How and why do working-class women engage with the structures of (higher) education?

Contents

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Abstract

…I have lain awake at night contemplating all the mild and genteel methods by which working-class children are led to see – out of what kind and painful necessity it is done! – that, really, they aren't very clever,… (Steedman, 1982: 7).

This research is driven by a personal and professional interest in class and its relationship to education and to the different ways that class is used to theorize about educational inequalities. The concept of class has become marginalized within educational theory, policy and practice in response to post-modern discourses of multiple, reflexive, and individualized identity formation. Equality of opportunity rhetoric, claims of meritocracy, movement toward a mass system of higher education (HE), and widening participation initiatives all contribute toward a discourse that obscures and denies the enduring impact of class upon educational attainment, and ultimately for this study, upon 'how and why working-class women engage with the structures of (higher) education'.

This thesis repositions class as central to the distribution of, and access to educational resources. An emphasis upon social justice both in and from educational research (Griffiths, 1998) is reflected in the methodology and methods employed. Through the use of an auto/biographical approach and implementation of semi-structured in-depth life history interviews this research has made concerted attempts to challenge and reposition power differences between the researcher and researched.

The main findings of this research are: the development of 'classed and gendered learner identities'; and processes of 'embodiment of innate in/ability and/or inferiorization' which can lead to a deep sense of 'lack' for some working-class women from early childhood onwards. Continuing emphasis upon discourses of deficiency, present in much widening participation literature, can contribute to this sense of 'lack' and may offer insights into the '…highly differentiated 16+ population' (Brine, 2006: 444) which has endured. Through exploration of these areas this study seeks to demonstrate '…that participation in higher education is not an equal or possible 'choice' for everyone' (Archer, 2003: 20). This study will offer suggestions through which 'choice' may be enhanced for working-class women within the post-compulsory educational sector.

Chapter 1

Introduction to the study

Introduction

This research is motivated by a commitment to contribute to a body of literature which seeks to explain why so few working-class women engage with the structures of (higher) education within an era of widening participation. 'Social justice in educational research' and 'from educational research' (Griffiths, 1998: 94) has been a primary concern. The methodology which informs this study and the methods employed reflect this. A desire to attempt to shift the power balance between researcher and researched is evident throughout the study, as is the objective of making visible the continuing inequality within education and higher education (HE). This is in contrast to claims that modes of inequality such as class now have a weaker influence within the British education system, inherent in liberal/neo-liberal educational theory which emphasizes the benefits of a marketized system of education. This research seeks to reposition class as central to the continued generation of inequality in and from education. Class remains as a tool of differentiation, and is part of the processes which make us more or less able to operate and compete for resources within an education system which is increasingly structured around market principles of choice and competition. In prioritizing class other modes of inequality are both acknowledged and emphasized within this thesis; modes such as gender which has a strong influence alongside class within this research, and ethnicity, disability and sexuality which can all be demonstrated to cross-cut class in terms of educational inequality.

This chapter will begin by setting out the aims and research questions which have informed this study, continuing with an overview of who the participants of this study are, and of the methodology and methods utilized. A breakdown of the study will be offered with an overview of each chapter which will contextualize the research and clarify the direction of the study.

Aims and research questions

This research began with a working title of 'how and why do working-class women engage with the structures of higher education'. The only change to this title has been to enclose in brackets (higher) education. This has been to recognize that as this research developed and the words of the participants demonstrated, 'how and why working-class women engage with the structures of higher education' is intimately connected with 'how and why' they engage with the structures of other sectors of education from primary, and more recently foundation stage, upwards. As the interviews within this research unfolded it was abundantly clear that the women in the study often continued to be greatly affected by primary, secondary and further education experiences and that this sometimes influenced later decisions regarding HE. Throughout the thesis HE will appear as (H)E (accept when using other commentators words) to denote acknowledgement that the structures of the British Education system are connected in many complex ways.

Statement of the aims of this research

This research seeks to explore the multiple ways in which women experience education. The aims of this research are:

- To use auto/biographical analysis of working-class women's experiences to produce a rich life account in the words of the researched.
- To explore how and why working-class women engage – and why they do not – in (higher) education.
- To uncover a range of possibilities as to why so few working-class women engage in (higher) education within an era of widening participation.
- To examine ways in which working-class women may begin to want to enter the institutions of (higher) education in greater numbers, through an examination of early childhood education and onwards.

These aims have not changed throughout; except that I have modified the fourth aim, focussing upon 'choice', so that it now reads:

- To examine ways in which working-class women may **be enabled to make informed choices upon whether or not, when, where and how** to enter the institutions of (higher) education in greater numbers, through an examination of early childhood education and onwards.

This change to the fourth aim reflects my growing awareness that (H)E is not always an unquestioned good. (H)E can (as is reflected in the data and review of the literature) have detrimental effects upon the classed identity of many working-class women. I have modified this aim to reflect the emphasis of the outcome of this research which is upon choice rather than compulsion to follow certain pathways and to reflect my growing awareness of the value of alternative pathways to 'remake' the self or to achieve degrees of 'self-actualization' which a competitive and marketized system of (H)E can ignore or marginalize. The thesis discusses in detail the marginalization of vocational education to academic; of middle-class ways of being to working-class; and of particular and more traditional pathways through (H)E, than those designated as 'non-traditional' and in so doing as 'lacking' in status to traditional pathways.

Research cohorts: methodology and methods

This research is made up of 19 original participants. 16 women become the eventual focus of this research; 9 are focussed upon in more depth in chapter 5 and 7.

Of the 19 original participants[1]:

- 7 were identified early on in the research as participants from friends, colleagues and then 'snowballing'.
- To widen the number of participants I then 'purposively' selected a further 7 participants from a UNISON and Worker Education Association (WEA) 'Learning at Work Programme' who were studying 'Women, Work and Society: Women's Lives' course.
- Finally a further 5 participants were 'theoretically sampled' later in the research, from a college course that I had finished teaching.

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[1] For a detailed description of methods used to access the participants see chapter 4.

From the 19 original participants, I later decided that 3 participants were not suitable candidates for this research. Jenny was educated in Jamaica and came to England as an older teenager. Jenny's transcript is interesting and valuable, however the differences from the education system under investigation here and the education she received in Jamaica make analysis of Jenny's transcript and application to this particular research problematic. Brigitte and Jane's interview details made it clear that under the criteria specified later in this thesis, their background could not be regarded as working-class. Therefore I take this opportunity to thank these three participants for their valuable time to this research; however their transcripts were not used in the analysis. Two other participants – Valerie and Rebecca – also posed some difficulties in defining which class influences had most impact upon their lives. As will become clearer later on in this research Valerie has both middle and working-class influences within her life as her mother came from a middle-class background and her father from a working-class. Valerie self-defines herself as working-class and at many stages throughout the interviews stresses that there were far more working-class influences upon her life; her economic circumstances substantiate this, and she discusses how she has always felt most comfortable with other working-class people. It needs to be acknowledged here that there were some cultural influences in Valerie's life that would be more associated with a middle-class upbringing such as an appreciation of and familiarity with art, literature and music. The same could be said of Rebecca who clearly states that she is from a working-class background; however she grew up in a musical household. Both Valerie and Rebecca's parents had unskilled, manual jobs and no post-compulsory education, they both lived in rented/council accommodation, and their family's economic circumstances were challenging. Under the criteria for class definition which this thesis uses and which will be explained in chapter 2, Valerie and Rebecca are defined within this research as working-class and their interview transcripts are drawn upon throughout. All other participants are unambiguously working-class under the definitions of this research both in a cultural and economic sense, though this research clearly acknowledges that groups and individuals can move between classes throughout the life course.

The 16 participants have been divided into 3 chronological groups for analysis[2]. Brown's (1990) 'waves' of education are utilized here to split the 16 participants into groups.

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[2] Brown's (1990) 'waves' of education are discussed in chapter 3. Division of participants into these three groups is discussed again in chapter 4, 5, 6 and 7.

Group one: 1944 Education Act and tri-partite system of education

This time period is characterized by the introduction of the tri-partite system and commences from the 1944 Education Act. Brown describes it as the 'second wave' of education which is distinct from the ascriptive education which was in operation from the 1870 Education Act. This time period ends with the introduction of comprehensive schooling from the late 1960s/early 1970s.

The participants within group one consist of 5 working-class women who were educated in the post-war period, and received their secondary education in the 1960s within the tri-partite system.

Group two: Introduction of comprehensive schools

This educational phase is described by Brown as the 'later stages of the second wave'. It commences with the introduction of comprehensive schooling in the British Education System which began to be introduced in the 1960s and 1970s. The 'later stages of the second wave' begins to be dismantled from the late 1970s, but is formally replaced by the 'third wave' with the introduction of the 1988 Education Act.

The participants within group two consist of 5 working-class women who were educated from the 1960s, and received their secondary education in the 1970s within comprehensive schools.

Group three: 1988 Education Act and marketization of education

The final time period utilized is referred to as the 'third wave' of education (Brown, 1990). It commences with the 1988 Education Act and continues to the present day. It is characterized by a move toward markets, competition and choice in education, and by the gradual replacement of comprehensive schools with more specialist schools.

The participants within group three consist of 6 working-class women who were educated from the 1980s and received their secondary education in the 1990s, under a marketized system of educational provision.

In the analysis chapters – chapters 5, 6 and 7, two lenses were utilized. In chapter 5 and 7 I focus upon 9 women from the study; 3 from each group. In these two chapters a more detailed analysis of these 9 women's lives was utilized to explore two substantive issues of the development of particular 'classed and (gendered) learner identities' and a concept of 'deficit' which can be demonstrated to be in operation regarding class and (H)E. In chapter 6 I broadened the focus upon all 16 of the participants to demonstrate the development and existence of a substantive issue of this thesis 'the embodiment of innate in/ability and/or inferiorization' which can lead to a sense of 'lack'.

The methodology in this thesis is primarily qualitative, though quantitative secondary sources are referred to. The methodological perspective that shaped the study is auto/biographical (as stated in my aims) and is predominantly influenced by social justice considerations. The methods employed to gather the data were semi-structured interviews lasting between 45 minutes and 2 hours. Each participant was interviewed twice; each interview was recorded and fully transcribed by the researcher. Analytical methods utilized were a system of coding developed by the researcher which searched for themes within the research. These themes came to form the focus of second interviews. The advantages and disadvantages of 'grounded theory' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) and the use of aspects of this approach are given detailed consideration in chapter 4 and I argue that the research utilizes a 'well informed qualitative approach' rather than a 'grounded theory' method.

Chapter overview

Chapter 2 and 3 of the research encompass a wide ranging literature review. Chapter 2 will begin by reviewing some of the literature upon class and class definition. Because the concept of class has become so contested it is important both to justify the emphasis upon class within this research and to clearly outline what is meant by class and how it will be defined.

{Bourdieu's use of reflexivity (in Lash 1994) is introduced within the counter argument to class critique. Bourdieu's reflexive self contrasts with the individualized reflexivity articulated by Beck (1992) and Giddens (1991). Alternatively Bourdieu describes the reflexive individual as situated 'in their life world' (Lash, 1994:156) which is negotiated through the 'economic, social and cultural capital' (Bourdieu 1977 and 1986) at their

disposal. The concept of capital enables a deeper insight into the ways that working-class women engage with the predominantly middle-class structures of (H)E. As with the work of Skeggs (1997) the working-class woman often has more limited access to the forms of capital which best position her to more successfully negotiate the British Education System. For example the working-class woman and her families' access to, and possession of, knowledge of highest performing schools, and post and pre-92 universities are discussed later in the thesis.

Chapter 2 begins to explore the emotional aspects of engagement with (H)E which is strongly focussed upon later in the thesis. The working-class woman may position herself, but also be positioned by the education system onto particular pathways designated as suitable, such as more often vocational rather than academic courses, or undergo processes of 'undereducation' (Brine, 1999) as a result of differential access to, and possession of, capital.}

Chapter 2 continues with a reflexive account which clearly positions the researcher in the research and examines my own history. The advantages and disadvantages of such an approach are considered and justifications set forth for the subjective positioning of the researcher in this auto/biographical analysis. Major consideration is given to the shifting balance of power in the researcher researched relationship. A broad discussion of this area sets forth the researcher's position regarding this and clarifies that re-alignment of the power relationship within research is sought. However, I clearly state that analysis remains the job of the researcher in this account, who has access to many 'life stories' which are converted to 'life histories' through the addition of context, analysis and theory. I state that the stance of this research is one of 'activist research' (Fine, 1994) rather than 'voice'.

Chapter 2 begins to explore ethical issues where 'commodification of rapport' (Duncombe and Jessop, 2002) and 'reciprocity' are discussed and this signifies a continued emphasis upon a desire to break down power relations within this research. It continues by outlining the 'historical context' of the research. To justify the focus upon working-class women I introduce the concept of 'crisis of masculinity', arguing that this is more accurately a '**classed** crisis of masculinity'. I go on to state that a 'classed crisis of femininity' also exists and the masculine crisis discourse is in danger of overshadowing this. This chapter states that hierarchies and divisions between the masculine/feminine 'classed crisis' are not useful.

This research further justifies its focus upon working-class women by stating that much discourse assumes a greater acceptance of and opportunities within the changing occupational structure for working-class women than working-class men. The review here finds evidence that working-class women are as likely to suffer from 'ontological insecurity' (Giddens, 1991) as working-class men, and may 'mourn' the loss of the traditional self characterized by a gendered division of labour. Working-class women may also experience structural and individual barriers to remaking themselves as may working-class men.

This chapter continues by contextualizing the focus upon educational structures and defining what this research means by the structures of education. The dominant middle-class bias of educational structures is analyzed. Bourdieu's (1977) concept of 'habitus' is discussed and explained as both part of what goes toward maintaining the structures of education, and the link between the way that the individual negotiates these structures. {Bourdieu's concept of habitus is a theoretical tool which enables a deeper understanding of the ways that working-class women may experience (H)E. Habitus can be explained as the history of individuals developed through their relationship to a group. 'Habitus' is informed by many aspects of identity, within this research the conscious and unconscious influence of class is the focus. Chapter 2 begins to examine how the working-class woman's class informed habitus can be at odds with the dominant middle-class structures of (H)E. This chapter continues by linking the work of Plummer (2000) Parr (1999) and Lynch and O'neill (1994) with the concept of habitus to demonstrate that the working-class woman may often feel the need to change or subdue her working-class self to attain, and maintain, educational and occupational success within the structures of (H)E.} Agency and structure are considered in this analysis and through Bourdieu (1989 and 1990) and other theorists such as Plummer (2000) the chapter concludes that the middle-class bias of education is more easily negotiated by the middle-classes.

Chapter 3 sets out the theoretical basis of the study, arguing that theory, policy and practice in the British education system is largely underpinned by liberal/neo-liberal theories of equality of opportunity and meritocracy which justify the continued disparity between those groups who benefit least and most from the British education system. It describes how the education system claims that modes of inequality have less of an influence upon educational outcome, and that inequalities that continue are 'fairly unequal' (Saunders, 1990, 1995 and 1996). The chapter sets out the competing understandings of this thesis including the view

that inequalities of class are becoming more deeply embedded in a marketized system of education based upon choice and competition. A critique of the concept of meritocracy and equality of opportunity is offered and Brown's (1990) 'waves' of education are introduced exploring the post war era and the tri-partite system; the comprehensive 'era' of the 1960s and 1970s; and the marketized era of education from the 1988 Education Act onwards. The groups into which the research participants are divided mirror these 'waves'. The three groups are utilized within the chapters of this research to demonstrate similarities and differences within these time periods. A focus upon the 'third wave' of education from the 1988 Education Act onwards, attempts to demonstrate increasing inequality which arises directly from a market system of education where different class groups are more and less able to effectively compete.

This chapter moves on to explore 'classed and gendered constructions of learner identities' where reference is made back to Victorian times and the work of Purvis (1991) who makes clear the divisions between the working-class 'good woman' and middle-class 'ladylike homemaker'. Dyhouse (1977) discusses the 'social anxieties' surrounding the working-class woman from the late 19th century. Moving on with a more contemporary focus the work of Plummer (2000) Bates (1984 and 1990) Buswell (1992) and Colley, et.al. (2003) is utilized to demonstrate the continued middle-class bias of the British education system. Processes such as 'anticipatory socialization', 'filtering', 'vocational habitus' and 'cooling-out' are evaluated.

Chapter 3 continues with an analysis of the historical and continued associations between intelligence, ability and class within the British education system. An overview of the development of IQ testing and of hereditarian theories is given to demonstrate such connections in the past. Contemporary theory is utilized to demonstrate that such connections continue, albeit unconsciously. The work of Gillbourn and Youdell (2000, 2001) is utilized to demonstrate that the competitive A-C economy that has developed has resulted in the intensification of such associations and that whereas in the past intelligence was linked to genetic endowment, today ability has come to carry similar connotations.

The chapter concludes with an overview of some of the major reasons for differential participation in (HE) by under-represented groups and identifies five major reasons through the work of Gilchrist, Phillips and Ross (2003): lack of information; lack of value; lack of

entry qualifications; financial risk; and the impact of class identity. This chapter identifies a substantive area to be explored from this research of 'the embodiment of innate in/ability and/or inferiorization' present in the construction of 'classed and gendered learner identities' for some working-class women that can lead to a sense of 'lack'.

Chapter 4 clearly articulates the ontological, epistemological and philosophical underpinnings of this research. Drawing particularly on the work of Pring (2004) and Bourdieu (in Grenfell and James, 1998) dualisms within research methodology and methods are discussed and discounted as often unnecessary divisive barriers within research. A consideration of subjective and objective positions is offered with the conclusion that all research is influenced by the subjective, and the interpretivist nature of this research works within a framework which utilizes subjectivity whilst maintaining rigorous enquiry. Within this paradigm validity is sought through honest, transparent research which documents processes by which themes are identified and tentative extension of knowledge acquired. Feminism is considered in this chapter and I outline my own view which is that feminism in this research is a perspective which informs methodology but that the emphasis of this research remains class and this is prioritized over gender conflict throughout[3]. Feminist theory therefore has an influence upon this research but the marginalization of class and middle-class bias of much feminist theory is acknowledged in this chapter. The over-riding influence upon this thesis is explained as social justice which encompasses all sites of inequality. An in-depth discussion of competing models of social justice is given in this chapter with reference to the work of Griffiths (1998, 2003) Gewirtz (1998, 2001) and Young (1990). My own personal value system and experience within education is considered here in line with my view upon social justice.

Chapter 4 also gives a detailed account of the how participants were accessed, and the methods used to gain and analyze the data. Ethical considerations are further discussed here with a continued focus upon power relations within research with a primary emphasis upon 'informed consent' and 'researcher responsibility' (Olesen, 2005). Chapter 4 concludes with an account of how and why 9 women became a greater focus of this research within the three groups outlined.

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[3] Though the intersections of class and gender are acknowledged within the content of this thesis.

Chapter 5 forms the first analysis chapter in this thesis. The 9 women identified from the three groups are the focus of this chapter which considers the 'classed and gendered construction of learner identities'. This chapter clearly discusses aspects of the lives of these 9 women as they are split into the three groups. Within each group each of the 9 participants' lives are broadly discussed recounting family background, primary and secondary education and post-compulsory educational experiences and choices. The focus here is upon the literature reviewed which highlights class processes within the family and school, thus the work of Bates (1984 and 1990), Buswell (1992) and Colley et.al. (2003) is utilized in detail to show the identified practices of 'filtering', 'anticipatory socialization', and 'cooling-out' in action in these 9 women's lives. Comparisons are made between the three groups to explore similarities and differences and to demonstrate the continuation of such processes to the present day. This chapter concludes by stating that class inequalities can be identified as becoming more, rather than less, deeply embedded in today's market system of education.

Chapter 6 is the second analysis chapter and broadens the analysis to give an overview of the data collected from all 16 of the participants. This chapter deals with the substantive issue of 'embodiment of innate in/ability and or inferiorization' which may lead to a sense of personal 'lack'. Once again focussing upon the three identified time periods, the 16 women are analyzed within their respective positions within group one, two or three. Links back to the literature which focuses upon intelligence, ability and class are made. Processes of the 'embodiment of innate in/ability and or inferiorization' by participants and those who educate them are identified within the data. As with chapter 5 similarities and differences are explored between the three groups and the continuation and deepening of the processes are identified. This chapter clarifies the position of this research which is that class continues to inform theory, policy and practice within the British education system, and that a marketized system of education embeds inequality in terms of class more deeply.

Chapter 7 narrows the focus once again back upon the 9 women discussed in chapter 5 within group one, two and three. The substantive issue explored in this chapter is deficiency which links into the literature and data discussed in chapter 6 and the sense of 'lack' that can be identified in the participants' words. The focus here is upon (H)E and the concept of deficiency. Utilizing the findings of the recent Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) (2006) report, this chapter gives an overview of the continued references

to working-class deficiency and to the 'them and us' language that can characterize it. The chapter problematizes (H)E institutions and practices and explores the possibility of institutional rather than individual deficit, and then considers the possibility of widespread institutional change which acknowledges a wider and more equitable student body and its needs. The words of the participants are used to demonstrate the continuation of divisions between traditional and non-traditional students in terms of entry qualification, vocational and academic divides, full and part-time study, and the differential needs of students. Participant accounts highlight that perceptions of deficiency contribute to the continued sense of 'lack' that can be experienced by working-class women within (H)E and that this affects choices regarding whether, where, when and how to engage with the structures of (H)E. Questions are raised in this chapter as to the shape of (H)E institutions, and to the ability of institutions to respond to a changing student body that equitable widening participation would bring about.

