press Guild Awards	Nominated	Best Comedy/Entertainment
	RTS Award, UK	Nominated	Best Comedy Performance (Jack Whitehall)
	Writers’ Guild of Great Britain	Nominated	Best Television Comedy.

Chart 2

Little Britain. Series 1-3.

Broadcast: BBC Three/ BBC One (2003-2009)			
Directed by: Steve Bendelack (Series 1), Matt Lipsey (Series 2) and Declan Lowney (Series 3)			
Written by: Matt Lucas and David Walliams.			
2003	British Comedy Awards	Won	Best TV Comedy Newcomer (David Walliams)
	Royal Television Society, UK	Won	Best Make Up Design – Entertainment & Non Drama Productions
2004	BAFTA Awards	Won	Best TV Comedy Actor (Matt Lucas and David Walliams)
			Best TV Comedy
			People’s Choice Award
	Broadcasting Press Guild Awards	Won	Best Entertainment
	National Television Awards	Won	Most Popular Comedy
	Rose d’Or Light Entertainment Festival	Won	Press Prize. British Broadcasting Corporation
	Royal Television Society	Won	Best Comedy Performance (David

	Society, UK		Walliams and Matt Lucas)
			Best Entertainment
			Best Costume Design – Entertainment & Non Drama Productions
			Best Music – Original Title Music
			Best Make Up Design – Entertainment & Non Drama Productions
2005	BAFTA Awards	Won	Best Comedy Performance (Matt Lucas and David Walliams)
			Comedy Programme or Series Award
		Nominated	Best Costume Design
			Best Make Up & Hair Design
	International Emmy Awards	Nominated	Best Performance by an Actor (David Walliams)
	National Television Awards	Won	Most Popular Comedy Programme
	Rose d’Or Light Entertainment Festival	Won	Comedy. British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) UK
			Best Male Comedy Performance (David Walliams and Matt Lucas)
	Royal Television Society, UK	Won	Best Make Up Design – Entertainment & Non Drama Productions
			Best Costume Design – Entertainment & Non Drama Productions
TRIC Awards	Won	TV Comedy Programme	
2006	BAFTA Awards	Nominated	Best Comedy Programme
	International Emmy Awards	Won	Comedy
	National Television Awards	Won	Most Popular Comedy Programme
	Royal Television Society, UK	Nominated	Best Make Up Design – Entertainment & Non Drama Productions
	TV Quick Awards, UK	Won	Best Comedy Show

	TRIC Awards	Won	TV Comedy Programme
2007	BAFTA Awards	Nominated	Best Comedy Programme

Chart 3

Teachers. Series 1-4.

Broadcast: Channel 4 (2001-2004)			
Directed by: Richard Dale, Jeremy Lovering and Sallie Aprahamian (Series 1), Peter Lydon, John Alexander , Susanna White and Reza Moradi (Series 2), Brian Kelly, Otto Bathurst, Jonathan Fox Bassett, Susanna White and Andrew Lincoln (Series 3), Barnaby Southcombe, Sean Grundy and Iain B. MacDonald (Series 4).			
Written by: Tim Loane, Andrew Rattenbury and Julie Rurrerford (Series 1), Julie Rutterford, Andrew Ratterbury, Richard Stoneman, Charlie Martin and Ed Roe (Series 2), Ed Roe, Richard Stoneman, Andrew Rattenbury, Charlie Martin, Toni Basgallop and Jack Lothian (Series 3), Richard Stoneman, Ed Roe, Charlie Martin, Linton Chiswick, Jack Lothian and Tony Basgallop (Series 4).			
2002	BAFTA Awards	Nominated	Best New Director Fiction (Richard Dale)
	Royal Television Society, UK	Nominated	Best Drama Series
2003	BAFTA Awards	Nominated	Best Drama Series
			Best New Writer (Charlie Martin)
			Best New Writer (Ed Roe)
British Comedy Awards	Nominated	Best TV Comedy Drama	
2004	BAFTA Awards	Nominated	Best New Director Fiction (Andrew Lincoln)
			Best New Writer (Jack Lothian)
	Royal Television Society, UK	Nominated	Best Drama Series

Chart 4

The Inbetweeners. Series 1-3.

Broadcast: E4 (2008-2010)			
Directed by: Gordon Anderson (Series 1) and Ben Palmer (Series 2-3)			

Written by: Damon Beesley and Iain Morris.			
2008	British Comedy Award	Won	Best Comedy
			Best New British Television Comedy (Scripted)
2009	BAFTA Awards	Nominated	Best Situation Comedy
	TV Quick Awards, UK	Won	Best Comedy Show
	Rose d'Or Light Entertainment Festival	Nominated	Sitcom
	British Comedy Awards	Won	Best TV Comedy Actor (Simon Bird)
2010	BAFTA Awards	Won	Audience Award
		Nominated	Best Situation Comedy
			Best Male Performance in a Comedy Role (Simon Bird)
	Television and Radio Industries Club Awards (TRIC Award)	Won	Satellite/Digital Programme
	Rose d'Or Light Entertainment Festival	Won	Sitcom
	British Comedy Awards	Won	Best TV Sitcom
		Nominated	Best TV Comedy Actor (James Buckley)
	Broadcasting Press Guild Awards	Nominated	Best Comedy/Entertainment
	National Television Awards, UK	Nominated	Digital Choice
	Royal Television Society (RTS), UK	Won	Best Writer - Comedy
Nominated		Best Scripted	
2011	BAFTA Awards	Nominated	Best Writer
			Best Male Performance in a Comedy Role (James Buckley)
	TV Quick Awards, UK	Won	Best Comedy Show
	Broadcasting Press Guild Awards	Nominated	Best Comedy/Entertainment

	National Television Awards, UK	Won	Digital Choice
	RTS, UK	Nominated	Best Scripted Comedy
			Best Comedy Performance (Damon Beesley)
	Television and Radio Industries Club Awards	Won	Satellite/ Digital Programme
	TRIC Award	Won	Satellite/Digital Programme
British Comedy Awards	Won	Outstanding Achievement Award	

Chart 5

The Thick of It. Series 1-4.

Broadcast: BBC two and BBC Four (2005-2012)			
Directed by: Armando Iannucci			
Written by: Jesse Armstrong, Simon Blackwell, Armando Iannucci, Ian Martin and Tony Roche (Series 1, 2 & 3), Tony Roche, Simon Blackwell, Ian Martin, Will Smith, Roger Drew, Sean Gray, with additional material written by David Quantick, Dan Gaster, Georgia Pritchett and Rob Colley (Series 4).			
2005	BAFTA Awards	Nominated	Best Writer: Comedy
			Best Male Performance in a Comedy Programme (Peter Capaldi)
			Best Editing: Fiction
			Best Situation Comedy
	British Comedy Awards	Won	Best TV Comedy Actor (Chris Langham)
Best TV Comedy			
Nominated		Best Comedy Newcomer (Chris Addison)	
2006	BAFTA Awards	Won	Best Comedy Performance (Chris Langham)
			Best Situation Comedy
	Nominated	Best Comedy Performance (Peter Capaldi)	