Chapter 8 is the concluding chapter of this thesis. I will consider how this research has met the aims of the study and give an overview of the findings of this research. Suggestions to increase the choice for engagement in (H)E for working-class women will be set out in this final chapter as a product of the literature reviewed and the research undertaken. This chapter will conclude the research with an overview of gaps within this research and suggestions for further study. It will ultimately argue that class inequalities within the British education system endure, despite claims that equality of opportunity operates in a meritocracy independent of factors such as ethnicity, gender – and for this research - class.

Concluding comments

The introduction to the thesis has set out some of the arguments and theories to be pursued, and clarified the direction of the research. The aims of the research have been set out, and the participants of the study, and methodology and methods used briefly introduced.

The following chapter will set out the position this research takes upon class arguing that class should be repositioned as central to educational theory, policy and practice, despite moves by some theorists to eradicate or play down class within education.

My own position in the research has been given consideration and will be more fully discussed. Personal and professional interest with this area of research undoubtedly influenced my research choices. Chapter 2 will give a detailed account of my reflexive presence within this research and explore issues of power within research. The reasons for emphasis upon working-class women will be introduced and discussion upon what this research means by the structures of (H)E presented.

Chapter 2

Context of the Research

Introduction

This chapter is divided into four contexts: the class context, the personal context; the historical context; and the educational context.

The class context will consider the concept and definition of class within a time period where its relevance is brought into question. Consideration of the post-modern critique of class will be given, and a counter critique offered which justifies the continued emphasis upon class that this research takes. A definition of class will be set forth that acknowledges class both as category and process.

Within the personal context a short auto/biographical account will be given where my own educational trajectory as a working-class girl and woman will be a focus. Literature which analyzes the experiences of working-class groups in education will be engaged with to begin to demonstrate some of the processes which may go toward the development of learner identities which impact upon choices made or not made within the educational trajectory of many other working-class girls and women. Moving on from the reflexive bias of this research and attempts to overcome and work positively with such bias, consideration will be given to the power dimensions that exist between the researcher and the researched.

The historical context of this chapter will focus upon the differences that exist between (H)E participation for working-class girls and boys; women and men. This chapter will describe the existence of a 'classed crisis of femininity and masculinity' and its impact upon educational engagement. Discussion over 'new times individualization' will take place with a focus upon the difficulties that both working-class genders encounter in attempts to remake the self in an individualized, competitive and marketized education system which claims that class has lost much of its impact and has less influence upon social mobility.

The educational context of this chapter describes what this research means by the structures of (H)E. Forms of power in the education system are discussed and analysis of the middle-

class bias of education considered. The links between structure and individual agency are explored and Bourdieu's (1977) concept of 'habitus' introduced. 'Habitus' is a focus of this thesis and is used to identify a range of processes such as the ways in which different groups are more or less able to engage with the education system.

Class Context

Class critique

> Sociologists who have stopped the time-machine and, with a good deal of conceptual huffing and puffing, have gone down to the engine-room to look, tell us that nowhere at all have they been able to locate and classify a class…(Thompson, 1968: 939).

''Death' of class' literature (Crompton and Scott, 2000; Pakulski and Waters, 1996) claims that class has lost its impact in a de-industrialized consumer society. Traditional class theorists such as Glass (1954) Lockwood (1958) and Goldthorpe and Lockwood (1963) focussed upon class and occupation and opened up a debate which culminated in claims that a breakdown in class divisions and class consciousness has occurred. Post-modern critique has extended this debate, claiming that as processes of individualization take hold and people perceive themselves as in charge of their own destiny class, and its impact lessens.

This introduction to the thesis sets out to offer counter arguments to some of the post-modern critiques. In so doing I will demonstrate how class is defined in this research. In a knowledge economy, which is argued to be consumer rather than production led Bauman (1998: 1) quite rightly states:

> It is one thing to be poor in a society of producers and universal employment; it is quite a different thing to be poor in a society of consumers…

What this section addresses is the relevance of processes of class today, where 'consumption no less than production is a classed and classifying process.' (Reay, 1998: 262)[4].

Consumption and colonization[5] of the best of education is a prime example:

> Last night Sir Peter Lampl, of the Sutton Trust said: "The best state schools in the country are effectively closed to the majority of less well-off families... (Taylor, 2005: 1).

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[4] Field (2000) discusses how old exclusions are being overlaid with 'more complex patterns of inequality' (103).

[5] Ball's (2003) research suggests that all public services are eventually dominated by the middle-classes.

Beck and Giddens set forth arguments that the significance of class in the traditional sense of: conflict, consciousness and loyalty has demised. Closer reading of their work clarifies a continued awareness that – at least for now –

> …class does not disappear just because traditional ways of life fade away…the end of class society is not some big revolutionary bang (Beck, 1992: 99).

Class remains significant and is one of a number of factors that contribute to the formation of our identities and to continuing and polarizing inequalities within a 'reflexive' and 'individualized' modernity (Beck, Giddens and Lash, 1994; Giddens, 1991). Memories of past and present class; shape past, present and future actions and orientations where:

> Memory is the after-life of history. It is through memory that history continues to live in the hopes, the ends, and the expectations of men and women as they seek to make sense of the business of life, to find a pattern in chaos, to construe familiar solutions to unfamiliar worries (Bauman, 1982: 1).

In this quote Bauman articulates a process akin to Bourdieu's 'habitus' (1977) where our history orientates future actions [6]. I agree With Beck, Bauman and Giddens, that we are in a different stage of modernity, where the impact, visibility and significance of class has changed. Where I differ is that the 'post-modern' class debate under-estimates the importance of current class positioning and past class processes in shaping our destinations and biographies in an individualized, competitive, consumer society. The following analysis of class consciousness offers alternative positions upon the reflexive self and the consciousness that emerges. Skegg's (1996, 1997, 2004) work on the organizing effects of class and differentiated access to the reflexive self supports Bourdieu's (1987: 5) alternative theories on reflexivity and knowledge of one's social space where a '…sense of one's place is at the same time a sense of the place of others…'. Reay's (2005) work on 'The Psychic Landscape of Social Class' demonstrates that emotional class consciousness remains strong, the participants of this research display similar attachments [7].

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[6] Goffman (1959) discusses a 'sense of place' which orientates our actions and others' perception of us.

[7] In further agreement with the 'post-modern' theorists, our identity is much more than identification to the group and it always has been.

Class consciousness in an 'individualized' and 'reflexive' modernity

Beck and Giddens 'suggest an erosion of class identities in 'late modernity'' (Skeggs, 2004: 52) which they attribute to projects of the self accessed through reflexive choices. Skeggs suggests that individuals have different levels of access to the reflexive self which is directly related to class position 'class informs the production of subjectivity' (Skeggs, 1997: 75). Often participants of her research 'dis-identify' with class positioning but this is not because of the erosion of class identities, but rather to escape the way they are positioned by others because of their class. Identifying with being working-class for many of the women in her study signifies a 'lack' of some sort:

> They find it very difficult to trade on being working class and even more difficult to find anything positive associated with their working-class position (Skeggs, 1997: 94).

Bourdieu's use of reflexivity is quite different to that of Beck and Giddens in that Bourdieu does not situate the individual as objectively separate to the structure. Beck and Giddens place greater emphasis on the capacity of the individual to stand outside of past and present processes, somehow assuming that history has less capacity to shape present and future actions and orientations. Bourdieu's reflexive individual on the other hand is oriented and orientates to a large extent through 'habitus'. Lash explains this well in relation to Beck and Giddens theories of :

> …a disembedded, cost-minimizing and benefit-maximising, preference-scheduled actor…Habitus, in contrast, assumes a certain 'throwness' into a web of already existing practices and meanings (Lash, 1994: 156).

Bourdieu situates 'knowers in their life-world' (ibid: 156) and, as Skeggs, takes account of differential access to 'appropriate' capital needed to legitimately move between social spaces. The participants of this research display behaviour more in line with Bourdieu's reflexive individual and Skegg's class-informed subject rather than Beck and Gidden's rational, choice making actor able to transcend the boundaries of their history and class.

Reay (2005: 911) argues:

> In contemporary British society social class is not only etched into our culture, it is still deeply etched into our psyches, despite class awareness and class consciousness being seen as 'a thing of the past'.

Class remains a 'visible' and valid site that can be perceived of with a kind of 'permanence', and can be psychically felt to be 'inescapable', and at the least is often experienced as

structurally constraining. Reay identifies a range of emotional responses to class but focuses on 'fear' and 'shame' (2005: 914) two responses which are predominant in my research and go toward the dynamics at play in the development of two substantive issues to be discussed in detail: 'classed and gendered constructions of learner identity' and 'the embodiment of innate in/ability and/or inferiorization'. Such emotional responses can also be seen in effect within the focus of this research: 'how and why working-class women engage with the structures of (higher) education'.

Reay's data testifies to the small, yet regular ways in which class permeates the psyche and continues with an analysis of the 'costs' involved in moving outside of working-classness which seems to be necessary for educational and/or occupational 'success' [8]. Reay's (2005: 923-924) research demonstrates, as does my own that:

> While dominant discourses argue that individualism has displaced social class, making it largely irrelevant in contemporary society, I have argued that class operates just as powerfully at the individual level as it ever did on a collective level…The inequitable operations of social class damage all of us…But it is the most vulnerable, the working classes, who are made to bear the greatest psychological burdens of an unequal society.

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[8] This is widely discussed in Mahoney and Zmroczek (1997). Lawler (1999) discusses the 'pain and estrangement' associated with class movement. Charlesworth (2000) utilizes Bourdieu's theories in his discussion of the 'disempowered' working-classes.

How is class defined in this research?

It is not sufficient to reject class because empirical measures of its borders prove problematic, or because class consciousness is claimed to have demised. Class remains a useful analytical tool within a hierarchical society where '…hierarchical practices emerge as 'second nature' unremarkable and ordinary' (Bottero, 2004: 995). Because those practices are rendered 'unremarkable' or 'ordinary', it does not make them less powerful. Reay (1997) draws our attention to the continued 'filtering mechanisms' of class in that people continue to situate both themselves and others in relation to perceptions of class.

As with Archer, Hutchings and Ross (2003: 12) this research utilizes a range of theoretical approaches '…to forge a 'middle way'' between structural categorical approaches and post-structural process approaches. For categorical purposes I refer to the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification scheme (NS-SEC) [9] as set out in table one below.

Table One.

The National Statistics Socio-economic Classification Analytic Classes		
1	Higher managerial and professional occupations	
	1.1	Large employers and higher managerial occupations
	1.2	Higher professional occupations
2	Lower managerial and professional occupations	
3	Intermediate occupations	
4	Small employers and own account workers	
5	Lower supervisory and technical occupations	
6	Semi-routine occupations	
7	Routine occupations	
8	Never worked and long-term unemployed	

Source: Office for National Statistics (ONS)

This research works both with the participants' class of origin and class of destination. I have chosen to work with the NS-SEC rather than the more traditional Registrar General

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[9] Referring to the introduction in 2001 of the NS-SEC which has come to replace the Registrar General scheme as the main occupationally based classification scheme.

class schema[10] as the NS-SEC is more in line with the structural changes that have occurred within the occupational sector. The NS-SEC measures employment relations and conditions and classifies individuals in accordance with levels of economic security, prospects, authority and autonomy. The Registrar General scheme classifies along more traditional lines associated with skill divisions such as classification of manual and non manual work by class. From 2001 the NS-SEC is the classification system which has been used for all official purposes; therefore it is also adopted in this research for comparative purposes.

With all categorical approaches there are inherent problems and difficulties in assigning class position. Occupational based classification systems have often been based upon male 'head of household' and as such defining female class position has been problematic. Also many categorical models have been influenced by male notions of occupational categories, taking little account of female production (Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody, 1999). When to assign class position to each individual in their own right, instead of with reference to parents' class position is another issue, one which takes on greater salience with the extension of economic dependency that occupational and educational changes have brought about. Universities and College Admissions Services (UCAS) currently uses the age of 21 to begin to define students to a class position in their own right, however many students move back home after their studies and may continue to be economically dependent on their parents for some time after this. Other young people are independent from their parents and support themselves far sooner than 21.

Most criticisms of categorical approaches come from post-modern critique, as this chapter has demonstrated, thus the categorical approach utilized here is combined with a class as process approach to class analysis which views class as a non static process across the 'life course' (Gershuny, 2000) which is cross cut by other factors such as gender and ethnicity.

For practical purposes it is necessary to set out the factors which constitute 'working-class' for this research so as to identify working-class participants. The women's class of origin is defined in this research through: predominant housing tenure in childhood (or whilst living

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[10] For more details on the Registrar General classification, and its replacement by the NS-SEC, see (ONS) or Archer (2003). The NS-SEC was developed from Goldthorpe's schema (1997) to replace both the Registrar General scheme and Socio Economic Group (SEG) scheme as advized by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

with parents/guardians), parents/guardians predominant occupation, parents/guardians level of education, parents/guardians knowledge of higher education, and whether the participant is amongst the first generation in their family to go to university.

Housing tenure: Predominantly participants – growing up – lived in council or social housing (some parents purchased housing through Right to Buy schemes; one participant's parents purchased a private semi-detached house).

Occupation: Participants' parents/guardians predominantly work/ed in jobs which offered low security and prospects, and were positions of little authority which offered little or no autonomy (class 3-8 NS-SEC).

Levels of education: All of the participants' parents/guardians had/have little or no post compulsory educational qualifications (most parents left school at the earliest legal age and did not return to continue study).

Knowledge of HE and participation: Most parents/guardians had/have no/basic knowledge of HE. Those participants who have participated in higher education are predominantly the first in their families to do so and are certainly first generation participants.

Whilst I acknowledge the importance of self definition of class, some participants displayed a lack of class consciousness or an element of class confusion. Whilst post-modern class critiques would suggest that this is evidence for the demise of class I instead concur with Skeggs (1997:74) who states of participants in her research:

> …whilst they made enormous efforts to distance themselves from the label of working class, their class position (alongside the other social positions of gender, race and sexuality), was the omnipresent underpinning which informed and circumscribed their ability *to be.*

Therefore where self definition of class was absent or confused this research defines these women as working-class where they fit the criteria outlined.

Having outlined my definition of class for this research I also fully acknowledge that class is not fixed, rather it is a process as outlined by Archer, Hutchings and Ross (2003) and the class that you belong to may change and alter throughout the life course. Class cannot be essentialized – gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, generation…all of these factors impact upon the experience of class. Neither should class be viewed as deterministic, agency as well as structure influences the path of our biographies. However, for those people who

begin life working-class (under the definition of class as outlined here) class of origin continues to impact upon the choices and decisions that are made throughout life as we negotiate the familiar and the strange through a deeply embedded class 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1977). Class analysis which seeks an 'holistic' approach to class encompassing culture, identity and economics (Devine and Savage, 2000: 187) may enable a more open and honest debate about the nature of class and its effects upon groups and individuals in a rapidly changing society. This research acknowledges all the ongoing difficulties associated with the concept of class but considers class to remain an important site of inequality and a useful conceptual tool in analyzing inequality. With reference to all the points considered in this chapter a 'working definition' of class has been offered here but no claims are made that this working definition is without flaws. The people of this research and their words will speak more about class than any working definition can hope to offer:

> The finest meshed sociological net cannot give us a pure specimen of class, any more than it can give us one of deference or of love. The relationship must always be embodied in real people and in a real context (Thompson, 1968: 8).

Personal context

Reflexivity

In my first week of secondary school back in 1980 I was asked what my name was. On stating my first and last name I was aware that my surname marked me out as in need of monitoring[11]. I now understand that my background may have influenced expectations of my potential. Gilborn and Youdell (2000 and 2001) draw attention to the connections that teachers and schools can make between working-class pupils (and certain minority ethnic groups) and ability:

> Only rarely do teachers draw a direct connection between 'ability' and a pupil's class… but such connection seems to be operating tacitly in the ways that certain pupils are perceived as lacking in effort or the necessary skills to achieve…it is also clear that social class and ethnicity can also act as powerful markers of 'ability' (2001: 82).

I shall return to their work on ability and class later in the thesis as this connection in the burgeoning 'A-to-C economy' (ibid: 74) that has developed has become much more

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[11] My four brothers before me had either been expelled, suspended or had low attendance and low/no educational attainment in terms of accreditation.

pronounced for the working-class children (and certain minority ethnic groups) of today. My surname, manner and dress marked me out quite clearly as working-class; statistically I was unlikely to attain results that would contribute very much to the attainment levels of the school, and in the due course of time – I did not.

Like many of the women in this study I had no political class consciousness and was unaware of the differential treatment that working-class children can experience in the education system. I had no real concrete aspirations; no expectations of what the education system could give me, and – again like many of the women in this study - made no connections between my school career and my career beyond school.

My secondary school years were relatively uneventful, I did not always try as hard as I could at school, but I completed what was expected of me most of the time and I did not misbehave – I went through the motions of school. I can recall times when I was lethargic and disinterested about my studies and moments of inspiration when I made a real effort. One particular teacher did take an interest in me, my English teacher, who saw enough potential in me to enter me for O level English instead of CSE. Some students, I can remember, paid to enter the O level grade, even though they did not follow this syllabus. I remember wondering if I could do this but not following it through: most of my friends were doing CSEs so it seemed 'natural' that I would too; I had no idea how I went about transferring to O level; I really didn't think I was capable of O level; and I did not want to ask for the exam entrance fees as though the fees were not huge our family finances were so restricted that I just knew exam fees would not be a priority. As one of the participants of this research also recalls when she discusses how she would rather not ask her parents for something she needed because they would struggle to provide it for her and she would rather they were spared that extra pressure:

> I didn't have to go without anything, they always tried…but as I got older I didn't like to ask, I didn't want them to struggle (Emma, first interview July 2004).

My mother attended parents' evenings, she sometimes told me to do my best and not to worry about the outcome as long as I tried. She didn't really know what subjects I was taking when I made my option choices in year three as it was then, or what exams I would take, let alone the fact that I had been relegated to the C.S.E. groups, which I vaguely knew

meant that I would be taking the 'useless'[12] exams. Lareau and Shumar (1996) and Lareau (1997 and 2000) discuss the difference in relationships that working-class parents can have with schools and teachers. Parental participation is problematized and 'the dark side of parental involvement' demonstrated (Lareau, 2000: 149-165). It is discussed that those families with more assertiveness give their offspring educational advantages. Mann (1998) backs this up and explores the impact of 'traditional' and 'transitional' working-class mothers' relationships with their daughters in terms of academic achievement. His analysis finds that those daughters whose mothers are making transitions from working-class to middle-class through acquisition of credentials are able to offer more support than the 'traditional' mothers. Reay (1998a) contributes to this debate through analysis of the gendered and classed processes that both working and middle-class mothers experience in negotiating the educational market. Her findings suggest that middle-class mothers have distinct advantages within the educational market in operation today and this would be linked to their classed 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1977) which mirrors the middle-class bias of the education system. The differential access to resources that are at the disposal of middle-class mothers also skews the educational system in their favour.

I cannot remember why I chose the options I did: chemistry, geography, biology, typing, catering. There was not much advice on offer, just as the scant careers advice I was offered amounted to a choice between secretarial or hairdressing training at college when I left school: 'you don't want to do journalism, take a typing course, you'll always get work that way' – I chose hairdressing. There were no conversations with myself or the girls (and boys) like me about careers outside of vocational training and certainly – as far as I was aware - nothing about university. Buswell (1992) discusses how working-class girls are 'trained' to accept low pay low skill work, and Colley et.al. (2003: 477) introduce the concept of 'vocational habitus' where they analyze the ways in which certain groups and individuals are 'cooled out' of particular ambitions and career paths. I knew nothing about university, nor would have thought to find out.

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[12] 'Useless is my own term but it signifies my knowledge that C.S.E.s were viewed as secondary to O levels. Prior to September 1986 a two tier system of certification existed. In 1986 these two tiers were amalgamated into one singular exam the G.C.S.E where it can be argued that grades A-C have come to replace the old O level grade, re-instating a new two tier system of accreditation. Those students attaining a D grade or below within the G.C.S.E. may also acknowledge the same sense of 'uselessness' that I describe.

Reay (2005: 914) draws attention to 'working-class resentment' and 'anger' and to the 'felt injury' (ibid: 916) of living class. In line with the analysis of others (e.g. Bates, 1984 and 1990; Buswell, 1992; and Colley et.al.,2003) Reay goes on to discuss how failure can be fixed in the working-classes (2005: 916) and I can distinctly recall a 'fixity' to my own sense of failure as something I did not feel I could change. A participant of this research who went on to become a teacher recalls instances when colleagues 'fixed' failure in their students:

> In the staff room there were discussions over students and a lot of those students came from council estates and the teachers definitely, definitely had, um, prejudice against kids from those estates…so without even realizing it they were criticising me (Rebecca, first interview September 2004).