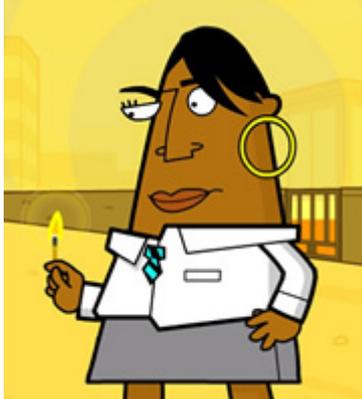
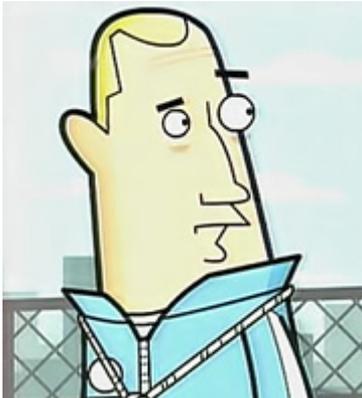
	British Comedy Awards	Nominated	Best TV Comedy
	Broadcasting Press Guild Awards	Won	Best Comedy/Entertainment
			Writers Award
		Nominated	Best Actor (Chris Langham)
	Monte-Carlo TV Festival	Won	Outstanding Actor – Comedy Series (Chris Langham)
	Rose d’Or Light Entertainment Festival	Nominated	Sitcom
	Royal Television Society, UK	Won	Best Situation Comedy & Comedy Drama
		Nominated	Best Comedy Performance (Peter Capaldi)
2007	Writer’s Guild of Great Britain	Won	Television Comedy/Light Entertainment
2008	BAFTA Awards	Nominated	Best Comedy Performance (Peter Capaldi)
			Best Situation Comedy
2010	BAFTA Awards	Won	Best Situation Comedy
			Best Female Performance in a Comedy Role (Rebecca Front)
			Best Male Performance in a Comedy Role (Peter Capaldi)
		Nominated	Best Writer
	British Comedy Awards	Won	Best TV Comedy Actor (Peter Capaldi)
		Nominated	Best TV Sitcom
	Broadcasting Press Guild Awards	Won	Best Actor (Peter Capaldi)
			Best Comedy/Entertainment
			Writers Award
	Monter-Carlo TV Festival	Won	Best Actress (Rebeca Front)
Best European Producer			
		Nominated	Outstanding Actor – Comedy Series (Peter Capaldi)

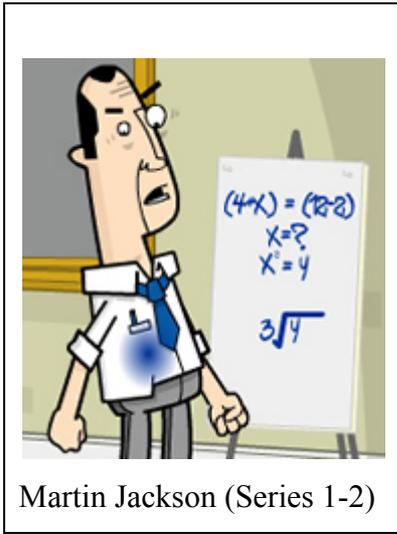
			Outstanding Actor – Comedy Series (Roger Allam)
			Outstanding Actress – Comedy Series (Rebecca Front)
	Royal Television Society, UK	Won	Best Scripted Comedy
		Nominated	Best comedy Performance (Peter Capaldi)
	Writers’ Guild of Great Britain	Nominated	Television Comedy/Light Entertainment
2011			
2012	British Comedy Awards	Won	Best TV Comedy Actor (Peter Capaldi)
			Best TV Comedy Actress (Rebecca Front)
		Nominated	Best Sitcom
2013	Broadcasting Press Guild Awards	Nominated	Best Actor (Peter Capaldi)
			Best Actor (Roger Allam)
			Best Comedy/Entertainment
	Royal Television Society, UK	Won	Best Writer – Comedy

Chart 6

ANEX II

Main characters: *Bromwell High*.

		
Latrina (Series 1-2)	Natella (Series 1-2)	Keisha (Series 1-2)
		
Mr. Bibby (Series 1-2)	Iqbal (Series 1-2)	Carol Jackson (Series 1-2)
		
Gavin Beale (Series 1-2)	Mr. Phillips (Series 1-2)	Melanie Dickson (Series 1-2)



Martin Jackson (Series 1-2)

Images retrieved from: http://www.comedy.co.uk/guide/tv/bromwell_high/characters/

Main characters: *The Inbetweeners*.

 <p>Will Mackenzie (Series 1-3)</p>	 <p>Simon Cooper (Series 1-3)</p>	 <p>Jay Cartwright (Series 1-3)</p>
 <p>Neil Sutherland (series 1-3)</p>	 <p>Carli D'Amato (series 1-3)</p>	 <p>Mr. Gilbert (series 1-3)</p>

Images retrieved from: <http://www.comedy.co.uk/guide/tv/inbetweeners/characters/>.

Main characters: *Teachers*.