Like many of the women in the study I was resigned throughout childhood, without really knowing it to be resignation, to a particular life trajectory and an 'inevitable' life of low pay, low skill work, probably marriage, probably children, before more low pay, low skill work. Bourdieu's (1977 and 1986) concepts of 'habitus' and 'choice of the necessary' usefully account for such resignation:

> Necessity imposes a taste for necessity which implies a form of adaptation to and consequently acceptance of the necessary, a resignation to the inevitable, a deep-seated disposition… (Bourdieu, 1986: 372).

Messages to working-class girls and women:

> …tells them they can be what they want in a labour market that cruelly sets limits on any ambition, together with an education system that classifies them as fit for certain kinds of work … (Walkerdine, Lucey and melody, 2001: 21).

I took my CSEs and attained a range of passes from grade 1-4. I left school, started a hairdressing course at my local college, and then quit after a year because I wanted to work and earn money. I started my first full-time job in a service station, and then did a range of jobs: cleaning, shop work, waiting work, bar work, office and clerical work, before I married, had children and then worked part-time, while they were young, in similar work as before. Then my life trajectory was 'interrupted' 'disrupted' from its historically and socially confined boundaries by my return to study and then later - entrance to university. I continue to analyze this interruption or disruption, and like the women in this study, there is no one reason or answer for why my life should take such a diversion away from its historically, economically and socially defined path.

Plummer (2000: 86) focuses upon:

> …the conflicts a group of working-class girls faced when they attempted to make use of the education system to escape their destiny, foretold in their working-class mothers' and grandmothers' lives.

This research also focuses upon such conflicts in an attempt to offer further understandings of why I and some of the women in this study have consciously or unconsciously 'escaped their destiny'.

Hey asks ''Whatever Happened to the Working Class?' (2003: 319) and replies that:

> A short, flippant answer to the above question is that some of them are women and some of these women have entered the academy.

Often a decision to return to learning is not driven by any particular reasoning or plan; it might be a vague notion of needing a change in life, of not feeling fulfilled, or of wanting to prove to oneself or to others your capabilities. Parr (1997) discusses her return to learning and does not attribute it to any great master plan, rather awareness '…of a need to 'do something'' (ibid: 33) and this would mirror my own vague or as I have described it elsewhere my 'sometime' dream of an education' (Bovill, 2003: 42) and the often vague notions that 'there must be something better' articulated by the women in this study.

Utilizing my own auto/biography in this research – for example by analyzing my own decision to return to education - is part of the research itself. I am, to all intents and purposes, a 17th participant, and in taking this step I acknowledge the advantages and disadvantages of this approach. Plummer (2000: 88) acknowledges that her '…past and present experience of class strongly influenced the research approach.'

The use of an auto/biographical approach enabled her:

> …to enter the space behind the magnifying glass as one of the subjects of my research, thus allowing the authority of my own class experience – which prompted me to look beyond existing class theories – to be recognised (ibid, 2000: 88).

Stanley (1993) discusses the work of Merton (1972) who makes reference to 'insiders and outsiders':

> Robert Merton (1972) notes that different kinds of knowledge, both equally valid in their different ways, are produced by such persons (Stanley, 1993: 42).

I agree that it is not only the working-classes who can offer valid and considered analysis of education and class, and that you do not have to be an 'insider' to research the experience of the working-class. There are a range of opinions on insider/outsider research, the authors in Mahoney and Zmroczek (1997) give this issue much consideration. Casey (2003: 107) analyzes how she and the women in her study make sense of 'middle class interpretation of their working class lives'. Lynch and O'Neill (1994) discuss the ways that middle-class academics have utilized working-class inequality for professional development, and that policy reflects middle-class understandings of the issues. This can result in management rather than eradication of processes of class inequality. The many debates regarding insider/outsider research present both advantages and disadvantages for both approaches. However, until recently there has been an absence of 'insider' research on class and with this in mind I am utilizing myself as a resource as with 'The auto/biographical I' (Stanley, 1992). I do this whilst remaining aware that my own subjectivity may indeed influence the research. Existing theories and class accounts exist because of other subjectivities – all researchers are present in their research. Working-class accounts of working-class lives by working-class researchers are vital and valuable to educational research. The resultant research can bring with it qualities of empathy, understanding and experience; as well as the possibility of bias. However as Fine, et.al. (2000) discuss bias exists in all research and its consequence has often been seen in the 'othering' of marginalized groups. This research, as does the growing body of research by working-class academics, seeks to interrupt this 'othering'. My discussion of reflexivity will explore my thoughts on, and demonstrate the measures that I take to remain as unbiased as a researcher can lay claim to. What will be offered here are the words of the researched and the reflexive theorizing of the researcher which is affected by past and present experiences and positioning, as is all research whether it recognizes it or not:

> …a materialist science of society must recognize that the consciousness and interpretations of agents are an essential component of the full reality of the social world (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 9).

Bourdieu takes the concept of reflexivity further than to acknowledge social origin (class, gender…). He explores bias of *'location'* (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 39) or the field we come from, in the case of research the academic field, and that our interpretations are also affected by the social relations therein.

The third area of bias that he explores is *'intellectual bias'* (ibid:39):

> It is not the individual unconscious of the researcher but the epistemological unconscious of his *(her)* discipline that must be unearthed…(ibid: 41, my italics).

This might be explained as a kind of institutional unconsciousness which requires institutionalized practices of reflexivity to be able to scrutinize these biases in the 'reflexive return' (ibid: 42) between researcher and researched and their intersections. Reflexivity for Bourdieu is awareness of origin, location and intellectual bias and is countered by analyzing the observer as critically as the observed and having awareness of the many different types of bias that we bring to the research and that are embedded within the practices of research themselves. To claim to be able to withdraw from the world(s) under observation in order that we may study them is a false claim.

Linked to reflexive practice is acknowledgement that differential power relationships exist between the researcher and the researched. To expand this point I will explore two areas where power and vulnerability intersect in a complex relationship between the researcher and the researched. The first will encompass analysis of issues of 'voice', 'rapport' and the potential of 'harm' to the researched. The second will be an exploration of reciprocal research.

Power dimensions in the researcher researched relationship

Power is not static but a fluid two way process and the relations of power ebb and flow through the researcher researched relationship. Davies, et.al. (2002) analyze power and knowledge and imply that within humanist thinking there exist neutral power free zones. This research takes the stance that power is always present and that neutral power free zones are not possible but that it might be possible to create less unequal balances of power. Foucault declares:

> So the birth of the human sciences goes hand in hand with the installation of new mechanisms of power…that the strategies of power actually produce knowledge (1988: 106).

Within this research the dimensions or 'strategies of power' were at times tangible, at other times they were more subtle. The issue of 'voice' and the extent to which narrative analysis allows stories to be told without researcher influence is one such area where power relations are at play, here-in lies a research dilemma that I have struggled with. How much do I allow

the voices of these women to tell it as it is? How much do I intervene in the telling of these stories with analysis and theory? My own position regarding analysis has been guided by the belief that no voice can be presented in research as some kind of 'uncontaminated truth'. This is in contrast to research and theorizing influenced by a phenomenological view[13] which flow from a philosophical positioning which asserts that people and the meanings and classifications that they impose make up social reality. This viewpoint asserts that any attempt to make sense of data only reflects the view/s of those analyzing the data and the categories that they impose. Clough (2002) is a researcher who aims at allowing the text to speak for itself to the reader; for the 'unadulterated' voices of his participants to convey multiple meanings. Aspects of Clough's approach inform my own viewpoint regarding the importance of the voice/s of the participants of this research but I deny that any 'voice' is free from the imposition of the researcher's categorization. There are always 'strategies of power' at your disposal when entrusted with the 'lives' of participants which you are able to shape, edit – even manipulate. Researchers bring with them origin, location and intellectual bias, but the reflexive researcher should also bring with them researcher responsibility and a desire to extend knowledge. Simply by choosing to publish one particular participant's story over another involves some form of bias or categorization in deciding which voice/s make it past transcript and into the public arena. This is undeniably a 'strategy of power' from which there is no escape. Therefore I take the position upon analysis that it is the researcher's job to convert a life story into a life history by analysis, adding context and utilizing theory. At the same time researchers have a responsibility to attempt to convey the 'intended meaning' (Atkinson, 1998) of transcript data.

Fine's analysis of 'Stances' (1994) explores the 'God trick' of 'Ventriloquy where 'the author tells Truth, has no gender, race, class, or stance' (ibid:17). Of 'voice':

> …such researchers appear to let the "Other" speak, just under the covers of those marginal, if now "liberated" voices, we hide (ibid: 19).

And 'activist research' where:

> …the researcher is clearly positioned (passionate) within the domain of a political question or stance…Within these texts, researchers carry a deep responsibility to assess critically and continually our own, as well as informants', changing positions (Ibid: 23).

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[13] As with Charlesworth (2000a).

I align myself with activist research and I continually return to and remain aware of the old (origin) and new (location and intellectual) bias that I bring to the research. Attempts are made throughout the research process to pay attention to the 'intended meaning' of life stories that have been conveyed to me. For example I have returned transcripts to participants with notes of my analysis of these transcripts, giving participants an opportunity to agree or disagree with those extracts of analysis. I fully acknowledge the power sensitive relations of research but deny that stances of 'ventriloquy' or 'voice' have the ability to neutralize such power. I acknowledge my presence in making sense of the data, just as I acknowledge my presence in data generation:

> Making sense of one's data is a personal process and though I take up the position of an insider, the text is still my interpretation of accounts… (Plummer, 2000: 92).

Ultimately, I am open to the participant's interpretation of the research, however as I have access to many life stories I remain in a unique position to be able to analyze all the life stories of this research as a whole and to utilize theory to make 'sense' of the data which is most likely unfamiliar to the participants.

Another danger, in terms of a researcher's potential to abuse their position of power, is that which is present in the development of rapport with participants. Duncombe and Jessop (2002: 107) honestly surmise that:

> Uncomfortably, we came to realize that even feminist interviewing could sometimes be viewed as a kind of *job* where, at the heart of our outwardly friendly interviews, lay the instrumental purpose of persuading interviewees to provide us with data for our research, and also (hopefully) for our future careers.

They go on to discuss the 'commodification' of 'doing rapport' and how this can be used to meet the researcher's own ends. Their article makes very uncomfortable reading and raises ethical and methodological issues. The researcher has to manage the moral aspect of honest, open research relationships which are clear in their boundaries, but at the same time there is a necessity to build a 'rapport' which supports and is conducive to the generation of worthwhile, sometimes very personal, data. Many of the 'techniques' explained as a kind of 'how to do an interview' that a researcher aiming to 'fake friendship' (ibid: 110) would adopt, I adopted myself. Techniques such as: not turning up in business dress, keeping eye contact, adopting a friendly tone, and using reassuring smiles and gestures. Along with some of the 'commodified' techniques they describe I also used some of my own: I stroked dogs – though not a dog lover, accepted cups of tea I didn't want, I kept notes of children and

partners names and asked about these children and partners, I noted and referred to illnesses and health problems they had discussed previously. This was done partially in the hope that I would develop a friendly relationship with the participants but not to lull them in to a false sense of security and then cut and run with the data to do with as I wished. These techniques might be the hallmark of 'faking friendship', but if they are truly this, then I fake friendship every day of my life – sometimes to get what I want, but more often out of politeness, common decency and the desire for daily meetings with people to be pleasant rather than unpleasant.

Duncombe and Jessop (2002) reflect that interviews move along a spectrum between 'genuine rapport' and 'faking friendship'. I would suggest that all relations move along a similar spectrum, where we develop general rapport with some and fake friendship, or more accurately, friendliness with others. The potential to exploit this situation is present, just as it is present in the many negotiations of our everyday lives. As with the other dilemmas I have chosen to focus upon, their existence cannot be denied, and to claim to be able to overcome these dilemmas is to overstate the researcher's capabilities. The reflexive researcher can remain aware of dilemmas such as the very real danger of 'harm' that can befall those who are researched and who end up divulging more than they would have liked to. I discuss in chapter 4 an instance when this happened to me and I made the choice to withhold the information from transcript, advising the participant that it was available to them if they chose. Another instance of this was with one of my younger participants who discussed in detail difficulties that she had growing up in relation to her mother. This was important to the research and so I transcribed it, but when I came to send her the transcript I did not know how to convey to her that she might not want her mother to read this, after she had discussed with me that her mother read her first transcript. If I put this in the letter what would happen if her mother was in the habit of opening her letters? If I knocked on her door with the transcript what if her mother opened the door and took the letter from me? In the end I managed to meet up with her and hand deliver and explain my dilemma to her.

On another occasion I received a letter from a participant who was feeling guilty because she had portrayed her mother in a very harsh light. Her mother was dead and would never have known, but understanding the guilt of talking about one's parents negatively I wrote to her empathizing that I would feel the same, but that her mother had come across as a very strong person coping in difficult circumstances and that her honesty was very important to

the research. I now ask myself 'was this faking friendship'? It was not done with that intent but with the sympathy of one person to another, hoping that my interview had not made this woman feel too bad about herself.

Many such instances presented themselves – I was after all asking participants to talk about their life. I wasn't always prepared for the tears, the regrets, the guilt but I feel that I did not put my professional interests above my ethical and moral duty to protect participants but tried to negotiate between the two. Many documents exist outlining the way that researchers should conduct themselves. The British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2004) and British Sociological Association (BSA, 2002 and 2002a) guidelines are very clear that care over harm to all those involved in research should be paramount and risks minimized. There is no denying, as I have found out, research can be a messy business. Maintaining a professional distance might be one way of avoiding or minimizing harm to participants. It can also be a difficult stance to take and can also lead to data which lacks validity, in that participants never really tell you the full story behind their polite, nervous responses. Rapport is a dilemma which is uniquely negotiated with each participant and each interview. With some participants - maintaining a professional distance may be less rather than more empowering in that you act as a powerful reminder of their perceived subordination, whilst others may find a familiar approach uncomfortable.

My relationships with the participants were varied, however within all the relationships I attempted to develop a reciprocal approach. For example, when some participants strayed off the subject and interviews lasted a very long time, I often allowed their discussions to continue because they quite clearly needed to talk about this area of their life. I did not see the interview as a form of counseling, but I think some of the women did and if they could use the interview in this way then I was happy for them to do this, as long as they understood that I could not professionally help them. Duncombe and Marsden (1996) discuss that research interviews are not therapy, though in some cases with participants they can be seen as this, or participants can use them in this way. It is the job of the researcher to be quite clear that the research is not a form of counseling or therapy, and to inform participants that they are not trained in this area (if this is the case). Also it is the responsibility of the researcher to be aware of potential upset and to be able to refer participants in the direction of appropriate professional help.

Extending the reciprocal nature of the research, some of the participants sought my help in course applications and I made sure that I was able to help them, giving up weekend time, visiting them outside of interviews, phoning institutions and gathering information for them. I often asked for input from the participants, and with each interview I transcribed I sent full copies to the participants. This was done so that they could confirm that I was accurately portraying what was said at interview. This is also in line with my desire to challenge power relations and Atkinson's (1998) advice upon 'intended meaning'. By sending transcripts back to participants they are given an opportunity to confirm that the transcript conveys what they meant to convey and also it is an opportunity for them to add detail that they may not have recalled at the interview. Often participants took advantage of these opportunities by sending me additional or amended material. I worked with all this data to weave a rich and valid picture of 'intended meaning' and to aid me in Fine's (1994) stance of 'activist research' which advocates close scrutiny of our own bias in the research. By collecting multiple sources of data from participants and having an open view toward analysis it is more likely that valid interpretation takes place. Using many sources of data is an aid to help minimize personal bias by using these sources to check and balance what researchers views, values and experience lead them to think they might find. This is practice advocated by researchers such as Atkinson (1998) who states that participant revision of documents can be useful to the analysis process. However he also advises that many participants will pass on the opportunity to read their life. Miller (2000) advises caution in the involvement of participants in analysis. This research takes the stance that analysis is largely the job of the researcher as has been previously discussed; however participant input in analysis should be considered and can be a useful tool of validation.

My commitment to reciprocal research is due to my value system which holds that social justice within research is important[14]. I remain aware of the possibility that reciprocal research can in fact be a mask for very un-reciprocal research in the form of a 'pat on the back' for all the good work you see yourself as doing; or as self aggrandisement and self congratulation for 'helping' so many. I hope that my way around this has been to admit to myself that my research is self serving at times in that it may further my career. Also I admit that sometimes I do feel good because I see myself as having been part of someone's decision to make a change. However I remain very aware that these women (many of them have) are more than capable of running/changing their lives without my input. They live

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[14] The impact of social justice to this research will be expanded upon in chapter 4.

busy, fulfilled lives and my research may well be an unwelcome or time consuming interruption rather than a fulfilling opportunity for them. The sense of awkwardness that I felt on several occasions when participants had obviously forgotten I was coming, and the sense of relief when I managed to persuade them to see me anyway soon shifted any grand 'I'm the professional researcher who has turned up to give you the opportunity to tell me the story of your life' illusions. Casey (2003: 115) discusses similar situations where her research was an intrusion, instances of participants stopping the research as they were pushed for time, forgotten interviews, and wariness of motives.

Sparkes (1998) discusses reciprocal research with acknowledgement that sometimes participants may not feel up to the task: 'what does Andy want me to say? He's the expert…' (ibid: 69). In my own research several participants told me on different occasions something along the lines of 'I've got nothing interesting to tell you' or 'you won't find what I've got to say very useful'. Sparke's participant reports a lack of confidence to ask questions or query things. In my interviews often participants were shy and unconfident. I always encouraged questions and queries, but this evident lack of confidence from some of the participants might well have prohibited this. Sparkes asks his participant: 'Does reciprocity exist?' (ibid: 70). Her response is mixed; she discusses pleasure at his acknowledgement of her and her opinions, feelings of flattery, pride, and curiosity, but also nervousness. I hope that my participants have gained more than they have lost from the process of this research. Does reciprocal research exist? Reciprocal research peaks and troughs both for the researcher and the researched:

> Reciprocal relationships characterized by 'fair trade' are not static but dynamic and vibrant, they ebb and flow over time in their mutual giving and receiving (Sparkes, 1998: 80).

This statement captures the essence of reciprocity for both the participant and the researcher who live busy, separate lives, and who both can afford to be more and less reciprocal at given times. Reciprocal research is characterized by a commitment to mutuality even if it is not always practiced in every instance, a commitment to giving something back to those who give up valuable time, and an acknowledgement that participants not only have something worth saying but might be able to offer insights into the research that elude the researcher. Like many research dilemmas a reciprocal approach is not set in stone at the beginning of research, but is an area which needs re-negotiation throughout the research process.

Historical context

Occupational restructuring and a 'gendered classed crisis'

There is a very real difference present in the 'how and the why' of working-class participation in (H)E for working-class men and women. The move from manufacturing to service industries in 'developed' countries can be seen to have been accompanied by a 'feminization' and 'casualization' of work which has been accompanied by a perceived 'crisis of masculinity' and discourse of improved educational performance for girls and women. It is well documented elsewhere[15] that the 'crisis of masculinity' in terms of educational performance and occupational rewards and the gains that it offers women is overstated. In the post 16 sector many inequalities such as: gender specific subjects, unequal A level entry, unequal entry to pre-92 universities, and the continued lower pay, benefits and promotional prospects for women counter this 'crisis'. The 'crisis of masculinity' could be described more accurately as a crisis for working-class boys and men who have been severely affected by the demise of traditional working-class jobs and many of whom continue to have a problematic relationship with education. Miller (1992) articulates this working-class male crisis drawing on Willis's (1977) account of working-class boys' rejection of the education system, boys:

> Who, by rejecting school, were preparing themselves quite adequately for the least skilled work in the particular manufacturing industries available to them…The problem has been that since that book was published in the late seventies, such work is almost impossible to find (Miller, 1992: 16).

I argue that a '*classed* crisis of masculinity' exists rather than a 'crisis of masculinity', however this discourse combined with the perception that girls outperform boys has a double effect, in that it is in danger of silencing '…demands for increased social justice *for girls and women…*' (Weiner, Arnot and David, 1997: 628) and deflects attention away from the 'classed crisis of femininity' that many working-class girls and women are themselves negotiating.

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[15] Gorard, Rees and Salisbury (2001) Weiner, Arnot and David (1997).

Classed crisis of femininity

Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody (2001) analyze these changes in society. They draw attention to the losses the working class male has suffered through de-industrialization; but as I want to explore here, they question assumptions and misconceptions that women have greater opportunities to re-invent themselves; that all women want to re-invent themselves, and of particular importance here that women have equal resources with which to re-invent themselves:

> Thus the biggest self-invention of all lies in the possibility of the working class remaking itself as middle class (Walkerdine, Lucey and melody, 2001: 21).

Boys' rejection of school and academia, as illustrated by Willis (1977) is a technique also employed by working-class girls, perhaps to protect themselves from the reality of their own likely transition into low skilled, low paid work either in manufacturing (at the time of Willis's study) or the service and care industries today. It might also be a way of asserting their own classed version of 'girl'. This rejection of education may be in response to the 'unfeminine' perception they have of being academic and of the notion that the already threatened working-class male may reject the educated female.