Simon Casey (Series 1-3)



Susan Gately (Series 1-2)



Jenny Page (Series 1-2)



Kurt McKenna (Series 1-3)



Brian Steadman (Series 1-3)



Clare Hunter (Series 1-4)



Bob Porter (Series 1-4)



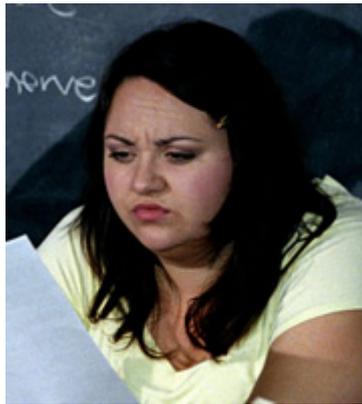
Carol (Series 1-4)



Liz Webb (Series 1-4)



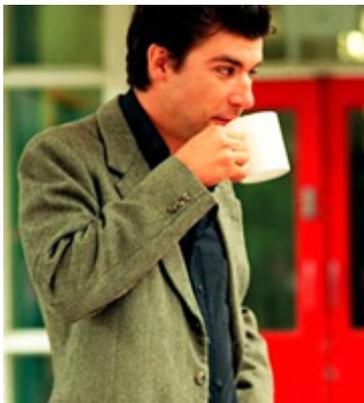
Penny Neville (Series 2-4)



Lindsay Pearce (3-4)



John Paul Keating, (Series 2)



Matt Harvey (Series 3-4)



Ben Birket (Series 4)



Ewan Doherty (Series 4)



Damien Wallace (series 4)

Images retrieved from: <http://www.comedy.co.uk/guide/tv/teachers/characters/>

Main characters: *Fresh Meat*.

 <p>Howard (series 1-3)</p>	 <p>Josie (series 1-3)</p>	 <p>Oregon (series 1-3)</p>
 <p>Vod (series 1-3)</p>	 <p>Kinsley (series 1-3)</p>	 <p>JP (series 1-3)</p>
 <p>Candice (series 3)</p>		

Images retrieved from: <http://www.channel4.com/programmes/fresh-meat/profiles>

ANEX III

Howard's phone; MY NOTES; HOUSEMATES DOSSIER

I have compiled a dossier on each of my housemates based on freely available information gleaned from the internet. If only I had access to the NSA software I could rule them like a god. As it is, this is a good insurance policy should I need to exert leverage on any of them at any point in the future. As they say – knowledge is power and I think this is the sort of knowledge they mean. Certainly I have not found any power resulting from my extensive knowledge of geothermal energy. Irrespective - as always Howard McGregor bides his time and compiles thorough dossiers.

JP

- **Facebook privacy settings:** v.poor
- **Weaknesses:** incredibly willing to endorse products and services online via Facebook 'likes', also posts incriminating personal information on messageboards under the illusion he is doing so 'anonymously' (those 14 year olds on ask.fm are an unusually cruel bunch – I don't think having a penis that bears to the left is that out of the ordinary). No proxy, no encryption, no anonymity my privileged friend.
- **Also:** Twitter trolling – under the nom de plume 'StoweGee' JP has been waging a longstanding campaign of intimidation against the conjuror David Copperfield – perhaps under the mistaken belief he is the protagonist from Dickens' book, David Copperfield.
- **Fears:** standard male anxiety: penis size, sexual orientation, sexually transmitted diseases etc.
- **Potential impact of web presence on his future:** entirely mitigated by protective bubble of the 'old boys network' he exists within.

JOSIE

- **Facebook privacy settings:** poor
- **Weaknesses:** Candy Crush Saga, mixed martial arts videos, plastic surgery mishap photos, online bingo, bats
- **Fears:** loneliness, alcoholism, unemployment
- **Potential impact of web presence on her future:** high. Lots of photographs freely available show her participating in a degenerate lifestyle like a Welsh Geordie (the big three - drink, drugs, mild fornication).

KINGSLEY

- **Facebook privacy settings:** medium. Uses the false name 'Owen Kingsley' but once that enigma-style code was cracked he has very lax security settings.
- **Weaknesses:** keen on arguing under YouTube videos of indie music, Googling abstract symptoms (e.g. 'dry armpits', 'sore ear lobes', 'funny knee', 'brain tingle')
- **Fears:** cancer, mental illness, falling behind in cultural awareness.
- **Potential impact of web presence on his future:** negligible. In spite of his attempts to hide behind a false name, Kingsley is actually doing very little online that would negatively impact his future.

OREGON

- **Facebook privacy settings:** medium.
- **Weaknesses:** extreme hubris.
- **Fears:** Being unexceptional. Which she is. Which they all are.
- **Potential impact of web presence on her future:** to be honest even if Oregon did increase her social media security, the fact that she has signed so many online petitions means that the secret service are almost certainly watching her already and many, many employment opportunities are now closed to her. Also her 'blog', which she updates infrequently, makes her appear unbalanced. Would you employ Sylvia Plath as a graduate trainee? Exactly. And Oregon is no Sylvia Plath.

VOD

- **Facebook privacy settings:** excellent. Since she has yet to accept my friend request, I can confirm she has the high security of a NATO or a Goldman Sachs or a Knights Templar - well played Vod.
- **Weaknesses:** has conducted a lot of research into family/immigration law.
- **Fears:** being pursued for alimony payments; Oregon password-protecting her laptop – neither fear at all justified.
- **Potential impact of web presence on her future:** quite low. Whilst I have been able to find out a little about Vod's online pursuits, it is unlikely any potential employer would be inclined or able to search as deeply as I have.

- **CANDICE**
- **Facebook privacy settings:** not on Facebook, a position one has to respect. Homeschooling truly is the greatest gift a parent can give a child.
- **Weaknesses:** undoes all her good work not being on social networks by being a change.org-aholic. Happy to lobby for social/political change in almost every arena.
- **Has Twitter account followed by five people:** two of which are sexbots attracted by her use of the word 'sexual' (in the context of 'sexual objectification') and another is my secret, anonymous Twitter account. Which means her constant calls to action on matters of gender equality are only actually being heard by Goth Gary and JP.
- **Fears:** being socially excluded.
- **Potential impact of web presence on her future:** middling.

SABINE

- **Facebook privacy settings:** low.
- **Weaknesses:** the band 'Maroon Five', pictures of animals in costumes (puppies dressed as bees, cats dressed as superheroes, ferrets as cheese – that kind of thing), positive aphorisms, celebrity gossip, the fantasy television programme Game of Thrones.
- **Fears:** this may be a result of the inefficiency of Google Translate, but best I can analyse Sabine has a fear of water and running or possibly running water.
- **Potential impact of web presence on her future:** none. She is already safely ensconced in the protective bosom of academia. Sabine's future is now.

Retrieved from: <http://freshmeatunlocked.channel4.com/#!/howard/notes/housemates-dossier>

ANEX IV

Vod's pone; POLITICAL PARTIES.

Frankly Howard's LAN party seems more fun than most of the so-called 'political' parties but there's something to be said for having a party machine supporting you when you're running for office. Gonna take some notes to help me decide which one to gift with my candidacy:

CONSERVATIVE PARTY

The conservatives are also the Tories, which is confusing. All about the Big Society which basically translates as "do it yourself mate." The entire cabinet could easily pass as JP's cousins. Next.

LIBERAL DEMOCRAT PARTY

A surprising amount of sex scandals when you get a look at them. Believe in 'fairness' which is just like saying you believe in 'niceness' isn't it? Who doesn't... You know what I mean? Collaborators - believe. Next.

LABOUR PARTY

They were a lot better before Blair made them electable. This One Nation shit is a bit racist against the Welsh, Scots and northern Irish. I mean, we all know there's only one nation and it's England but there's no need to rub their noses in it. They get chippy about that sort of shit, I live with a couple, take it from me. Anyway – next.

UKIP

Anti-immigration, anti-Europe, anti-not sounding like paranoid loons. Big on fishing, keeping the pound and defence. Not bothered about fishing, rather have the Euro and while I'm broadly in favour of returning the defence budgets to 2010 levels (a childhood spent in military bases gives you a perspective) that's not enough to get me as their candidate. I'm out. Next.

GREEN PARTY

Self-explanatory. Fair dues. I don't know what I think about environmentalism though – it's like, maybe the rat people who replace us will be better – it's the humans the environmentalists are bothered about, not the 'environment'. The environment will be fine mate. Don't worry about it. Pass.