Rather than working-class girls accepting re-constructions of themselves as educationally and occupationally achieving, many may hold onto past constructions of their most potential life trajectory. One which may embrace a gendered division of labour, which is characterized by the wife and mother at home, and supported by a male breadwinner. They may 'mourn' the loss of the potential for this future possible self. Westwood (1984: 103) articulates a dominant view of 'marriage as salvation' for working-class girls in her study of women factory workers:

> Nikki and Trish, like their older sisters and friends, lived at home as daughters and it was not economically possible for them to do anything else. They did not earn a living wage nor could they expect to; instead, they paid £10-£12 a week to their mums for their 'keep' and dreamed of the day when they would be able to leave home. The only way out of the family and into a house or a flat of their own was to join hands with a male wage and, therefore, with the man who went with the wage packet.

The decrease in traditional male working-class jobs and the potential for working-class males to earn a 'family' wage makes this a declining possibility which may be viewed by some working-class women as a real loss.

Previously working-class women's participation in waged labour may have been viewed as temporary, marginal or as a 'useful' or sometimes 'crucial' addition to the family wage at times when the working-class female had fewer demands in the home, such as when the children were starting school. Now the working-class girl and woman is likely to face longer and greater hours in the workplace performing menial and unskilled tasks for low pay and benefits in a job she derives little or no satisfaction from. To portray the working-class female as emancipated by these changes is overstating the positive benefits in terms of class opportunities for the working-class female. Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody (2001) give a more accurate portrayal of what this means for many working-class females. They discuss how for many working-class girls financial dependence on family has increased as previously many of these girls gained financial independence before their middle-class counterparts through earlier entry to the workforce. Now it is more likely that their entry to the workforce will be delayed as they are compelled to stay on in education and filtered onto low skill training courses such as childcare as explored in the work of Bates (1990) Buswell (1992) and Colley et.al. (2003)[16]. The differences in qualifications gained by working and middle-class girls remains, so that many working-class girls end up in desperately alienating situations, in jobs that they hate and have little hope of escaping so that their despair is:

> …not mitigated by light at the end of the tunnel, for the only hope was to have been born a different person…People who cannot imagine things being different, cannot at least fantasise something else, cannot reinvent themselves (Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody, 2001: 68).

This line of thinking ties directly into the arguments that I want to make in this thesis. If you cannot reasonably view yourself as an 'able', capable, competent learner in today's performance orientated marketized society, then it may be difficult for you to envision a future different to that of past generations. This mindset can make it harder to realistically take advantage of 'equal opportunities' in order to re-invent yourself or 'remake' yourself '…as a new female professional elite…' (ibid: 21). Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody continue in their analysis by drawing attention to the utilization of resources that middle-class families have undertaken to safeguard professional jobs for their offspring through processes that have led to 'credential inflation' so that:

> Very few working-class black and white families are in a position to meet the financial demands that such education requires (ibid: 72).

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[16] For a broader discussion of this area see chapter 3.

In the past women from all classes tended to have a carved out destiny in terms of school, marriage and children which was firmly connected to their class.

Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody (ibid: 81) give a valuable insight into the very real class differences in terms of such opportunities perceived to be more available today:

> Everything is presented as a possibility today. But this also means that individuals are increasingly held accountable for their own fate. The necessity for self-invention is imposed in extremely contradictory economic, social and individual landscapes.

Whilst many women welcome increased opportunity, discourse should not assume that the 'crisis of masculinity' that has been articulated in terms of working-class men, might not also be a 'crisis of femininity' for working-class women. Working-class males are often seen to have been more severely constrained by their classed, gendered, racialized, sexualized masculinities, than working-class females. The analysis here does not concur, neither does it place the 'classed feminine/masculine crisis' within a hierarchy of better or worse. The intention within this part of the thesis is to draw attention to a debate that, because of powerful discourse, is in danger of being eliminated or overshadowed - girls outperform boys and boys are in 'crisis' - so resources, time and research needs to be deployed here. Research time and resources indeed need to be deployed to examine the 'classed crisis of masculinity' as participation in (H)E for working-class boys and men remains strikingly low, but not at the expense of analysis of the real problems that the working-class female faces within her own 'classed crisis of femininity'. This is the justification for my focus in this thesis on working-class women.

The issues surrounding 'how and why working class women engage with the structures of (higher) education' are varied and complex. Reay (1997a: 20) draws attention to the gap in theory '…to explain 'the ones who got away''. She goes on to explain that the 'psychological processes' involved in such transitions are rarely considered. This research seeks to contribute to this area of study, and to examine the detrimental effects that 'getting away' can have upon the working-class psyche, and to question the taken for granted assumption that (H)E is always a positive step to be undertaken.

Education is often a liberating, life affirming experience. It can also be a lonely, difficult struggle which attacks self-esteem, denies previous life experiences, asserts one way of

being as superior to another and either invalidates past identities or leaves the working-class woman forever feeling confused:

> I suggest the female academic from a working-class background is unlikely ever to feel at home in academia (Reay, 1997a: 21).

The remainder of this chapter will contribute to understandings of this process paying particular attention to the loss of working-class identity that seems to be a necessary part of becoming educated, and the detrimental effects this can have upon the emotional well being of working-class women who make this step. Within this analysis I will begin to clearly articulate the theoretical structure of the thesis by explicitly referring to Bourdieu's (1977) work on 'habitus' to establish what this research means by the 'structures of (H)E.'

Educational context

Structures and structuring processes

The title of this thesis asks: 'how and why do working-class women engage with the structures of (higher) education', to further understand this engagement it is useful to explore what it is that the working-class woman is engaging with. The structures of (H)E are those practices and the relationships between things which give (H)E its shape and meaning/s. Those forms which are prominent within this research are structures such as: economic organization; language; behaviour; educational choices; knowledge of the education system; the curriculum; ideologies that underpin education such as meritocracy and equality of opportunity; and control and power in education such as the power to prejudge an individual/groups' potential to achieve. The structures of education restructure and are structuring; with education being a powerful force which both mirrors and reproduces the dominant ideologies and the most powerful groups of the time. These structures do not exist independently of the individuals, there is a:

> …dialectical relationship between the objective structures and the cognitive and motivating structures which they produce and which tend to produce them…(Bourdieu, 1977: 83).

The link between these structures which contributes to the maintenance of the shape of (H)E is 'habitus' which:

> …could be considered as a subjective but not individual system of internalized structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class…the sharing of a world-view…(Bourdieu, 1977: 86).

Bourdieu is clear that this does not imply that all or any members of a given group share identical experiences or world views, but that each group is more likely to have been exposed to similar situations which are 'most frequent for the members of that class' (ibid: 85). Thus 'habitus' is the history of each individual, learned through their relationship to a group. 'Habitus' may shape behaviour, actions and interactions both consciously and unconsciously and it is a deeply embedded and powerful force. We can relate with the structures of (H)E through our 'habitus' and our ability to do so may be enhanced or compromized dependent upon whether our 'habitus' mirrors the dominant and powerful form. The working-class woman, in her engagement with the structures of (H)E, is more likely because of her 'scheme of perception, conception, and action' to be affected by:

> …the structural lag between opportunities and the dispositions to grasp them which is the cause of missed opportunities… (ibid: 83).

If the working-class woman is able to successfully negotiate the structures of (H)E it is unlikely that she will do so without either harm to her emotional capacity or to her working-class self which can be a result of the historically learned 'habitus' of her class, where:

> In a class society, all the products of a given agent, by an essential *overdetermination,* speak inseparably and simultaneously of his class…praised, like strength or beauty, or stigmatized (ibid: 87).

Plummer's (2000: 86) research seeks to look at the 'lived experiences' of working-class women who have been 'educated out of their class'. In line with Bourdieu's theory of 'habitus' I would argue that the working-class woman's class 'habitus' is far too deeply embedded for her to be educated out of it. She might however, out of cultural necessity find herself subordinating her working-class interior to her middle-class exterior, or working between the overlaps of a new hybrid classed self. The richness of Plummer's (2000: 119) accounts of the participants of her research is testimony to this, you do not strictly 'unlearn' that '…having a formal education and a career' is 'taboo'(ibid: 117). It takes more than economic, social and political intent to erase the deeply learned messages which prepare us '…to inherit our mother's lives…' (ibid: 117). What is often assumed to be a welcome, simple transition from working-class girl to middle-class woman can be a confusing and

alienating process which is both desired and resisted (sometimes both at the same time) within the lives of the participants of this research. This may be further problematized and contradicted in a society where 'not being a desiring (aspiring) subject is the new taboo' (Hey, 2003: 329).

Parr (1997: 38) discusses the difficulty that working-class women have in first entering educational environments, when often they have been viewed as out of bounds to them:

> …when I came on the first day I was nervous as hell and I thought, 'God, what am I doing this for?' I was so scared, and I kept thinking, you're going to show yourself up (Dilys, research participant).

As I will discuss in detail in this thesis the women in this study display inferiority in terms of their notion of themselves as learners and this may stem from a classed construction of their learner identity. Lynch and O'Neill (1994: 307) state:

> Yet if they are to succeed in the education system they have to abandon certain features of their class background. They cease to be working class at least to some degree.

Concluding comments

This chapter has discussed my position in the research and has clearly positioned me both as a researcher and a participant within this study. 'Crisis of masculinity' discourse has been discussed and problematized. The literature has been utilized to demonstrate the potential existence of a 'classed crisis' which affects both genders in today's 'new times individualization'. The concept of 'new times individualization' has also been brought into question. Questions are raised about the existence of such 'free choice' to remake the self, and whether if this is possible, is it equally possible for all classes and genders? Further this chapter asks whether the desire to be an 'aspiring individual' is always positive, welcome or unproblematic, and this question can apply regardless of class.

Literature which discusses the 'lived experience' of class within the education system has been explored. Hey, Skeggs and Reay (in Mahoney and Zmroczek, 1997) are amongst the academics who have 'come out' as working-class. This chapter raises further questions such as 'why don't we quietly let go of the past self and embrace the new more valuable middle-class self'? Is it, as Bourdieu's 'habitus', that this self is too deeply embedded to quietly fade into the background, or as I have argued here, so much a part of who we are that we are unable to be 'educated out of our class'? Hey (2003: 328) asks:

What is producing this identification-is it simply the pull of loyalty, memory, and commitment, guilt, rage and righteous anger?

There is no one answer, and no one theme emerges from the literature reviewed or the data as to why our deeply embedded classed habitual state re-asserts itself time and again whether we are aware of it or not. However Skeggs (1997: 7) discusses how it is only those whom class does not affect who can ignore class:

...to ignore or make class invisible is to abdicate responsibility (through privilege) from the effects if produces. To think that class does not matter is only a prerogative of those unaffected by the deprivations and exclusions it produces.

Within this next chapter the theoretical framework for the research will be explicitly addressed. The chapter will explore the development of a marketized system of (H)E and argue that the current 'wave' (Brown, 1990) of education has exacerbated educational inequalities for the working-class female. An overview of current theory which seeks to illuminate 'how and why working-class women engage with the structures of (higher) education' will also be given.

Chapter 3

Theoretical structure

Introduction

This chapter will begin with a discussion of current theory, policy and practice which is informed by liberal/neo-liberal discourses of equality of opportunity within a meritocracy which is claimed to be independent of class. I will offer a counter critique to this rhetoric and argue that class continues to have a significant impact upon who gets what in terms of education.

This chapter will expand upon areas introduced in chapter 2 with a detailed account of the development of particular 'classed and gendered learner identities'. Continuing with reference to Brown's (1990) 'three waves' of education this review will demonstrate that a connection between intelligence, ability and class within the three time periods Brown discusses is in operation. A hereditarian position upon academic ability and educational performance can be seen in evidence and identified as a contributory factor to a '...highly differentiated 16+ population...' (Brine, 2006: 444). A focus upon the reasons put forth in current theory for this highly differentiated population will also be examined through analysis of the five reasons put forth by Gilchrist, Phillips and Ross (2003). I will discuss in detail classed identity which this thesis sets forth as an area which needs greater focus if under-participation by working-class women with the structures of (H)E is to be more fully understood.

Theoretical structure

Current theory, policy and practice surrounding participation by underrepresented groups in (H)E is informed by a discourse of raising standards and aspirations and increasing opportunities to widen access:

> Success in opening up higher education to all who have the potential to benefit from it depends on building aspirations and attainment throughout all stages of education (DFES, 2003: 68).

Policy documents[17] state that students and their families '…who come from less advantaged backgrounds' (DFES, 2003a: 7) are target groups who need assistance and encouragement to raise standards, attainment and aspirations. Theory, policy and practice is underpinned by a liberal/neo-liberal discourse of equality of opportunity, meritocracy and individualization, placing greater emphasis on self reliance, and seeking individual explanations for educational underachievement. Class origin is now assumed to have a weakened influence upon a person's socio-economic destination. Post-modern class critique lends weight to liberal/neo-liberal claims that the impact of class has weakened within what Hey has termed 'new times individualization' (2003: 328)[18] or Tony Blair's '…"opportunity society"' where:

> The New Britain is a meritocracy where we break down the barriers of class, religion, race and culture (Baggini, 2006: 2).[19]

A discourse of equality of opportunity constructs many who have low educational achievement as low aspirers, or as having low ability, or lacking effort. The discourse legitimates inequality by claiming that if you work hard and have the ability then you have every opportunity to move up and out of your 'less advantaged background'. Walkerdine (2003: 241) explores 'femininity and the neo-liberal subject' and finds a discourse of 'failure' and 'success' where:

> Women's employment is divided between those who have education and skills…and those who leave school with little or no qualifications…

Her article describes a classed negotiation of success and failure which both desires and rejects the liberal/neo-liberal definition of success linked to mobility.

Equality of opportunity is currently a presumed state of affairs within liberal/neo-liberal discourse and it is viewed as a fair and just means to educationally select and filter people onto appropriate types of education and ultimately to the sorts of rewards they will enjoy through the occupational sector. Equality of opportunity is viewed as a way to facilitate what Young articulated as the 'meritocratic equation' of 'Intelligence and effort together make up merit (I + E = M)' (1968; first pub.1958: 94). In fact, as Young predicted, 'opportunity' often remains unequal as it continues to be largely facilitated by access to

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[17] DFES, 2003 and 2003a.

[18] Hey has used the term new times individualization but she is critical – as this research is - of post-modern claims of equal capacity to negotiate identity formation in that different groups and individuals have different resources at their disposal.

[19] Tony Blair speaking in 1997.

resources which makes it more - or less - possible to take advantage of so called 'equal opportunities'. Whilst access to resources remains unequal the discourse of equality of opportunity will work largely in the favour of those with greatest resources, whilst at the same time justifying inequality. Equality of opportunity legitimates a weakened concern for alternative social justice frameworks such as equality of outcome or equality of condition[20] and explains educational and occupational destinations as 'fairly unequal' (Saunders: 1990, 1995 and 1996).

Class has/is being taken out of education and as Young (2001:1) states:

> With an amazing battery of certificates and degrees at its disposal, education has put its seal of approval on a minority, and its seal of disapproval on the many who fail to shine from the time they are relegated to the bottom streams at the age of seven or before… I expected that the poor and the disadvantaged would be done down, and in fact they have been.

Compensatory programmes of education such as: 'Sure Start', 'Excellence in cities', 'Education Maintenance Allowances (EMAs)' and 'Aimhigher' schemes are offered to help the 'disadvantaged' to play catch up with the 'advantaged' from early years education onwards. However, compensatory programmes of education are often not sufficiently able to target problem areas efficiently as discussed by Gould (2006). Other sources suggest the inadequacy of such programmes (Knights, 2006). Importantly, compensatory programmes of education do little to tackle the underlying inequalities that make them necessary.

The theory here is informed by many commentators who reject liberal/neo-liberal claims that we live in a 'fairly unequal' (Saunders, 1996) meritocracy. An exploration of classed and gendered constructions of learner identities will demonstrate some of the aspects which may contribute toward the development of learner identities for working-class girls and women that often reject individualization. Illustration of the move from an education system based on ascription to achievement will further problematize equality of opportunity and meritocracy. Particularly I will analyze the concept of ability and demonstrate the difficulties associated with both ability and meritocracy[21]. Analysis of the connections between ability, innateness and class will be offered through an examination of the work of

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[20] Social justice frameworks will be discussed in more detail in chapter 4 where I will refer to the work of Young (1990) Gewirtz (1998, 2001) and Griffiths (1998, 2003).

[21] See Goldthorpe (1997a) and Barry (2005).Can ability be measured, is it fixed, is class a marker for ability as it once was for intelligence as put forth by Gillborn and Youdell (2001)? Do we live in a meritocracy, or does class, gender, ethnicity have more to do with outcomes than ability and effort?

Saunders (1990, 1995 and 1996) Herrnstein (1973) and Eysenck (1973). I will argue that this connection is still in operation today and that it acts both as a filtering device and a way of maintaining class inequality.

For centuries the working-classes have received a class differentiated education. Attempts to standardize education and break down barriers of class resulted in claims from the Right that the 'masses' were both eroding educational standards and receiving an education that did not suit their needs[22] (Brown, 1990: 398). Competing evidence presented from Scottish comprehensive reforms, where the private sector of education is weaker and these reforms were implemented more vigorously, contest such claims with evidence of increasing: equalization of attainment between classes; equalization of class composition of schools; and an overall rise in attainment across the curriculum (McPherson and Willms, 1987).

The messages sent to working-class students and their educators continue to be, overwhelmingly, characterized by educational underperformance and these messages are often linked with discourses of genetic or cultural inferiority. Just as the widely accepted and 'taken for granted' assumption that African Caribbean boys will under perform educationally can result in teachers treating this group differently, expecting bad behaviour and low attainment, disciplining them more harshly and criticizing them more often (Gaine and George, 1999: 87-95) the same can be said of social class:

> Social class is fertile ground for expectations. There are signals of clothing, speech and 'style' as well as teachers' knowledge of research that working class pupils on average do less well. There are abundant stereotypes on which to draw about cultural deprivation and inadequate parenting…(ibid: 97).

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[22] It was both the left and right of politics which instigated educational change from the 1976 'Great Debate' onwards.

Classed and gendered constructions of learner identities

Working-class girls and women have been predominantly filtered onto particular low paid, low skilled educational and occupational pathways. Ambition, aspiration and expectations have often been controlled, monitored and tempered within the structures of education and the family. This can have the result of particular 'classed and gendered constructions of learner identities' which may accept and embody notions of the working-class female as educationally inferior and less able:

> …educational attainment for girls in Britain is still deeply and starkly divided on traditional class lines…(Walkerdine, 2003: 238).

Historical classed and gendered constructions of learner identities

During Victorian times:

> …the ideal of femininity that the middle classes upheld for their own womenfolk was that of the *ladylike homemaker* while the ideal upheld for working-class women was that of the *good woman* (Purvis 1991: 5-6).

Dyhouse (1977) reports on the social anxieties surrounding the working-classes between 1890-1920 and how poverty, squalor, high infant mortality, malnutrition, feckless husbands, and unsanitary living conditions were blamed upon the 'ignorance' and 'incompetence' (ibid: 22-23) of working-class women. This period saw a rise in the number of reports drawn up, and in monitoring of the working-classes. What arose was a surge in domestic training within schools for working-class girls, along with 'Schools for Mothers' later to become 'Infant Welfare Centres' (ibid: 28).

In the late 19th and early 20th century the education a girl received was driven by the most likely type of occupation or lifestyle she would enter[23]. From the early 20th century to the mid part of the 20th century concern over the capacity of working housewives and mothers continued along with a rising anxiety over the new found confidences of working-class young women. The youth cultures emerging were seen as influencing a new 'cocky' over sexualized type of young working-class woman who would not be content to go into service and respect authority, and who may seek to rise above their social position. These young

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[23] Both girls and boys received a classed and gendered education with working-class boys and girls often receiving little or no education at all.

women were encouraged through education and ever increasing monitoring via the welfare system to adopt a working-class respectability measured by: appropriate sexuality and restraint, and a respect for authority (Giles, 1992).

Historical classed 'messages' passed from one generation of women to another portray a sense of what is appropriate in terms of education and employment that certain groups expect to receive. Working-class girls learn to expect different outcomes from education, and consequently work, to that of middle-class girls. Often a cycle of low aspirations and low expectation between educator and educated can result. Working-class girls learn that their fate is most likely to be low levels of education followed by low skilled and low paid work as they accept their social space as working-class women. This is in line with Bourdieu's (1986) work on 'choice of the necessary' and 'taste for the necessary' which unifies the objective structures of 'field' and the subjective structures of 'habitus'. In 'Distinction' (1986: 101) Bourdieu proposes a formula '{ (habitus) (capital) } + field = practice' to express that lifestyles 'are always defined objectively and sometimes subjectively in and through their mutual relationships'. The decisions and choices that working-class girls, and later women, make are shaped in and through the conditions of the social space they inhabit and this is a cycle that can be materially and psychically difficult to break away from.