CONCLUSION

To be honest I don't think any party directly aligns closely enough with my own highly developed personal credo. I'm basically an iconoclast - I'm too independent of mind for the party political sausage factory. That's it - I'm totally independent, I should be an independent. Fuck all parties except house, warehouse, boat and ironic street. I'm gonna Harrison Ford it - Vod's going Han Solo

Retrieved from: <http://freshmeatunlocked.channel4.com/#!/vod/notes/political-parties>

ANEX V

JP'S MEMBERSHIP CRITERIA FOR THE DRY SLOPE SKIIN SOCIETY:

	Monday, 3:15pm JP SAYS:
<p>ATTENTION STUDENTS – Medlock’s leading snow-free winter sport club is inviting applications for new members for a limited time only. Applications are sought from individuals in the student body who meet the following criteria –</p> <p>Female Aged 16 plus (supporting documentation may be required) Dress size 12* or less (and that’s a very strict H&M or Zara 12 – sorry ladies) Facial symmetry of 90% or more. Sexually progressive. And by progressive we mean promiscuous. But not too promiscuous. Just promiscuous enough. Actually – scratch number 7, as promiscuous as you like. The more promiscuous the better. Preference will be given to applicants with experience of modeling - catwalk, fashion (editorial) or glamour. Catalogue or miscellaneous ‘other’ is application neutral.</p> <p>* A small number of discretionary exceptions to criteria 3 can be made for Christina Hendrix-style chunky-outliers.</p> <p>Please apply via email enclosing a clear, non-misleading, Instagram filter-free headshot to President Elect Jonathan ‘JP’ Pembersley: JoinJonathanPembersleyForTheRideOfALifetime@gmail.com</p>	

	Monday, 9:01pm JBENNET SAYS:
<p>Flagged. This is misogynistic crap. Moderators please take down this sexist post.</p>	

	Monday, 9:55pm OFFENDEDSTUDENT SAYS:
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Now the objectification of women has spread to dry skiing – ridiculous, offensive and shameful.



Tuesday, 10:12amGOGSMCCALL SAYS:

Is it just skiing or can you do snowboarding?



Tuesday, 7:35pm
JP SAYS:

Hello and thanks for the feedback.**GogsMcCall** – we're completely open to snowboarding (or dryboarding to be accurate) but I've had a look at your profile and don't think you really read the advert properly. **jbennet** and**offendedstudent** - while it seems like you DID read the post I'm not really sure what you're driving at – we're not discriminating against munters we're just discriminating in favour of hotties. It's positive discrimination. We're helping munters by saving them the time it would take to fill in a redundant application, and also the pain of rejection. At the MMDSS we're on the munter's side - we just don't want to look at them while we're skiing. Thanks for your interest



Wednesday, 10:12am
ANGRYFRESHER SAYS:

I can't believe this advert hasn't be taken down yet. Unacceptable retrograde prehistoric rubbish. Flagged.



Wednesday, 11:21pm
JP SAYS:

Wrong! Regular 'wet' skiing is the prehistoric rubbish **angryfresher**. Dry Skiing is the winter sport of the future. It's half sport half science. Thanks for your interest.



Thursday, 10:05am
FURIOUSOBSERVER SAYS:

This advert contravenes the Equality Act 2010 and has been reported to the authorities



Thursday, 5:59pm
JP SAYS:

Look, I'm bloody sick of these incessant attacks. If you want to run a dry ski society for unattractive people please start one. The MMDSS is just a group of like-minded, similarly-attractive people (and Howard) who want to slide (fairly slowly) down hills on that weird astroturf stuff together. I don't see what all the fuss is about. If you don't want to join don't join – you don't see me trying to get the Socialist Workers shut down because they won't let me join because I'm a massive massive capitalist do you? Exactly. Same thing



Thursday, 7:19pm
INDIGNANTOFSALFORD SAYS:

A dry ski society seeking women only applications? This is absurd and offensive and wrong.



Thursday, 10:22pm
JP SAYS:

God, the feminists object to all male golf clubs AND all female ski societies? Make your mind up. If you pc killjoys had your way we'd never have won any medals at the Olympics. Anyway, we've now changed the entry requirements so you no longer have to be a mega-fitty to fit in. Now the MMDSS has a doors open policy – all welcome. All girls welcome. All single girls welcome. See you on the slopes!



Friday, 9:10am
JP SAYS:

UPDATE: The MMDSS is now no longer accepting applications. We were just a funky little soc that didn't play by the rules but now we are a defunct-y little soc because those rules actually turned out to be laws and once we obeyed them the society seemed a bit pointless. Also we were massively underwhelmed by the levels of interest.

Broken Britain. I hope you're happy Emily Pankhurst.

Retrieved from: <http://freshmeatunlocked.channel4.com/#!/jp/medlock/dry-slope-skiing-society> on the 30th December 2014.

ANEX VI

Josie's phone; MY NOTES; BOOZE TRACKER

Someone said they think I might drink too much. I could easily have pointed out that someone is a big wet indie mummy's boy who wouldn't know how to have fun if he was at a fucking Jenga, chimps and fireworks party. But to prove I don't have a problem I'm just going to record my drinking habits over a week.

MONDAY

Mondays aren't drinking days generally. Unless it's a holiday Monday. This week was a holiday Monday, so I got shitfaced. It started in the pub:

1 large glass of rose wine (with dinner) 3 units per 250ml glass at 12% ABV

3 pints of cider 2.8 units per pint at 5% ABV

2 bottles of cider (changing the barrel?) 2 units per 440ml bottle at 4.5% ABV

Then on to the union:

5 single vodka cokes 0.9 units per 25ml vodka at 37.5% ABV

3 apple sourz 0.4 units per 25ml shot at 15% ABV

2 sambucas (flaming, so the alcohol has probably burned off like a nice crepe suzette or some coq au vin) 1 unit per shot at 40% ABV

Oh and a cheeky nightcap at the flat:

1 bottle of Howard's mystery booze (must replace). No idea how many units; only Howard has the answer!

Monday total: 23.1 units, plus Howard's mystery booze

Not a great start admittedly, but a one off is a one off. You need to be spontaneous don't you? Otherwise I, you, may as well be living in Cardiff.

TUESDAY

Ordinarily I wouldn't be drinking on a Tuesday, but as Monday was a holiday... Didn't drink during the day though.

2 boxes of Bailey's chocolate liqueurs that were inexplicably in the sitting room (Candice? Oregon? Howard?? Vod??? Will replace)

Which gave me a little taste for it:

5 or 6 glasses of Bailey's (how many are in a bottle?) 12 units per 70cl bottle at 17% ABV

Then off to bed.

Oh and obviously:

2 large glasses of rose wine (with dinner) 3 units per 250ml glass at 12% ABV

Tuesday total: 18 units

Not bad. 18 units seems fine doesn't it? Not sure how many are recommended, will check at the end of the week.

WEDNESDAY

Back to school today. And back on the straight and narrow. Except of course:

3 large glasses of rose (with dinner) 3 units per 250ml glass at 12% ABV

And then the quiz night:

2 bottles of Kopparberg (pear) 2 units per 500ml bottle

2 pints of Strongbow (apple?) 2.6 units per pint of draught at 4.5% ABV

Which we won!!! WOOHOO!!! Slightly gutting that the prize was only a crate of lager but it's the winning that counts.

5 cans of Skol (free) 2.1 units per 440ml can at 5% ABV

Then to celebrate:

4 and a half glasses of cava (spill) 1.7 units per 150ml champagne glass at 11.5% ABV

Wednesday total: 36.35 units

Not great. Free units don't count though, do they? Not really, it's like you don't count calories at a buffet, and we did win the beer. To the victor the spoils. To the victor the Skols!