Plummer (2000) sets out some of the evidence which demonstrates that the post-war education system was far from the social equalizer it claimed to be[24]. She then goes on to explain how educational under-achievement can be perceived of as individual/family fault. No one offers alternative explanations to these children, most of whom do not consider their social class positioning or do not understand the implications of their class background, they have no notion:

> …of the ways in which the education system – state and independent – privileged the already privileged (Plummer, 2000: 22).

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[24] For example the social class disparity in the intake of grammar schools, how the assisted places scheme of the eighties failed to recruit many students whose parents had manual jobs, and the link between being working-class and being placed in the lower streams in school

Plummer (ibid: 19) states:

> When I was at school in the 1950s and 60s I was not consciously aware of *being*
> working-class – the label and I met at a time when I was, supposedly, being *educated out*
> *of my class.* What I was aware of, however, was a whole sequence of events, happenings,
> feelings that conveyed to me at a very early age that families like mine, and people like
> me, were somehow *lacking,* socially and mentally.

Many of the participants of this study articulate a similar sense of awareness.

Contemporary classed and gendered constructions of learner identities

Bates (1984 and 1990) and Buswell (1992) demonstrate the socialization and training of
working-class girls to accept low paid, low skilled work throughout the period of 'new
vocationalism' which began in the 1980s[25]. Their work complements some of the findings
emerging from my own study and demonstrates the perception that working-class girls
'lack' something vital which fixes them as educationally and occupationally inferior. Bates
(1990) compared the attributes that were sought, and explored the way that girls were
trained and socialized both in preparation for and throughout the duration of a BTEC
Fashion design Course and a Youth Training Scheme (YTS) course in Care. On the BTEC
course a minimum of 3 O levels were required which began the process of *filtering* out those
who '…were most educationally and socially disadvantaged students' (ibid: 88). Those that
successfully got past this first barrier were further *screened* at interview with dress,
confidence, articulation and level of family support prime criteria for acceptance on the
BTEC course.

The last process of screening that Bates describes actually occurs on the course itself, with a
few designated as fashion designers and polytechnic or university candidates, whilst most
are relegated to positions within the industry but in lower level retail or manufacture jobs:

> In this third stage of screening, which might be termed 'fine filtering', it is evident that
> family background continues to play a part. The students from the most privileged
> families almost invariably tend to carry on to higher education and those from the least
> privileged families tend to drop out or look for employment (ibid: 88).

Bates concludes that girls are trained and screened in a way that is strongly linked to class.

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[25] Preston (2003) also analyzes the role of the vocational system in forming class and 'race' identities.
Though the focus of his article is 'whiteness' his article sets forth useful concepts such as 'cultural
resistance'.

Buswell (1992) examines the impact of the development of (YTS) for women and links the rising vocationalism which emerged from the 1980s with earlier forms of 'useful' yet narrow forms of education deemed suitable for the working classes. Vocationalism was, and remains, associated with those students designated as less able and is the pathway more often offered to working-class girls[26]. Buswell discusses the proliferation of young working-class girls within office and retail work, which is portrayed as a more desirable form of work than factory or manufacture work, she states how:

> …the distinction between office and factory work was the crux of the difference between a 'good' job and a 'bad' one for girls in her study (ibid: 83).

Many of the women in my study made reference to office work as a goal with families suffering financial hardship to ensure this step upwards for their daughters. Buswell asserts that the girls in her study learn to expect and depend on low paid and low skilled jobs from an early age making realistic assessments of their life, and low paid service sector work is often the sum of their alternative realities. Kilminster (1995: 148) states:

> There are three 'women's' areas within FE, hairdressing, secretarial studies and health and social care, which account for most of the working-class women in FE.

She concludes that the vocational curriculum being launched at the time was 'rigid', 'controlling' and gave few opportunities for the women on these courses to 'develop an understanding of their social position' (ibid: 149). Working-class girls learn to know what their social space is now as well as what it is likely to be in the future. They learn not to expect too much from education and not to expect much in the way of a career. They are often screened and filtered throughout education, where family background can be used as a marker both of ability and of the potential for future achievement, and expectations are often based upon this. The learner identities of many working-class women are socially, culturally and politically constructed to shape them for and adapt them to education and work deemed 'suitable' to their class positioning.

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[26] Recent rejection of the recommendations from '14-19 Curriculum and Qualifications Reform: Final report of the Working Group on 14-19 Reform' for a 'unified framework of diplomas' (DFES, 2004) is unlikely to improve the perception that vocational education is second rate to academic. This pathway is often offered to those designated as less able (typically the working-class student). Some forms of vocational education have become associated with monitoring, control and almost as a form of compensatory education in themselves.

Colley et.al. (2003: 477) demonstrate a development of 'vocational habitus' where girls are '…'cooled out' of ambitions…' and make links back to the work of Bates (1984) and her analysis of '…careers education in school as a form of 'anticipatory socialization'' (in Colley et.al. 2003: 474). As I will demonstrate in chapter 5, in this research there are instances of 'cooling out' and 'anticipatory socialization' both within the education system and the family which appear linked to class.

Brine (2006: 431) explores the construction of '… gendered-classed identities, aspirations and expectations…' and concludes as does Reay (1997a) that those few working-class women who are educationally and occupationally 'successful' should not be used to fuel right wing rhetoric for low achievement or as Brine (1999: 6) puts it 'undereducation':

> I use the term 'undereducated' to signal first, a deeper educational consequence than that indicated by 'low- or underqualified' – a consequence that relates to the educational 'process' as well as to the quantifiable outcome…

Brine's (2006:444) work focuses upon selective schooling processes of the grammar system and links into the selective schooling in operation today which she states is:

> …based, as was that of the 1944 Act, on an inscribed essential difference that continues to mirror class positioning.

Referring to the work of Skeggs (2004) on inscription Brine (2006: 444) describes how:

> …children of the working-classes are essentialised with ascribed values, such as innate low intelligence and a discourse constructed that allows policy makers, educational administrators and practitioners to engage in practices that lead to the under-education of many children, the results of which are then used as evidence for further selective practice.

This research will now go on to show how the marketized and individualized system of education in operation today is infused with references to class and low ability/intelligence, aspirations, expectations, and to inferior and deficient cultures and ways of life. I will demonstrate that theory, policy and practice is informed by this infusion and that the working-classes themselves embody this infusion. With an overview of Brown's (1990) 'three waves' of education I will briefly discuss the historical development of the move from an education system based on ascription to one of meritocracy. The focus of the last section of this chapter will be on Brown's 'third wave' where the connection of class and ability can be demonstrated as explicitly and implicitly present within the structures of education and within the psyche of the individual.

Brine (2004: 124) states:

> The 11-plus *seemed* to show a direct relationship between low class and low intelligence. As intelligence was innate, there was little that education could do to improve it.

It is generally accepted that hereditarian links between intelligence and class are no longer in operation. However, Gillborn and Youdell (2001) demonstrate that ability has come to replace the term intelligence with all its genetic connotations, and the A-to-C economy (ibid: 73) that has developed since the 1988 Education Act has cemented the connection of ability and class in a way that far surpasses the damaging effects of the post-war tri-partite system.

Connecting intelligence, ability, and class within Brown's 'Three Waves'

Brown's 'first wave' (1990: 394-395) of the British education system, developed from the Education Act of 1870 when elementary schooling was offered to the masses. At this time and until the post-war Education Act of 1944, education was overtly class (and gender) determined and differentiated and sought to confirm existing social class hierarchies. For working-class girls, who were viewed as educationally inferior to both males and their middle-class female counterparts, the most likely form of education, if they received any at all, was to be education for domestic duties.

Brown (ibid: 395) describes his 'second wave' of education as involving:

> …an ideological shift in organising principle, from an education determined by an accident of birth (ascription) to one based upon one's age, aptitude and ability (achievement).

This 'second wave' is marked as separate from the 'first wave' by the introduction of the tripartite system within the Education Act of 1944. The later stages of the 'second wave' are characterized by the introduction of comprehensives and by the extension of meritocratic principles in terms of gender (and 'race') though inequalities in access continued to persist. The 'Third wave' of education begins to be set in motion from the time of the 1976 'Great Debate' onwards but is crystallized and grows in momentum from the 1988 Education Act, where education is increasingly opened up to the market. In this 'third wave' inequalities are deemed 'fairly unequal' (Saunders, 1996) because merit and inequalities are said to be distributed on the basis of ability and effort, rather than gender, ethnicity or social class.

Brown (ibid: 393) makes a powerful argument in his research that we do not live in a meritocracy but a

> …*parentocracy*, where a child's education is increasingly dependent upon the *wealth* and *wishes* of parents, rather than the *ability* and *efforts* of pupils.

This is a valid argument, however it is not the argument that I want to develop here. What I will argue here is that in all three 'waves' connections are being made and implied that there is a relationship between class and the potential to educationally achieve. In all three waves the working-classes are constructed as having less potential. In the first wave the education system overtly and openly operated social selection and legitimized inequality through notions of innate inferiority and superiority and this was based on enlightenment theory and social Darwinism. The preoccupation with developing intelligence tests can be traced to this time period, Francis Galton, the younger cousin of Darwin notes:

> …that men varied greatly in their intellectual capacity and, second, that various kinds of excellence run in families, suggesting that the basis of the capacities may be inherited (Herrnstein, 1973: 3).

The I.Q. test which came to form the basis of testing for the tri-partite system was developed from the work of Alfred Binet who introduced psychological testing and the idea of using 'mental age' as a measure of intelligence. William Stein furthered Binet's work by connecting mental and chronological age to come up with the Intelligence Quotient (I.Q.) which made it possible for proponents of this measure to claim a 'scientific' basis to the connection of class and intelligence 'the correlation between I.Q. and social class…is undeniable, substantial and worth noting' (Herrnstein, 1973: 51).

The debilitating effects of the 11+ on working-class girls and women is articulated well in the work of (Brine 2004, 2006) and Plummer (2000) with Brine stating of her experience in a secondary modern 'We were to have no transferable cultural capital whatsoever' (2004: 129). Many of the women in my study took the 11+ and report feelings of inadequacy, and alienation. The 11+ was predicated on a firm idea that different pupils needed a different education and it was based in research that stated that intelligence was innate, could be measured, and could be used as a predictor for future educational achievement and occupational suitability. Theories of innate intelligence, though challenged, continued to

inform theory, policy and practice throughout the comprehensive era. Examples of this can be found in the work of theorists such as Hernnstein (1973: 120)[27]:

> Setting aside group-differences, the conclusion about intelligence is that, like other important though not necessarily vital traits, it is highly heritable.

His view, and the view of other hereditarian theorists, lent weight to liberal/neo-liberal criticisms of the comprehensive system. Arguments developed which stated that competition for merit and allocation to suitable jobs based on such merit had been eroded by the comprehensive system. In seeking social justice, it was claimed that comprehensivization had resulted in mediocrity and injustice for all classes. Claims such as this enabled connections to be made between class and intelligence and at the same time legitimated selective schooling.

From 1988 onwards formal testing was re-instated in a far more vigorous way than was ever attempted under the tri-partite system. Liberal/neo-liberal discourses fuelled the embracing of free market principles to unfetter education, claiming that meritocracy and equality of opportunity are the most efficient tools to 'harvest' those with most talent for the most important jobs – to 'sort the wheat from the chaff' in terms of the more and less able.

This sorting process continues to be distinctly linked to class and can be found in the work of Saunders (1996: 51):

> Ability, then, is part of the explanation for why middle-class children are more successful than working class children, but it is not the full story... The other key element is 'effort' which involves both the desire to succeed and a commitment to behaviour (e.g. hard work)…

Saunder's investigation of the *SAD hypothesis* (ibid: 47) (the extent to which advantages and disadvantages determine social outcome) and the *meritocracy hypothesis* (ibid: 47) (the extent to which ability and effort determine social outcome) concludes that whilst both hypotheses may account for some of the variances in performance, the meritocracy hypothesis is more strongly supported by empirical evidence:

> …private schooling, parental contact with schools, material conditions in the home, the 'cultural capital' passed on by middle-class parents to their children…turn out, even when statistically significant, to exert only relatively minor effects on people's class destinies (ibid: 58).

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[27] Who utilizes, amongst other research, Jensen's (1970) study of twins.

Saunder's work has been highly criticized by many sociologists[28] such as Breen and Goldthorpe (1999), Marshall and Swift (1996) and Savage and Egerton (1997). Saunders questions the extent to which ability is randomly distributed stating that 'people's mental abilities are partly a product of their genes' (Saunders, 1995: 31). He goes on to state that the influences of background need to be more fully considered when investigating meritocracy, but seems to overlook the wealth of studies which do just that. Saunders argues that if it is found that middle-class parents transfer advantage in terms of ability and/or effort whether it is genetic or environmental, then meritocracy is just and fair. In their reply to Saunders, Breen and Goldthorpe's (1999: 21) research directly addresses the influence of background:

> The important implication of our findings here – and one which resolves any apparent contradiction – is that while merit certainly counts in mobility processes, children of disadvantaged class origins have to display *far more merit* than do children of more advantaged origins in order to attain similar class positions.

This statement is in line with the research of Gillbourn and Youdell (2001: 82) who state that:

> …We began to feel that working class pupils…face a particular hurdle in convincing teachers that they have 'ability'.

Gillborn and Youdell in their introduction to 'The New IQism' (2001: 65) describe how:

> *Bad blood, feeble-mindedness, genetic inferiority, eugenics*…these terms are associated with another age: They are the discredited and disgraced language of a pseudo-scientific tradition that wrought incredible injustice during the 20th century and are widely viewed with contempt.

They go on to argue that similar approaches continue to underlie theory, policy and practice today.

Young's equation I + E = M, can be seen today as A + E = M (Ability and Effort equal Merit). With this equation all the previous problems associated with intelligence ensue. Gillborn and Youdell (2000 and 2001) explore the way that policy and practice continues to be influenced by assumptions that ability is unevenly distributed and fixed, and that it can be quantified, measured and used as a predictive tool. This is done with no real definition of what ability is. In their research they reflect upon the nature of ability which is a word in

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[28] E.g. Breen and Goldthorpe (1999) state that Saunder's use of empirical data (National Child Development Study - NCDS) is misleading not least because he does not investigate the relative absence of downward mobility for the middle-classes.

every day use in education but rarely discussed as to its meaning and impact. Their research is carried out in two London secondary schools between 1995 and 1997 where they observed and interviewed teachers and pupils from both schools. Their findings regarding ability are that '*ability is seen as relatively fixed*' (2001: 77) '…can be *measured*' (ibid: 78) and '…it is frequently seen in terms of a *generalized academic potential*' (ibid: 79). Most worryingly they:

> …were struck by how teachers' notions of 'ability' seemed to reflect judgements about the nature of particular social groups (ibid: 82).

They refer to class and ethnic 'judgements'. For example teachers refer to the social class composition of the school and because the school is predominantly working-class, this is offered up as an explanation for its underperformance in the league tables.

Schools are increasingly rationing educational resources in response to those pupils perceived as most and least likely to achieve. The pressure on those in education to hit targets and keep up performance has increased within the burgeoning A-to-C economy: 'a school now lives or dies on its results' (in Gillborn and Youdell, 2001; Head of Department with more than 15 years teaching experience).The proposals from the Education and Inspectors Bill (2006) and the summary of this Bill (2006a) strengthen and outlaw selection by ability and interviewing (ibid: 1). It is likely that this may lead to more covert processes of selection as the emphasis upon targets and raised performance remains. The Sutton Trust found in its (2005) report on 'Rates of Eligibility for Free School Meals at the Top State Schools' that '…the admissions system is not operating equitably…' (ibid: 2):

> The intake of the top 200 schools is significantly more affluent than both the school population as a whole and the local areas in which they are sited (ibid: 8).

The report stated that the reasons for this are partially due to high attaining schools pushing up property prices but also that:

> …some other factor, aside from location, is acting to discriminate against poorer pupils from local homes to the benefit of those with better off parents (ibid: 9)

Also that '…it is in all our interests to break the link between attainment and socio-economic class' (ibid: 8).

If links are being made by schools and teachers between class and ability, then this could have far reaching effects, with working class pupils being relegated to low performing schools and this will have a knock on effect upon (H)E participation:

> The consequences of this are far reaching, but are seen particularly in the country's poor staying-on rates post-16 and in the inequalities of access to Higher Education (Sutton Report, 2005: 8).

If students themselves make connections between their own sense of ability and their class or social positioning, then this will also have an effect on the way that they perceive their own potential for performance.

In their study, Gillborn and Youdell (2001) found that the schools were also operating processes of selection by the entrance of pupils to either foundation, intermediate or advanced GCSE. In effect if a pupil is entered onto a foundation level maths GCSE then the highest mark they can achieve is a D. With my younger cohort of participants who are considering higher education, one of the greatest stumbling blocks to this is the attainment of that elusive C grade in Maths. An overwhelming majority of working-class students that I have taught on the Diploma for Childcare and Education (DCE) have to retake their maths G.C.S.E before or during application to university.

Gillborn and Youdell (2001: 96) state that they:

> …are not arguing that policymakers and teachers consciously accept the hereditarian position but that they *behave* as if they do.

I concur with this and would go one step further to suggest that many of the working-class students that I have come across in terms of this research, my professional capacity as a teacher, and my personal capacity as a working-class woman and student, also unconsciously accept the hereditarian position and their behaviour and responses to questions illustrate this.

Brine (2006: 444) states:

> Differentiated curricula, examinations and expectations of teachers, will, I suggest, lead towards a highly differentiated 16+ population that, despite the discourse of choice, will remain classed.

For the remainder of this chapter it is to this 'highly differentiated 16+ population' that I now turn. The final substantive issue that I will explore here is the focus of the research:

'how and why working-class women engage with the structures of (higher) education'. Both 'classed and gendered learner identities' and embodiment processes of 'innate in/ability and/or inferiorization' can interact to produce the classed and gendered 16+ working-class woman, these processes may impact upon the way that she engages (or not) with the structures of (H)E. The following will be an account of current theory within this area of research.

Current theory surrounding working-class female engagement in (H)E

The beginning of this section will look at theory surrounding working-class participation in (H)E in un-gendered terms by utilizing the work of a range of theorists such as Archer, Hutchings and Ross (2003). Reay, David and Ball (2005) will offer further analysis of current theory in a non specific gender format. I will then move on to discuss a range of literature which specifically focuses upon female engagement/non engagement with (H)E in terms of subjective identity formation.

Under participation of working-class students in (H)E

The nature of participation in (H)E in recent times has changed dramatically with more people than ever participating so that (H)E is no longer simply the preserve of the elite. However participation remains deeply: classed, gendered and ethnicized. Women can be seen to be participating in (H)E at much the same rate as men but deeper analysis demonstrates that particular subjects such as physics and engineering attract a greater proportion of men, while nursing and education attract more women. Importantly this increased participation by women is predominantly increased participation by middle-class women. Overall class differentials in (H)E participation have remained unequal, with some research suggesting differentials becoming more pronounced since 1998:

> One of Galindo-Rueda *et al's* (2004) more stark findings was that the difference between proportions of middle class and working class children going to university almost doubled between 1994-5 and 2001-2…Almost 80 per cent of students from professional backgrounds study for a degree, compared to just 15 per cent of those from unskilled backgrounds (Reay, David and Ball, 2005: 6).

In terms of ethnicity the interim report on 'Minority Ethnic Students in Higher Education' commissioned by the DFES (2003) found that minority ethnic participation is strongly linked to class.

Gilchrist, Phillips and Ross (2003: 83) found '… a pronounced association with social class…' The five reasons they put forward to explain differential participation by working-class students are: lack of information, lack of value, lack of entry qualifications, financial risk, and risk to class identity (ibid: 93-94).

All five reasons are evident in my own research and can be seen to be mirrored in the language of papers such as 'Widening Participation in Higher Education' (DFES, 2003a). I will now consider each of these reasons to begin to measure their value as explanations for differential participation of working-class groups in (H)E.

Information

The response to a lack of information is to make information more available and more accessible and this would be in line with equality of opportunity and widening access. What this response has less acknowledgement of is the fact that many working-class students do not consider university as a viable option, it is often outside of their frame of reference. Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000: 70) state:

> One of the key features of the careership of almost all of the young people in our study cohort is the *instability* and *unpredictability* of their education and work transitions (My italics).

Making information more available is premised on rational thinking around whether or not to go to university or what university to attend. Hutchings (2003) discusses working-class decisions on (H)E and finds greater support for emotional rather than rational responses, with respondents deciding on whether or not to embark on (H)E or ruling institutions in or out '…on the basis of 'what people like us do'' (ibid: 97). This has strong resonances with Bourdieu's (1986) connections between habitus and field which '…functions as a sort of social orientation, a 'sense of one's place'' (ibid: 466).

Citing that students lack information as a reason for under participation can also lean toward a deficit model. Research suggests that working-class students are not always given or offered information and advice on (H)E, so they may lack information, but because it may not be made as readily available to them. This is an important difference in the understanding of lack, with lack being understood either as individual deficit or institutional deficit in terms of differential advice given to different groups/individuals.

Working-class students may also lack information because they are more likely to be first generation potential participants in (H)E, and less likely to be among peer groups who have experience of (H)E. The importance of having other members of your family or peers who have gone to university is vital as a source of information to understand what university would be like, what sort of people would be there and whether they could manage the work. This information is best gained from those people who have been to university rather than from prospectuses or government leaflets. Ball and Vincent (1998) refer to this as 'hot' or 'grapevine' knowledge.