THURSDAY

Student night! The weekend starts here. This is my reward for my week of semi-abstinence. Started at the pub:

1 bottle of Kopparberg (summer fruits. Never again) 2 units per 500ml bottle

4 bottles of Kopparberg (pear) 2 units per 500ml bottle

1 bottle of rose (with dinner) 3 units per large glass 3 units per 250ml glass at 12% ABV

Then to the union:

2 vodka cokes 0.9 units per 25ml vodka at 37.5% ABV

2 sailor jerry cokes 1 unit per 25ml rum at 40% ABV

1 midori and orange 0.5 units per 25ml single midori

Oregon's midori and orange (who doesn't like midori?) 0.5 units per 25ml single midori

1 Aftershock (blue) 0.8 units per 25ml shot at 30% ABV

Then back to a party at the Halls of Residence – uber depressing.

1/3 bottle of sangria (fruity) 1.75 units per 1/3 of a 750ml bottle at 7% ABV

Hang on, that's technically Friday.

Thursday total: 20.35 units

Pretty laid back for student night! V.Good. If I have any spare units at the end of the week I'll binge drink them before bed on Sunday.

FRIDAY

1/3 bottle of sangria 1.75 units per 1/3 of a 750ml bottle at 7% ABV

½ bottle of WKD (large) (blue) 1.4 units per half 700ml bottle

Made it to uni. Hooray!!

And back to the union:

2 pints of diesel 2.8 units per pint at 5% ABV

1 pint of light ale – just had a fancy 4% 2.3 units per pint at 4% ABV

1 red sourz 0.4 units per 25ml shot at 15% ABV

1 blue sourz 0.4 units per 25ml shot at 15% ABV

1 Aftershock (red) 0.8 units per 25ml shot at 30%ABV

1 slippery nipple 1 25ml shot of sambuca (1 unit) and 1 Bailey's (0.4 units). 1.4 units per drink

Friday total: 14.05 units

V.V.Good. Well that's completely fuck all. That must be way below the Surgeon General's recommended daily allowance.

SATURDAY

Hair of the dog:

2 bottles of Kopparberg (summer fruits – this time NEVER again, proper) 2 units per 500ml bottle

2 glasses of port 2.5 units per 125ml glass

1 bottle of rose (no dinner) 9 units at 12% ABV

2 shots of absinthe 1 unit per 25ml shot at @ 38% ABV

1 Drambuie (Kingsley's. Weird. Tasted like heather. The plant, not the dental student) 1 unit per 25ml shot at 40% ABV

Then had to take Kingsley home.

1/3 bottle of Vermouth? (Oregon. Replace) 4.9 units per 1/3 of a 1 litre bottle at 14.7% ABV

Saturday total: 24.9 units

Again good, I mean I think you get a bigger allowance at the weekend don't you?

SUNDAY

Ah, sober Sunday.

Just chilled out with Kingsley most of the night.

2 bottles of wine – chardonnay I think but I can't really remember. We all went out after to GrooveBox for DanceBucket 9.8 units per bottle at 13% ABV

Then the rest is technically next week.

Sunday total: 19.6 units

Not bad, right now to check the weekly total.

Weekly total: 156.35 units + Howard's mystery booze + chocolate liqueurs.

Now let me see... What's the recommended allowance... DrinkAware suggest not drinking more than 2-3 units regularly if you're female. Well, what is regularly? Is that per round? I'm well below that per round. Oh wait, no that's per day... Patient.co.uk suggest no more than 14 units per week... What?! No, that can't be right. I'm on 156.35 and the recommended... Is... No I must have put a decimal point wrong somewhere... Bit embarrassing... No, no it's right....I'm more than 10x that.

Shit this looks REALLY bad...

But the thing is that this is term time and I actually drink a lot less during the holidays. The others are the bad influences really. So it all evens out when you write one off against the other. It's just basic maths. I hardly ever drink on the holidays. Unless you count when I'm actually away somewhere, I mean we all drink more when we're away don't we? Shit I should actually do something about my drinking shouldn't I? I don't want to end up a mad alchy with a packed up liver and meths breath hanging around in Tesco's until they pull up those vertical booze blinds they have in the alcohol aisle

SITES TO CHECK OUT

- Track your own drinking using the **free NHS drinks tracker**
- Keep track of how many units you've consumed using **the Drinkaware units calculator**
- **Read Manchester Medlock's alcohol advice leaflet**

Retrieved from: <http://freshmeatunlocked.channel4.com/#!/josie/notes/booze-tracker>