The issue of trust is also of importance and as Hutchings (2003) concludes non-participating young people do not want more publications, they want personal contact with information providers so that they can develop relationships of trust, and they want more opportunities to experience (H)E in normal day to day situations.

Value

Archer (2003a) explores the 'worth' of (H)E participation for working-class students. The findings suggest motivations for working-class participants to study were: improved economic chances, and increased status, particularly for the women respondents who want '…to become a 'better' person, to benefit their families' (ibid: 123). This is in line with Skegg's (1997) work on respectability. Other reasons cited were social mobility and to a lesser extent personal fulfilment.

Archer's (2003a) findings identify many reasons **not** to participate such as:
- Perceptions that only lower status institutions were accessible to working-class students, thus downgrading the quality of their eventual degree.
- Threat of non-completion, which was a particular worry often linked to past educational failure – financial loss/risk were also discussed in relation to non-completion.
- Worries that they would not particularly gain in the occupational sector upon gaining a degree as the graduate market is oversaturated – they may just end up with a similar job as before, or 'price' themselves out of the market by being overqualified.

Archer's (ibid: 119) research concludes:

> …that working-class groups occupy structurally 'riskier' social locations than middle-class groups, and this may translate into working-class perceptions of higher education participation as entailing higher costs and uncertain rewards.

These findings are in line with Brine and Waller (2004: 102) who also discuss risk in association with 'risk to personal relationships and risks to class identity'. Burke (2002) discusses widening participation and states that in her research, access students are in 'precarious and vulnerable situations' (ibid: 36). Masculinist, western, white, middle-class dominant discourses have shaped policy and prioritized 'national economy and individualised 'success'' (ibid: 36). In this society 'risk-takers' (ibid: 36) are those most likely to succeed. The working-classes are often less likely to take risks in the first place and when they do, they face more and greater risks throughout the whole process of (H)E than is usual for their middle-class counterparts.

Entry

Working-class students continue to do less well in terms of educational attainment than their middle-class counterparts and the various reasons such as: differential capital, different views regarding education and what education can offer, classed perceptions surrounding ability, and family and school cultural practices, have been discussed and will be discussed in greater detail throughout. Leathwood and Hutchings (2003) clarify that the more typical vocational routes into HE that working-class students take are considered to have lower status than the traditional A level route of most middle-class students.

Those that leave school at 16 are, in the majority, working-class. Working-class students that stay on, tend to transfer to FE colleges rather than 6th form. 'The educational system in England has always been one characterized by divisions…'(Leathwood and Hutchings, 2003: 138). Vocational qualifications carry with them lower status and, as has been noted in this chapter, they can tend toward a socialization process which filters, and teaches working-class girls to accept lower skilled positions and can lead to processes of 'cooling out' (Colley, et.al., 2003) of ambitions. Leathwood and Hutchings (ibid: 153) conclude that:

> …the academic/vocational divide in educational institutions, curricula and qualifications has been key to the reaffirmation of middle-class privilege in education and employment.

Slowey and Watson (2003) also discuss vocational and academic qualifications. They discuss the 'waste' in terms of '…vocational qualification bureaucracy' (ibid: 156) and this is evident in the many twists and turns the vocational system has taken.

Finances

Fear of debt is a major reason for working-class under-participation. Until 1980 tuition fees for university were met by the state, living expenses were covered by means tested grants. Since this time there has been an erosion of financial help available and the burden of financing (H)E has transferred to the individual. Institutions have been given financial freedoms and at the time of this thesis the average cost for tuition fees per year stands at around £3000. Students can defer payment of this by taking out a loan which is repayable once they are in employment earning over £15,000 a year. There is also a maintenance loan of up to £6,170[29] available. Grants for those from low income families have been re-instated and students are eligible for up to £2,700 per year which is income assessed. To receive the full grant household income needs to be less than £17,500 per year[30].

Callender (2001) argues that the least well off are carrying a higher financial burden than others. Financial arrangements have changed substantially since her argument but the basic premise that the least well off can borrow more, and will probably need to, remains. Therefore students from less well-off backgrounds are most likely to leave university owing more because they are unable to fall back on family help. Connor and Dewson (2001) surveyed non-participants with qualifications to enter (H)E from lower social class groups. They found that debt was a factor for non participation in half of their sample. Strategies to stay out of debt for those who do participate encompass going to a university near home, taking part-time work, and studying part-time. Working and part-time study can be contributory factors to non-completion. A student who needs to work long hours to avoid large debts will be under greater pressure than a student who does not. Studying part-time over, a longer period means less engagement with the institution, which can lead to a loss of momentum with study. Often a decision to study part-time is undertaken because of other commitments which may take priority over study.

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[29] For those living away from home and in London.
[30] For more details on financing see (DFES, n.d.) 'Higher Education Student Support.'

The complexity of the funding system is another barrier to participation. Many students whom I, and colleagues, have worked with have demonstrated confusion over the fees and loans system. It is often very difficult to work out household income and such complexity makes it very difficult '…for a prospective student to calculate what their income will be…' (Hutchings, 2003a: 165). In terms of finances, the confusion wrought by a constantly changing system can be a source of anxiety. Accruing debts may cause too much pressure and a decision to continue with study may be based upon an assessment of the worth of further financial risk. The immediate alternative of earning a wage may be a more appealing prospect to a working-class student and their family.

Identity

All the previous reasons are vitally important to understand if barriers to non-participation are to be removed for under-represented groups. This research acknowledges the importance of such issues but argues that deeper understandings of classed identity[31] are key to increasing participation:

> To participate in a knowledge-based learning society one needs not only to be able to access that learning, but to have one's identity confirmed, acknowledged and valued (Jackson, 2003: 368).

Archer and Leathwood (2003) draw attention to the 'pragmatic' ways that working-class students adapt to '…dominant academic cultures…' (ibid: 178) which may be through '…participating but 'not changing'' (ibid: 178) or choosing lower status universities so that they fit in. Too often working-class engagement with (H)E is seen through the lens of deficit and passivity. Their research refuses this model which is often the model set forth by liberal/neo-liberal theory.

Instead they articulate that working-class engagement with education is varied; identities are constructed and reconstructed by and in education through processes of acceptance and resistance, as with Crossan, et.al. (2003: 64):

> …engagement with learning is a subjective experience bound up with other life events and experiences…

The remainder of this chapter will give an overview of research which analyzes subjective engagement with (H)E through classed identity and identity formation.

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[31] As are understandings of other sites of inequality – gender, ethnicity, generation, disability.

Classed identity and (H)E engagement

To not be respectable is to have little social value or legitimacy (Skeggs, 1997: 3)

Skeggs discusses how the working-classes are massified, othered and pathologized in much academic literature. Her study draws on data from a 12 year study of a group of working-class women beginning a caring course at a college and their lives beyond this. Her data defines a strong dis-identification from the women with being working-class and a desire to 'improve' and to '…differentiate themselves from those who did not or could not improve' (ibid: 82). Reay (2002) conducted a narrative study of 23 mature students (17 were from a manual working-class background) in an FE college. Her research finds many associations with starting over, of becoming who you are supposed to be, of not believing that you have finally made it '…of the almost transformative powers of education' (ibid: 402). Reay also interviewed 97 traditional sixth formers and found no similar associations, rather that educational extension was part of the life course (ibid: 402).

Skeggs (1997) also discusses a desire to 'pass' and to be 'accepted' and anxieties over how to get this right. Reay (1998b: 13) in discussing her journey into HE states:

> …when I arrived at university in 1968, I had none of the appropriate cultural capital. Neither had I prior knowledge about, or understanding of, the milieu in which I was to feel for the next 3 years that I was drowning.

This statement has powerful resonances with my own experience of (H)E. Just as many of the women in this study I felt uncomfortable asking questions, I could not admit to not knowing something for fear of somebody telling me I had no business being there, I over compensated for this by working excessively hard. Educational success for the working-classes is often negotiated through a change to the self and an invalidation of past experiences '…education is not about the valorization of working classness but its erasure…' (Reay, 2001: 334).

Reay (1998b) explains that mobility literature often assumes that social mobility is a linear process – she cites Saunders (1995) as an example. My research, my experiences and much working-class research refutes this:

> The conjunction of my working-class history and a middle-class education could be seen to have produced a fictive self: a multilayered, unresolved, fragmented subjectivity, which, in spite of middle-class status, still draws on working-class consciousness (Reay, 1998b: 14).

Maguire (2005: 3) explores the '…plasticity of classed subjectivities'' in her research on working-class women who teach. She relates the experiences of these women who continue to know their classed place through such things as accent, and dress, but also through emotional feelings of knowing where they came from and being positioned by other teachers in relation to their class. This is cited in her article also as a positive source in that they have an allegiance with the working-class kids they teach and their families and that their class background remains an 'authentic touchstone' (ibid: 14). Many of the women in her study have chosen to stay with their class origins by working in inner city schools and they see themselves as being able to relate to the working-class kids and act as a role model to them.

This sense of 'giving something back' is articulated by the working-class women in another study conducted by Reay (2003: 305):

> I'm not really doing it for me. My main aim for studying is to help within the educational system (Research participant).

11 of the 12 working-class women in Reay's study articulated similar desires to contribute in some way. Reay describes this as justification for what they see as a selfish act and she states that this is in contrast to individualization discourse. The middle-class respondents of her research did not articulate similar responses. Some of the working-class women also discussed desires to become educated for themselves, as the middle-class respondents, but where this was articulated it was in the context of being able to give something back to the community. In dealing with their perceptions of education as selfish and self-centred the working-class women in the study discussed their role as 'good parents' (ibid: 309) seeing themselves as setting a good educational example for their children. This is in line with the earlier work discussed by Mann (1998) who explores the role of 'transitional' working-class mothers. A personal reason for becoming educated, and often a driving force when I flagged, was to be a role model for my own two daughters. Against the individualization discourse this presents '…collective rather than individualised motivations for returning to education…' (Reay, 2003:309).

This section of the thesis has offered an overview of some of the literature which seeks to offer deeper understandings of (H)E engagement. There is no one theme from the literature which emerges to offer a homogenized form of engagement with (H)E. Working-class women engage or do not engage with the structures of (H)E for a variety of reasons, but some patterns can be identified from the literature here, as they can from my research.

Patterns such as feelings of inadequacy, desires to improve, or to become something other. Alongside this are discourses of resistance and holding onto the classed self with overarching desires for authenticity and acceptance. Mobility models of linear relationships from working-class to middle-class are simplistic and deterministic, and contribute to deficit models of class which pathologize the working-classes. The many collective reasons for engaging with (H)E refute 'death of class' and individualization discourses.

Concluding comments

The theory that I am utilizing here repositions class as central to who gets what and why in education. In contrast to liberal/neo-liberal theory, it asserts that socially selective process of education continue and have become more embedded within the current system of education referred to by Brown (1990) as the 'third wave'. One of the effects of socially selective processes throughout education has been to reinforce the connection of ability and class rather than to overcome such connections. Many working-class women have undergone a historical development of a learner identity which identifies them as educationally inferior and this has been, and unconsciously remains to be, linked to class and innate characteristics. It is vital that theory, policy and practice acknowledge the presence of unconscious connections between class and ability and the effects that this might have on the development of learner identities:

> *Without any genuine debate the British education system is increasingly returning to policy and practice that takes for granted the assumptions proposed by IQists like Herrnstien and Murray* (Gillborn and Youdell, 2001: 96).

The pressures that those in education face today to achieve targets and to improve and maintain the performance and results in school compel such actions as to concentrate time, effort and resources toward the groups perceived as most likely to achieve. Whilst attainment levels overall continue to rise so does the gap in inequality between high and low performers. In an education system that claims to be meritocratic and 'fairly unequal' (Saunders, 1995 and 1996) those that under-achieve can be said to do so because they lack ability and effort. By attempting to remove class from educational theory, policy and practice, under-achievement and inequality become legitimated within a system of education that claims to reward on the basis of merit and ability.

Chapter 4 will now put forward a broad discussion of the methodology and methods in this research where the ontological, epistemological and philosophical underpinnings of this research will be addressed. Attention will be given to feminism and its impact upon this research, establishing that, whilst it has helped to focus this research, class inequality has been prioritized over gender inequality. The over-riding concern within this research has been issues of social justice which will also be discussed in detail in the next chapter. All 16 participants will be introduced in this chapter and the groups into which they are divided made clear. Reasons for a heavier focus upon 9 of the participants within parts of this research will also be explained.

Chapter 4

Methodology and methods

Introduction

In this chapter I will demonstrate how I come to hold the values that I do and the impact that this has had on the research and the methodology employed. Within this analysis it will be made clear how the research topic has developed and what its aims are.

In the methods section I will make clear how the study was conducted and demonstrate how I accessed suitable research participants, and what methods I used to collect the data. I will analyze problems encountered in this process, as well as explain and account for the theoretical approach I applied to data collection and data analysis. Within this, ethical considerations will be paramount.

Under the section of 'women in the study' I will introduce the participants and offer explanations of how I came to focus within 2 chapters of this study upon 9 participants. However, 16 participants have influenced the shape of this research and their interviews are reflected upon in other chapters.

Methodology

The philosophical underpinning of this research has been driven by an interest in individual interpretations of society and a desire:

> …for social science to take more seriously its humanistic foundations and to foster styles of thinking that encourage the creative, interpretive story telling of lives – with all the ethical, political and self reflexive engagements that this will bring (Plummer, 2001: 1).

The research design of this study was influenced by the following factors:

1. A concern for social justice; both within and through the research (Griffiths, 1998).
2. My positioning as a working-class woman within further and higher education, as a learner and an educator (explored in chapter 2).
3. My philosophical, ontological and epistemological world view.
4. The research questions.
5. The methodology and methods which offered the 'best fit' and could achieve the aims of this research (explored in chapter1).

My position on social justice is a driving force behind this research and is influential in the whole research design. I will give a broader discussion of this position later in this chapter. Briefly, Griffiths (1998) sets out guiding principles for educational research which seeks social justice, and I have kept these principles in mind through the different stages of the research process:

- Seeking knowledge which leads to improvement and learning.
- A willingness to change your mind and to challenge others in the research community.
- Collaborative work and respect for others in the research community.
- Openness to the ideas of a wide community.
- Reflexivity within the research; and upon your understanding and beliefs, with a willingness to revise.
- Acknowledgement that perfect research does not exist whilst doing the best research possible and seeking improvement.
- Recognition of your responsibility toward the wider research community and to those who benefit and/or take part in your research. (Adapted from Griffiths, 1998: 95-97).

Ontological, epistemological and philosophical underpinnings to the research

The dualisms that are set up within research between structure and agency, objective reality and subjective meaning, and the extremes of scientific and phenomenological enquiry are false dualisms (Pring, 2004). Drawing on Bourdieu's theoretical framework enables expansion of this view.

For Bourdieu, development of theory which could examine the '…space between…' (Grenfell and James, 1998: 18-19) the objective and the subjective was a preoccupation throughout his work. He sought theory which would facilitate a '…sort of third order knowledge' (Bourdieu, 1977: 4) and lead to a greater understanding of the underlying social practices:

> Bourdieu has steadfastly argued for the possibility of a *unified political economy of practice,* and of symbolic power in particular, that effectively welds phenomenological and structural approaches into an integrated, epistemologically coherent, mode of social inquiry of universal applicability…but one highly distinctive in that it explicitly encompasses the activities of the analyst who proffers theoretical accounts of the practices of others (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:4).

Bourdieu's theoretical tools are utilized here to avoid reductionism, and to recognize the pre-existence to the individual of categories and social relations which produce and reproduce the reality of the social order. This is facilitated by a cyclical and reflexive approach to the research whereby a 'Gordian knot of questions, objects, and sites' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 6) are pragmatically used to advance knowledge. Research which claims to be entirely positivist may not adequately account for the contingency of knowledge through extreme positivist claims of 'absolute knowledge'. Research which claims to be entirely interpretivist may be in danger of collapsing into extreme interpretivist claims of a myriad of different knowledges; the value of which is difficult to assess.

This research takes its objective material structures as class and the relations of class[32]; and its subjective interpretivist understanding of those structures form the participants' experiences, and words whilst acknowledging 'there exists a correspondence between social structures and mental structures…' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 12).

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[32] Whilst recognizing the fluidity of the concept (as explored in chapter 1).

Theorists working within a positivist paradigm may make claims that the nature of existence is able to be identified and studied and that there is a definitive knowledge that is able to be uncovered through rigorous and systematic enquiry, and this stems from the philosophical thinking of the enlightenment period. This research works more within an interpretivist paradigm, and holds more tenuous claims to the nature of existence and the solidity of knowledge. Because of my position regarding ontology, epistemology and philosophy, the predominant methodology within this research is of a qualitative nature where I do not seek to make generalizations but rather to seek understandings and to look for possible patterns and trends, of which there may be many. However, in rejecting 'false dualisms' (Pring, 2004) this research also utilizes quantitative sources. These sources have helped to shape the direction of this research by outlining more general trends, such as the under participation of working-class groups and individuals within universities.

This chapter will now move on to consider Bourdieu's rejection of 'methodologism' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 26). I will also explain my use of an auto/biographical approach to research. The social justice framework of this research will be discussed here and this will encompass an exploration of my value system, the feminist influence to this research, and the influence of these issues upon the choice of research topic and the direction of the research.

Methodological concerns

The predominant methodology utilized in this research is qualitative auto/biographical enquiry, though I have also used secondary sources that are quantitative and qualitative and devised a questionnaire (contained in appendix 1) with quantitative and qualitative aspects to 'theoretically sample' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) a younger cohort of participants. A research willingness to utilize apparently opposing methodology (and methods) is in line with Bourdieu's rejection of 'methodologism' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Robbins (1998: 46) describes Bourdieu's 'epistemological break' where 'epistemological vigilance' is discussed as attainable through a 'reflexive'[33] approach to research. Thus, rather than settle on a particular methodology, instead vigilante research 'constantly constructs, de-constructs, and re-constructs objects of enquiry (ibid: 46). Knowledge is always provisional, whether it is gained 'scientifically' or interpretively, but at the same time a form of

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[33] For a full discussion of researcher reflexivity see chapter 2.

generalizability is possible and this can be expanded upon by reference to the work of Bertaux (1981).

Bertaux discusses how any study which includes people cannot be called 'science' in the sense that there are hard, measurable facts that will emerge to produce laws of human nature, however '…it does not mean that social knowledge is an illusion' (ibid: 41). With reference to his study of bakers in France, he discusses the possibility of locating patterns emerging from the data which enable understandings of the particular but which can also be applied to the more general.

I particularly chose to use auto/biographical methodology because it is amenable to yielding rich, deep and experiential data able to get at the 'how' and the 'why' of my research title. In combining this form of data with a wide ranging literature review of both quantitative and qualitative research, current understandings can be enhanced. Comparing and seeking trends and patterns between particular (micro) and more general (macro) findings of wider research strengthens the validity of knowledge claims. In chapter 2 I outlined my viewpoint that researchers are always positioned within their research and auto/biographical analysis embraces this positively. When researcher presence is openly acknowledged then the researcher can reflexively seek to minimize and control bias. As with Bourdieu, rather than claim that research can and should be objective, or allow the subjective presence of the researcher to cloud the validity of research; this research seeks 'reflexive objectivity' (Grenfell and James, 1998: 11). This can be attained through processes such as: awareness of presence in the research, accounts of this presence, outlining the processes utilized in data analysis, acknowledging the existence of alternative interpretations, seeking other research which substantiates findings, and reporting inconsistencies and alternative viewpoints (Stanley, 1992, 1993, and Stanley and Wise, 1993).

Auto/biography has often been a vehicle for giving 'voice' to those groups who have been rendered 'voiceless' through historical relations of power, which can be explored through some of the first sociological forays into this area as with Thomas and Znaniecki's '*Polish Peasant in Europe and America' (1958).* The women in this thesis have been able to take the research in particular directions through the semi-structured interview process:

> Understood this way, a life history document is an entry into a life, a portal into a culture… Such texts become vehicle for self-understanding…They create spaces for the voices of previously silenced persons to be heard (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000: 374-375).

However it is important to note that to give voice to the participants is not the prime concern of this research. This is because the aim is to demonstrate connections between the private and the public, between individual lives and larger structural processes. At the same time, to empower individuals through the process of voice is in line with my thinking surrounding social justice:

> Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited a gesture of defiance that heals (hooks, 1989: 9).

So in much the same way as this research is not therapy, this research is not primarily about voice, but if in giving voice it contributes a little to 'healing' rather than doing harm then this research is worthwhile in more ways than advancing knowledge. Allowing the women in the study a voice and the opportunity to have some control over the direction of interviews is also about validity. If I had overtly imposed categories upon research participants from the beginning of the research then it would be my bias and my life experiences that drove this research rather than the experiences of the women in the study. Undoubtedly my own history has influenced the shape of this study to an extent. As I have argued, all research is influenced by researcher history. However, in remaining reflexively aware of my presence[34] and its effects upon the research, and by allowing some participant freedom over the direction of the research I have attempted to minimize this bias.

A post-structural or post-modern critique of auto/biography may be that as we speak about our lives and tell 'truth' we are re-constructing that truth in line with the moment. Auto/biography does not claim to recreate one solid truth of the past, present or future. Halse (2006: 97) refers to the work of Barthes (1986: 17) to clarify this point:

> The subject of the speech-act can never be the same as the one who acted yesterday: the I of the discourse can no longer be the site where a previously stored-up person is innocently restored.

This is of course true, but then no research can avoid this accusation, all texts have multiple meanings in terms of those conveying the text, those analyzing the text and then in turn those re-reading the text in their analyzed forms. What prevails is a kind of auto/biographical 'Chinese whispers'. Stanley (2004: 201) takes this issue a step further:

> …if my papers survive my death and its aftermath…if someone should read it a hundred years on, how might they understand it…

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[34] As discussed in Plummer (2000) and given consideration in chapter 2 of this thesis.

Researchers can endeavour to seek validity by cross referencing the lives told between different interviews; which is a technique I have employed. I have asked probing questions in second interviews which are directly related to information gathered in the first to 'double check' accounts. I have sent transcripts back to participants so that they may re-clarify any inconsistencies. Some participants have sent in written accounts and invariably issues which I have picked out as significant in the transcripts have also come up in these accounts. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) offer useful advice here in suggesting that when you are looking at such texts in order to write up an account, keeping your audience in mind can help. They refer to Richardson (1990) who discusses how a single piece of research is turned into many different texts depending on its audience. Whatever techniques are used to ensure validity and 'truth', narrative research is always open to challenge. Hockey and James (2003: 207) quite rightly state, 'truths are devised to both fit, or indeed contrast, with who we now think we are'. They go on to describe how memory – its selectiveness, its 'truthfulness' – is an integral part of a person's identity[35].

Most proponents of auto/biographical research, whilst having awareness of these criticisms, have chosen this methodology because of a value system which questions 'once and for all' interpretations. This research openly acknowledges that truth is contingent whilst working reflexively to produce accounts which are justifiably valid through acceptance that they are partial interpretations. One influence of feminist perspectives has been to reject any attempts to produce an 'autobiographical quest' (Mijolla de, 1984) and instead to embrace auto/biographical research as a way to push out the boundaries of more 'scientifically' oriented research and to enjoy and use the benefits of 'writing on the edge and without a safety net' (Vickers, 2002).

I will now analyze the impact of feminist perspectives upon this thesis and the social justice framework that drives the research.

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[35] This is a claim backed up by the work of Ribbens (1993), Plummer (2001), Atkinson (1998) and Miller (2000) amongst others.

Feminist perspectives

I take the stance that feminism is a perspective rather than a method:

> Feminism supplies the perspective and the disciplines supply the method. The feminist researcher exists at their intersection… (Reinharz, 1992: 243).

Feminism has been defined in a number of ways and the way that I will define it here for this research is an amalgamation of many of the points of other feminist researchers and my own perspective on feminism.

Feminism may be defined as struggles against patriarchy and sexism with a desire to end male domination. Feminism seeks to open up access, change existing unequal social structures, and raise awareness of the conditions which limit women's lives. The advancement of women's rights; and refusal to accept female subordination encompasses multiple sites of struggle against oppression such as sexism, racism, classism, disablism and heterosexualism. Smith (1980) highlights that feminism is not just a fight against patriarchy but also other forms of oppression. Feminism within this research is a rejection of reductionist science without rejecting scientific research. Anti or non hierarchical research is sought through self identification as 'like' the research participants; listening; a degree of freedom in the research process; and acknowledgement of power relations in the research.

Lorber (1988: 13) questions whether a feminist methodology or perspective is always distinct to masculinist. This research takes the stance that feminist concerns may also be the concerns of male researchers, or of any researcher who works with a strong notion of social justice to remove inequalities. The emphasis of this research is class; I utilize those aspects of feminism which acknowledge the damaging effects of any form of oppression and which has awareness that the working-class woman is doubly oppressed:

> Our goal now is to develop an anti-oppressive feminist praxis which aims to both account for, and take account of, the complex interplay of multiple sources of oppression (and areas of privilege) in women's lives (Kelly, Burton and Regan,1994: 28).

Feminist perspectives are employed to enable this but with recognition that they have, in the past, homogenized the female experience. Also, whilst feminist theory tends to prioritize patriarchal oppression, this research prioritizes class whilst remaining aware that the oppressions interact.

As with Reay (1998: 140):

> A key reason therefore, that I have used Bourdieu is because he offers an effective foil to mainstream feminisms which marginalise social class in their analyses (in Grenfell and James, 1998: 140).

Social justice

Earlier in this chapter I outlined Griffiths (1998) guiding principles for social justice research. I stated that these principles are used as a guide for this research. I will now explore these issues further to demonstrate my value system which is at the heart of this research. Tied up with issues of social justice are issues of inequality and equality. I want to be clear here that in striving for equality there is no notion of sameness or uniformity. This research sees diversity and difference as a resource rather than a 'problem' to be overcome. Griffiths (2003) articulates this well when she discusses education policy where the emphasis is upon overcoming difference and moulding people and institutions into an ideal type. Instead Griffiths (ibid: 10) asks:

1. How should we best live with the lovely diversity of human beings?
2. How can education best benefit all individuals and also the society in which they live?

And so social justice and a search for equality are not about sameness but about 'diversity and benefit' (ibid: 14).

Definitions of social justice or deciding on how to go about implementing social justice are varied and it is not possible or desirable to come up with 'once and for all' propositions as social justice needs to be as dynamic as the society it serves. An overview of existing understandings of social justice which my thinking is in line with will clarify my value position regarding these issues. I have articulated my opposition to liberal/neo-liberal theories surrounding the ways in which resources are distributed and the processes involved in distribution. I argue that the social justice proposed by such theorists, where we are offered equal chances to be unequal, is flawed in terms of its claims that opportunities are equal, or that ability and effort are static or can be measured, or that these criteria are the prime criteria through which we are awarded resources. This model of social justice is also flawed in terms of the value system which underpins it; such as the acceptance of gross (sometimes life threatening) inequalities. Or values which see diversity as a problem; and therefore enforcing a view that people should be forced to fit a particular model of success.

Particularly, if ability, competitive individualism, or whatever other characteristic which is decided upon by society as necessary for elite resources, is unevenly distributed (though I completely reject the eugenicist or hereditarian model) then where is the 'fairness' in using such arbitrarily decided 'attributes' to distribute resources. Why should this make any more sense or be any fairer than say distributing resources on the basis of physical strength, or biological sex? Taken to its extreme then what is to become of those people born with learning difficulties or mental or physical disabilities, or people who lack self-esteem, confidence or a competitive drive?

Alternative models of social justice

Social justice is a philosophical term which encompasses the ways that individuals and groups are rewarded in society. It is about the distribution of resources and is often used to refer to the overall fairness of a society. Social justice can be theorized in terms of distributional and relational dimensions, Gewirtz (2001: 51) suggests that a useful way to distinguish between the two dimensions is to think of distributional as 'having' and relational as 'doing'.

The strongest themes to emerge from the distributional dimension are that of *equality of opportunity* and *equality of outcome.* Both themes are criticized; this research has been critical of equality of opportunity. Lynch (1995 and 1995a) suggests that society should aim for 'equality of condition' where society:

> …would not simply be concerned with equalizing the position (access, participation and outcome) of marginalized groups…it would involve the equalization of wealth, power and privilege…an educational system devoted to developing equally the potential of every member of society…(Lynch, 1995a in Gewirtz, 2001: 53).

Relational justice is concerned with power and the ways that we treat one another. Two strong themes which emerge from the relational dimension are, *justice as mutuality* and *justice as recognition* (Gewirtz, 2001). Linked to Etzioni's (1995) 'communitarianism' mutuality is about a balance between individual and community rights and obligations. It centres around citizenship, stake holding and inclusive communities where there is an emphasis on building and investing in social capital. Recognition is about acknowledgement and acceptance of differences between people, such as social class, disability, gender, sexuality, culture… Gewirtz (2001) is critical of relational justice because it does not offer a collective or organizing force with which to bring about change.

Gewirtz utilizes Young's (1990. 39-65) work on the 'five faces of oppression' which Young identifies as:

   Exploitation: '…who does what for whom, how work is compensated, and the social processes by which the results of work are appropriated…(ibid: 50).
   Marginalization: '…people the system of labor cannot or will not use…'(ibid: 53) such as ethnic minorities, the elderly, the long term unemployed, lone parents and their children, the sick and the disabled. These groups are '…expelled from useful participation in social life…subjected to severe material deprivation' (ibid: 53).
   Powerlessness: Here Young adopts a Marxist traditional idea of class and exploitation 'it remains the case that the labor of most people in the society augments the power of relatively few' (ibid: 56).
   Cultural imperialism: This form of oppression is about hegemonic ways of being, stereotyping and othering, and 'involves the universalization of a dominant group's experience and culture, and its establishment as the norm' (ibid: 59).
   Violence: Groups who are subject to '…random and unprovoked attacks on their persons or property…what makes violence a face of oppression is less the particular acts themselves…than the social context surrounding them, which makes them possible and even acceptable (ibid: 61).

Gewirtz (1998 and 2001) suggests that theorists draw upon all the models discussed and select the best aspects of each model. In educational practice Gewirtz proposes that oppressive tendencies should be 'interrupted' or 'subverted'. Recognition, respect, care, mutuality and inclusion should be supported. Educationalists should remain aware of power differentials and seek practice which makes them more equal. As with Griffiths (1998 and 2003) this research works with an awareness of existing and emerging theories. However, my own educational experiences also have an impact upon my developing understanding of social justice.

Personal experience and value systems

As I have outlined above social justice drives this research. My own personal experience of the education system drives my research interest of class and engagement with (H)E. My personal experience impacts upon my value system and drives my personal interpretation of social justice. Griffiths (2003) refers to the work of many educators, and researchers[36] who use their 'own experience as a source of theory about living' (ibid: 49) and about how we educate, how we research, and how we come to research what we do. My interest in this research could be said to stem from an undergraduate research project that I did in my final year of study. I was a third year sociology undergraduate and the particular module I was

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[36] For example Barr (1999) and many of the commentators words throughout Griffiths (2003) book demonstrate this (e.g. accounts on pages 42-51).

studying was auto/biography. Our assignment task was to write about our life or the life of another and to research aspects of this life from a sociological positioning. I chose to research myself and my mother and to look at the similarities and differences in our lives and I particularly focussed upon education. My mother had received very little post-compulsory formal education and had left school without qualifications. I had left school as an under-educated (Brine, 2004) girl. Later upon my return to study and engagement with (H)E I found myself in a confusing and alienating environment which was at the same time liberating and enlightening. Many of my past educational experiences and inferiorities came back to haunt me and so I used my under-graduate assignment as much as a vehicle of self-discovery[37] as anything else.

I particularly recall the painful process of listening to my mother's often very sad life, and of transcribing that data and feeling as if she was living in my head for weeks after. She recounts it was a difficult process for her to. I also recall the sense of anger, frustration and resentment[38] I felt as I delved into my own educational trajectory; and of others similar to me whilst I did my literature review, and as I found out that what had gone on in my own life, and my mother's life was continuing. My decision to train to teach in the post-compulsory sector grew out of this. When I began to look into the possibility of PhD study I knew exactly what I wanted to research and by the time my proposal was accepted I already had a whole cohort of participants ready to take part.

Such was my enthusiasm and drive to get this research done that before enrolment I was conducting interviews on the back of the experience I had gained in my undergraduate studies. Sometimes such enthusiasm and such close involvement with the subject matter has had negative effects. On several occasions I have suffered from severe burnout, partially due to over-enthusiasm and over-involvement, but probably more to do with the reasons discussed in chapter 3 and to be developed in chapter 6. Reasons of returning feelings of inadequacy to complete such a task; of being 'found out' as lacking, deficient or inferior, and of over-working to compensate which are all linked to my own classed and gendered learner identity[39]. I fully accept that crises of confidence happen to all people regardless of

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[37] As in the work of authors such as Kuhn (2002) Steedman (1982 and 1986) Heron (1985) and Krzowski and Land (1988).

[38] This links directly into the work of Reay (2005) previously referred to in chapter 2 of this research.

[39] As has been discussed throughout, other working-class academics suffer bouts of this same sense of lack.

class. However the 'crisis' that I have experienced; that the women in this study and other working-class studies articulate, are crises that appear directly linked to classed identity. These crises often appear grounded in a sense of 'lack', 'deficiency', and/or 'inferiority', and of just not being good enough. This often appears as linked to class perception and the 'lack' of value attributed to working-classness. Middle-class crisis of confidence is not grounded in a 'lack' of value attributed to their class or cultural status.

In chapter 2 I refer to Hey (2003) who asks why working-class academics keep returning to the working-class self and why they often end up working with class. I continue to have a fascination and interest in the area. More importantly I feel a sometimes overwhelming desire to instigate change and sometimes hopelessness in my capacity to do so. I feel a duty to give something back as the women referred to in chapter 3 of this research do. As with Hey (2003: 328) there is 'loyalty, memory, and commitment, guilt, rage and righteous anger' behind my research, as well as a value system which seeks recognition of difference and redistribution of benefit to serve the interests of individuals and wider society. This chapter will now move on to an analysis of the methods employed in this research.

Methods

This study consists of 16 working-class women (either by self definition or who are defined as such under the criteria described in chapter 1[40]). These women range in age from 18 to early 60s. Some of the women have gone on to higher education and to post-graduate study, whilst others have had only very basic post-compulsory education.

The research is a study predominantly of an auto/biographical, qualitative nature. Semi-structured interviews were the main method used. These interviews began in July 2004 and finished in March 2006; all participants were interviewed twice and all the interviews were taped with the consent of the participants. Some participants also sent me additional notes or letters between interviews and this data was drawn upon. The interviews ranged in length from 45 minutes to 2 hours. The first interviews were loosely structured around a long list of themes (contained in appendix 2) that I had identified as relevant[41]. Some participants used a

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[40] Class identities are imposed by the researcher where they are absent for reasons referred to earlier and in line with the work of Skeggs (1997).
[41] I referred to Atkinson (1998) for guidance on this.

selection of photographs to begin the first interview, but mostly the interviews progressed on from an initial question from myself asking the participants 'what was their first memory'? Second interviews remained semi-structured around themes which began to emerge from first interviews and that I wanted to gain further understandings of; so my prompt notes followed these themes (contained in appendix 3).

All first interviews were fully transcribed by me and transcripts sent to participants. 9 of the second interviews were transcribed, as by this stage I had identified 9 participants that I would focus more directly upon. I will expand on my reasons for this later in this chapter.

A questionnaire (contained in appendix 1) was also used part way through the process to 'theoretically sample' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) a younger cohort of participants. My use of 'grounded theory' will be explored later in this chapter, as will my reasons for accessing a younger group of participants.

Locating the participants

> Locating suitable respondents for study is a problem that first-time biographical researchers often fail to appreciate at the outset. Biographical research is qualitative research and the standard quantitative method of drawing a probability sample randomly from a population will not (usually!) produce suitable candidates. Other means of selection are required (Miller, 2000: 76).

The first 14 women in the study were contacted early on in the research. Some of these women were friends who volunteered for the research whilst I was discussing my proposal for this PhD. Others were accessed through a 'snowball' (Denscombe, 1998) effect and were friends or siblings of the aforementioned. The remaining participants within this group of 14 women were chosen 'purposively' (Denscombe, 1998) through a UNISON (WEA) 'Learning at Work Programme' who were studying 'Women, Work and Society: Women's Lives' course. This group was targeted for this course because they were low paid, service sector workers. If this is combined with what it was they were studying it was very likely that they would fit the criteria of being working class and that they would be responsive to this type of research.

As is the case with 'purposive sampling' they were:

…selected with a specific purpose in mind, and that purpose reflects the particular qualities of the people or events chosen and their relevance to the topic of the investigation (Denscombe, 1998: 15).

The remaining 5 participants were accessed later on in the research and were 'theoretically sampled' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) as what I wanted to more accurately research was whether or not what I was finding was more a product of generation than class. It therefore became apparent that the way to do this was to access a younger group of participants who had recently been through compulsory education.

At this time I was teaching a younger group of students on a full-time college course studying for their Diploma in Childcare and Education (DCE). I decided to approach this class and ask them about participating in this research. I needed to ascertain whether the students fitted certain criteria that I had now deemed as necessary for participation in this study and so the best course of action seemed to be the development of a questionnaire (contained in appendix 1) to 'theoretically sample' this group. Unlike many of the first group of participants these women did not actually volunteer for this study. The questionnaire helped me to locate those students who would want to participate. Kelly, Burton and Regan (1994: 35) draw attention to the presumption 'that women want to share their experiences with another woman'. This group of students seemed, in the most part, more willing to disclose information to me in a written format than they may have done face to face.

The resultant data from the questionnaires was extremely varied in its depth, with some students giving lengthy answers to some of the more qualitative questions, and others only answering the quantitative closed questions. From the questionnaires I chose 9 participants for the study for the following reasons. They had all recently finished compulsory education and so fitted my identified need of a younger cohort of participants. They all self-identified as working-class or they were unsure of their class position, but their other answers indicated that they were probably working class. There was a mixture within this sample who were choosing to continue their studies in the near future into higher education as well as some who did not intend at this stage to do this. They had all attended their local state school. All had answered the more qualitative questions and so it seemed more likely that they would more actively participate in an auto/biographical research study. From the 9 that

I sampled, 6 agreed to take part, and ultimately 5 of these women participated in the full process of two interviews.   .

Gaining the data

Each of the 19 participants was interviewed twice using semi-structured interviews. At the beginning of each interview I established the intentions of the research, where and how it may be disseminated, and carefully explained how I intended to respect ethics of confidentiality and anonymity, and obtained 'informed consent'. In so doing I referred to and worked in accordance with The BSA 'Statement of Ethical Practice' (2002, and 2002a) the BERA 'Ethical Guidelines' (2004, and n.d) and The RESPECT 'Code of Practice for Socio-Economic Research' (n.d).

Each of the interviews in this study was taped. This was stated as being part of the process before consent was given by the participants. Bell (2005) draws attention to the issue of honesty when using tapes which may be inhibited because of the very knowledge that their words are being taped. One way around this is to re-assure participants of how those recordings will be stored and who will hear them. I always asked participants when they felt comfortable for me to switch on the tape, and I kept the tape (which was no bigger than a small mobile phone) in an unobtrusive position in the hope that each participant, though consensually aware of its presence, would soon be less conscious of the fact that they were being taped. In all instances, after a few awkward minutes at the start, participants did not appear to find this intimidating. I decided that I would not take field notes as I wanted the process to seem more like a conversation than an interview. Field notes have advantages and disadvantages and Fontana and Frey (2005) discuss the necessity to take regular, prompt notes and to write down even the smallest incident. I decided that the advantages of a flowing conversation, where I was giving my full attention to the participant, outweighed the disadvantages, and any notes that were vital could be jotted down in the car immediately upon finishing the interview.

With each of the first interviews I asked participants to talk about themselves, stressing that they could take the interview in directions of their choice, but I began each interview with a prompt to discuss first memories. I had asked in advance if participants would like to use photographs as memory prompts for this, some were very receptive to this idea; others

decided they would prefer a straightforward interview approach. With those women who chose to work around photographs their choices were varied with most bringing in a photo of their school, or themselves at school, whilst others brought out photos of themselves with their mother, their friends, or photographs which denoted particular time periods and transitions such as beginning work. The photographs turned out to be successful talking points and if I was to do this research again it is an area that I would explore more fully to understand the many ways in which photographs can be used in research. When using photographs:

> In a most striking way, all manner of details about childhood relationships, friendships, family rituals and family history can be highlighted (Plummer, 2001: 65).

The first interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 2 hours long. This tended to depend upon the rapport that sprung up between myself and the participant and my relationship with them. Each of these interviews was then later transcribed by me and a copy of the transcript was sent to each participant, along with a brief life trajectory that I compiled for all the women in the study, for checking.

The second interviews followed a similar format to the first in that I again explained the research to each participant, I got them up to speed on events since I had last seen them and I asked each participant if there were any queries from the last interviews. I asked each participant to read over the brief life trajectory that I had drawn up for them and to state whether they were comfortable with my portrayal. This was how each interview began and then progressed on in the form of questions with the invitation for participants to discuss any other areas that they felt were relevant. As before these interviews tended to last between 45 minutes and 2 hours.

Data collection, transcription and analysis

My decision to use auto/biographical analysis was grounded in the knowledge that it tends to yield deep, rich, experiential data and in the words of C. Wright Mills (1959: 6):

> No social study that does not come back to the problems of biography, of history and of their intersections within a society has completed its intellectual journey.

Whereas Mills, in this quote, advocates coming back to biography, my own understanding of research would lead me to begin with auto/biography as a useful starting point to deal

with my own undeniable position in the research, and as a useful tool to get at the 'how' and the 'why' of this research title.

Having identified auto/biographical analysis as the way forward in this research the decision to use life history semi-structured interviews followed:

> …interviewing offers researchers access to people's ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher (Reinharz: 1992: 19).

The decision over the level of structure to use in interviews is difficult, Opie (2004: 123) discusses how often a mixture of structure is used with the decision being '…determined by what you are seeking to find out'. No research is entirely inductive and I am not suggesting here that this was the case. However at the beginning of this research I had only my research questions to work with and was unsure of what field questions to ask to elicit data that might address those questions. Therefore the first interviews with participants were semi-structured around a list of themes that might be useful (contained in appendix 2). This list was long and quite complex, though it helped in keeping participants on track as often participants were quite shy at first in talking about themselves and were reassured by my prompting them.

From the first interviews conducted I began to assess that some of the themes emerging might be a product of generation. Because of this I decided a younger group of participants would be useful to the study. I located this younger group of participants via 'theoretical sampling' and the use of questionnaires. 'Theoretical sampling' is a technique employed within 'grounded theory' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). I will explore my interpretation of this approach to demonstrate that grounded theory might be more accurately portrayed as a 'well informed qualitative approach'.

Grounded theory or a 'well informed qualitative approach'?

Fine and Weis (2005: 65) describe their work as 'having legs' in that it is work concerned with social justice, which I have articulated as an aim for my own research. My research oscillates not just between theory and empiricism, but from the (local or micro) biography of its participants to the (structural or macro) class relations at play within the education system, and utilizes theory first as a starting point and then to move the research forward in practice. Theory helps us to return back and forth within empirical studies and to more

explicitly 'connect the dots' and '…render visible relations to other "groups" and to larger socio-political formations' (ibid: 66).

My analysis of the data might be described as an interpretation of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Charmaz (2005) utilizes a 'constructivist' flexible and fluid approach to grounded theory which she states can be 'fruitfully' used within social justice inquiry. Elements of Charmaz's interpretation of grounded theory inform my own methods of analysis:

> A major strength of grounded theory methods is that they provide tools for analyzing processes, and these tools hold much potential for studying social justice issues. A grounded theory approach encourages researchers to remain close to their studied worlds and to develop an integrated set of theoretical concepts from their empirical materials that not only synthesize and interpret them but also show processual relationships (508).

Within the above quote the aspects which inform my own interpretation of the data which might be related to a grounded theory approach are 'remaining close to the studied worlds' which I have done through very early analysis of the data and an ongoing immersion and re-immersion in the data. I have also utilized elements of a grounded theory approach in that I have looked not only for themes and trends, but also for gaps within the research design; thus a 'processual relationship' has resulted from and within analysis. Glaser and Strauss (1967: 1) describe grounded theory as 'the discovery of theory from data' . I take the position that there is no one theory in the data waiting to be discovered any more than any one way to 'discover' it.

Charmaz (2005) notes, that on closer inspection Glaser and Strauss' development of grounded theory was not as positivistic as first thought. Whilst Glaser's influence upon the theory was of a positivistic nature, Strauss' influence brought with it versions which '…emphasized meaning, action, and process' (2005: 509). In this research I suggest that what I am utilizing is a developed form of grounded theory which might also be considered to be a 'well informed qualitative approach'. Thomas and James (2006) problematize the various attempts to '…re-clothe and revitalize grounded theory' (ibid: 770) particularly with attempts to re-interpret grounded theory as a 'middle-way' between interpretivist and positivist research, or to use it to lend weight to qualitative enquiry. Qualitative research is a renowned and respected form of enquiry in its own right which does not require a 'scientific' seal of approval of the kind often associated with grounded theory. Thus, whilst my analysis of the data employs what might be described as a grounded theory approach I

would argue that this is part of any academically rigorous analysis of large quantities of qualitative data and not explicitly 'grounded'.

Another aspect of my data analysis which might be considered to have a grounded theory approach is my use of 'theoretical sampling' which I will discuss in the next part of this chapter. At no stage however have I sought to take a grounded theory approach to its ultimate conclusion of 'theoretical saturation'. My interpretation of Glaser and Strauss' ideas is less concerned with this aspect of grounded theory and can be summed up in the following quotes which allow for more elasticity in their theory than they are sometimes credited with. Rather than striving to find universals, their theories seek to discover 'structural boundaries' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 24). Generating theory from data is not a process of absolute proof rather '…evidence enough only to establish a suggestion' (ibid: 39-40) and particularly in line with my own thinking regarding theory:

> When generation of theory is the aim, however, one is constantly alert to emergent perspectives…These perspectives can easily occur even on the final day of study or when the manuscript is reviewed in page proof: So the published word is not the final one, but only a pause in the never-ending process of generating theory (ibid: 40).

To sum up, with regards to my approach to the analysis of data, there are what might be considered elements of a grounded theory approach evident, I would counter that this is the hallmark rather of a reflexive, questioning and alert approach to the analysis of research. The strength of qualitative data lies in its ability to offer first hand accounts of experience, and too strenuous an attempt to 'clear up' the data can render the data less rather than more valid. I contend that many of the strategies endorsed in grounded theory: of remaining close to the data, seeking meaning in the texts, looking for similarities and differences, and remaining open to alternative interpretations are strategies employed by conscientious researchers. There is no 'mystical method', however tempting this might seem in the face of large quantities of data, which will give the researcher '…gift-wrapped meaning' (Thomas and James, 2006: 783). Insistence or adherence to 'grounded' or indeed other theory renders the researchers own competence, vigilance, and interpretive skills as lacking.

Analysis, coding and 'theoretical' sampling

My decision to locate a group of younger participants came about as a result of early analysis of the first interviews. Whilst transcribing the interviews, and listening to the tapes - themes and trends began to emerge. I documented these via a system of codes. Having reviewed the use of computer aided coding systems such as NUDIST and ATLAS (Opie, 2004) I decided that my own form of coding was sufficient as I was not working alongside other researchers where universal meaning of coding is required. I developed a set of themes (contained in appendix 3) in the first instance which I was looking for within the data. These themes were a result of emergent trends which became apparent because of their repetition in the text. I became aware of this both whilst I was conducting the interviews, and afterwards listening to the interviews. I gave each theme a code and applied this code to the text of the transcripts. I recorded the instances of the occurrence of the code in the data within a database file, so I was able to recall the number of times a theme was occurring. From this first round of analysis I then developed a more concise set of themes in response to the strongest trends (or my interpretation of this). I returned to the data searching under 7 categories at this stage, which had attached to them a number of properties within each category (contained in appendix 3). Finally I refined these categories into 5 predominant themes (contained in appendix 3) that I have worked with for the rest of the data analysis, and which informed my second more structured interview questions (contained in appendix 4).

The coding that I worked with developed as I transcribed the interviews; the issue of transcribing material is widely discussed and here I want to illustrate my view regarding the vital role of self-transcription which allows the researcher to deeply emerge themselves in the data. The process of listening intently to make sure that you have correctly heard what the participant is saying, going back over portions of the transcript to make sure that you have captured meaning, the recording of pauses, tones of voice, laughter are – in my view - tasks which will be done more precisely and with more invested care by the researcher. Others – who may indeed be under quite explicit instruction – are unlikely to share your commitment to your own work. As is often cited by colleagues, they will - before and after - go over these transcripts to ensure the validity of the documents. It is my view that the time invested in this process would be more usefully invested in the process of self-transcription itself.

Self-transcribing also allows the researcher to make decisions over what might otherwise be considered as "…mundane interactions" (Peräkylä, 2005: 869). Some of the information that I have included in the final write up of this thesis has originated from recordings before or after the 'actual interview'. It is quite possible that had another person transcribed this for me the subtleties of these interactions would not have been captured. Also had I asked a transcriber to transcribe all documents in full some information, which I later considered to be too sensitive to be transcribed, may have remained. On at least two occasions a participant divulged information to me that they then asked me not to transcribe because the people to whom they were referring may read the transcript. On a particular occasion one participant discussed very private information with me that I felt later they would regret. As this was not relevant to my research questions and I considered this a matter of 'ethics', I made the decision to omit this from transcript. These are decisions that only the researcher who was fully present at the interview can make.

A final consideration within this process that I will pay some attention to here is the difficult decision of what to cut out and what to include from the data within the final text:

> Social research cast through voices typically involves carving out pieces of narrative evidence that we select, edit, and deploy to border our arguments (Fine, 1994: 22).

How do we justify that which makes it to final selection and that which ends up on the cutting room floor? Our own life histories and subjectivities are tied up in the whole process of research and cannot be denied in this part of the process. As with Harraway (1988: 411) this research argues for a stance of 'passionate detachment' in this process which acknowledges the self and allows for accounts to be partial, transitional accounts which offer 'a' researcher's analysis of multiple lives. The 'webbed connections' (ibid: 411) that have been identified within this research were not 'cherry picked' to answer my research questions; rather they were the ones that most clearly and loudly presented themselves time and again throughout the data. This is not to deny the existence and valuable importance of other translations of the data, or of sections of the data which I did not use.

Ethical considerations

There is a vast array of ethical considerations to be taken into account[42] within any research design. In this section I will describe how I assured a level of confidentiality and anonymity to each participant before I pay more detailed attention to the ethical issue of 'informed consent'. These are all inter-related ethical issues which contribute to the maintenance and tempering of power relationships between the researcher and the researched which is a focus of this research. I particularly choose to focus on these ethical issues as:

> The history of education (as is the history of the world) is littered with research-based justifications for treating particular groups of people (e.g. women, Blacks, Jews, the working classes) differently and usually, less favourably, than others (Opie, 2004: 18).

Research, particularly if it is focussing on social justice issues, is often carried out on vulnerable groups, who might have less knowledge about what it is they are actually letting themselves in for, or of the implications of any outcome of research. This is particularly true when research is carried out with the view that the researcher is the professional and the participant is to be studied. Research carried out this way can feel like something that is 'done' to the participants with little or no payback. Sikes (2004: 29) draws attention to this in a discussion of 'rape' research, where participants can feel used and brutalized by the process. For these and other reasons it was particularly important in this research that I take every effort to ensure 'informed consent', as much as it is possible, and to not only acknowledge but attempt to redress and balance power differentials.

With reference to confidentiality and anonymity this was assured through a verbal agreement that I would not discuss the participants with other participants. I would only refer to the participants in written form under the guise of a pseudonym which they were free to choose for themselves. When discussing this research with others in the research community I would also adopt this pseudonym. All records would be kept carefully and respectfully. Any institutions or identifiable persons would be anonymized within the research. Confidentiality and anonymity must be assured to participants and institutions, and all efforts made to achieve this. However, there are always limits to these ethical demands. For example, if harmful information were discussed with me then I may need to break assured confidences. This was less of an issue within this research because participants were

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[42] Power relations between the researcher and researched have been analyzed in chapter 2 so will not be a focus here.

all over 18, but had someone divulged information, such as thoughts about committing suicide, this would have put me in a difficult position regarding confidentiality. Particularly, as some of my participants still lived at home under the guidance of parents/guardians.

Anonymity is easier to ensure when participants do not occupy positions of power, such as was the case with participants of this research. However, some participants were known to one another and though I would not discuss information regarding one participant to another, reading over the final publication of this research may mean that some participants recognize one another. Institutional anonymity was reasonably easy to ensure in this research as no high profile institutions were referred to and there was a wide geographical and historical location to the schools, colleges and universities discussed.

With respect to 'informed consent' each participant had the nature of the research fully discussed with them through lengthy conversations either in person or on the telephone before agreeing to take part. In first interviews many of these points were re-iterated whilst I also asked participants to question me on anything they were unsure of. All participants were explicitly told of their right to withdraw from the research and to answer/talk about only that which they felt comfortable with. Each participant was also given a consent form, which highlighted these principles, and they were asked to sign it (contained in appendix 5).

I feel that as far as I can I covered what is expected of a competent and diligent researcher in respect of these issues and in accordance with current ethical guidelines. However the issue of 'informed consent' is a difficult one and one which deserves further expansion. I have discussed (in chapter 2) the issue of 'care to do no harm' so I will not re-iterate that here, though it is in itself tied up with issues of 'informed consent'. Problems around 'informed consent' such as the ability of less widely educated people, those who are not competent in the language/culture of researchers, or less powerful groups such as children to actually and legally give 'informed consent' have been well documented. Yet the problems around 'informed consent' can present themselves at a much more intricate level such as unwitting or indeed witting '…manipulation of participants hungry for social contact…' (Olesen, 2005: 225). Or unanticipated challenges to participants' views that are not in accord with your own. Misrepresentation of participants' words, and underestimation of time given over to the research in terms of participation time, time to go over transcripts, and emotional time expended on the whole process are other issues often not fully understood. The issue over

who owns the data and at what point – if at all – does the participant relinquish the interview data to the researcher also needs consideration. When a participant signs a consent form or verbally agrees to take part in a research project, however carefully issues are explained, can they ever be said to be giving 'informed consent'?

Olesen (2005) discusses issues of researcher power in these arenas and puts forward that this power is often '…confused with researcher responsibility' (ibid: 255). This links with two prominent viewpoints surrounding ethics and the move in some areas to more strict and established guidelines, versus the more abstract theme of 'researcher responsibility'. To expand on this I will refer to Plummer's (2001: 226) exploration of 'ethical absolutists' and 'situational relativists'. Plummer explains that the 'absolutists' are committed to the establishment of firm guidelines by which all researchers must be bound, this allows little room for the intricacies of life, and to be properly operationalized would require extreme, complex, lengthy guidelines so as to leave no room for interpretation. The 'relativists' on the other hand would take the post-modern stance that no guidelines can exist which absolutely bind and that ethics are a response to the moment.

As is often the case in research, what is developing is the potential for another 'false dualism' (Pring, 2004). There is a danger that what will develop is either guidelines that are so strict that there is no room for manoeuvre, interpretation or the 'happenings' of everyday life, or ethereal guidelines which give little 'guidance' to the researcher. What is needed is something in between, offering clear concise guidance which allows for researcher responsibility and considers researcher abuse. The research community remains at somewhat of a crossroads regarding the direction of ethical guidelines. Within this research I have referred to a range of documents on ethical considerations and conversed with other researchers on the subject. My own ethical principles are that ethics (and in the case of this discussion – issues of consent) are something that are not agreed upon at the start of a research project and forgotten. They are constantly in flux and reworked through communication between the researcher, their participants and the research community. Ethical conduct in this research is guided by: respect, tolerance, care, justice, fairness and a desire to expand knowledge but not at all costs. This research acknowledges that ethical choices are made throughout the research process and require researcher reflexivity.

The women in the study

In this section I will refer back to Brown's (1990) three time periods used in the research and into which all 16 of the remaining participants of this research (as described in chapter 1) have been divided. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 to follow are analysis chapters. In chapter 5 and 7 I have chosen to focus the analysis upon 9 participants, 3 from each group, to enable a more detailed account of their lives and the substantive themes under investigation. In chapter 6 I broaden the analytical lens to investigate all 16 of the remaining participants of the research. I will now re-clarify the time periods for analysis and introduce the 9 participants who will be the focus of chapter 5 and 7. Each time period and group is indicative of a distinct educational phase since the post-war Education Act of 1944 as described in chapter 1.

Group One: 1944 Education Act and tri-partite system of education

This group is made up participants who all received their secondary education in the early 1960s within the tri-partite system. This group was educated within Brown's (1990) 'second educational wave', which was characterized by meritocracy and was underpinned by the values and beliefs that drove the tri-partite system, where the working-classes were seen as an untapped pool of resources, and intelligence was viewed as static, measurable, and quite possibly heritable. Intelligence was viewed as a reliable measure to predict future potential, and groups and individuals were considered to require distinctly different types of education.

From this group Valerie, Ruth and Clare are selected for deeper analysis in chapters 5 and 7. They all took and failed the 11+; and subsequently they all attended their local secondary modern school where they would be considered to be in receipt of an appropriate form of education suitable for their IQ and aptitudes.

Group Two: Introduction of comprehensive schools

This group is made up of participants who all received their secondary education within comprehensive schools. This group was educated within the *late* stages of Brown's (1990) 'second wave' within a meritocracy which was – in the beginning - underpinned by the values and beliefs that drove the comprehensive system. IQ testing and its value was

questioned as was the ability of the tri-partite system to bring about social change through education in terms of social mobility. From the mid 1970s onwards the values and the beliefs which introduced the comprehensive system began to unravel. Instead assumptions that the working-classes harboured an untapped resource began to collapse into a discourse of declining educational standards, asserting that the masses had received an education which was not suited to their needs and was damaging to the economy.

Cathy, Susan and Anne are chosen for deeper analysis in chapters 5 and 7, they all received their secondary education in the early to mid 1970s, they did not take the 11+ and went straight on to their local comprehensive.

Group Three: 1988 Education Act and marketization of education

The third group in this study is made up of participants who received their education within an education system characterized by the introduction of markets, choice and competition and a move toward more specialist than comprehensive schools. All of the women in this group were educated in their local secondary schools within the 1990s. Rachel, Charlotte and Faye are chosen for deeper analysis in chapters 5 and 7. They received their secondary education either in 1997 or 1998 and have gone on to do a level three childcare course (DCE) in their local college. They are now taking the next educational/occupational step in their lives after successfully completing this course.

Concluding comments

This chapter has highlighted some of the difficulties involved in the research process and how methodology, methods and our own views regarding research are utilized to overcome research issues. A focus within this chapter has been upon analysis and interpretation and some justifications have been set forth which clarify some of the decisions that are made with regard to this. Just as data ends up on the cutting room floor through decisions of what data is most important, so to can whole lives of participants who have given valuable time and emotional energy to the process. Deciding which lives to focus upon more deeply in this research was a difficult process. However because of the wealth of data generated it was a necessary process to enable a more detailed analysis. Though this next chapter and chapter 7

focuses upon 9 participants in greater detail, all participants' contributions to this research are equally valuable and have contributed to the overall shape of this Study.

The following chapter is an account of the lives of these 9 women which will further introduce them within the context of this research. The focus in chapter 5 is upon the development of 'particular classed and gendered learner identities'. The literature reviewed so far will be drawn upon, as well as the words of the participants. This study utilizes different time periods so as to focus in on the similarities and differences within each. This research also seeks to explore whether inequalities in terms of class may be deepening or lessening in the most recent time period under investigation.

Chapter 5

Classed and gendered constructions of learner identities

Introduction

This chapter sets out the lives of the 9 women identified in chapter 4 for deeper analysis. Links will be made between the lives of the women and to the literature reviewed in chapters 2 and 3. The focus here will be upon the ways that working-class women construct themselves, and are constructed as learners throughout the three time periods identified. In all three time periods the women can be seen to go through similar processes linked to their class which can contribute to their construction and perception of themselves as able learners, often embodying inferior notions of the self. Particularly in the later stages of the 'second wave' and within the 'third wave' 'post-modern' individualization processes infer that working-class women have more opportunities, to restructure identities than men. The classed lives of the women in this study will demonstrate that they are as 'troubled' as the 'in-crisis' working-class male. The research demonstrates instances of liberation, but more often of fear, frustration, confusion, rejection and withdrawal which is more in line with Gidden's (1991) 'ontological insecurity' than his 'reflexive individualization'.

The words within these analysis chapters are, as far as possible, the words of the researched. Atkinson (1998: 56) draws attention to the importance of 'intended meaning' which should be the overriding concern within transcription. With this in mind my own mode of transcription, particularly with the first interviews, was to transcribe the words of the participants leaving out any questions that I used to prompt the interviews[43]. Editing was kept to a minimum explicitly to encourage authenticity of the participants' voices. The themes which began to emerge came out of a long process of transcription and analysis which, in line with what I have described as 'a well informed qualitative approach' in chapter 4 as opposed to 'grounded theory', demonstrate a processual form of analysis. Conversion of the life stories to life histories (Goodson and Sikes, 2001) was facilitated by transcription, analysis and interpretation; and finally by the decision as to which themes were most prominent and would become the focus of this research. The themes under

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[43] Except where these questions were needed to make sense of the answer. Particularly in transcribing the second interviews it became more necessary to insert the questions as the interviews moved from less structured life story interviews to more semi-structured around themes of enquiry.

investigation here, and in the following 2 chapters, arose from my interpretation of the data, but they came through as particularly strong themes and resonated with aspects of much of the data reviewed. Schwandt (2000: 192) discusses the possibility of transcendence beyond personal history when interpreting qualitative data. As I have outlined in previous chapters the reflexive presence of the researcher needs acknowledgement; I remain aware of my own history within this interpretation. However, competent and valid research makes considered effort to 'transcend' personal histories where possible and my account of the analysis and interpretation process within chapter 4, justify claims that this research is valid.

The life histories presented here are not intended as accounts which can be generalized in the 'scientific' sense, but they are intended to show connections and relationships to other groups and to wider social processes as discussed in chapter 4 with reference to the work of Fine and Weiss (2005) and to Bertaux (1981).

Each of the 9 women identified in chapter 4 will now be discussed within the time periods specified by Brown (1990).

Group one: 1944 Education Act and tri-partite system of education

Valerie's story

Valerie's home life had many mixed classed influences. She was born in 1948 and can remember living in a large house for a while in what she describes as a 'middle-class area'. Her dad was an insurance collector. Valerie describes the physical strength of her father and that he was an active member of the communist party, he was often away working and as a result her mother ran the house. Valerie describes her mother as 'loving', 'sharp' and 'strong'. Later, when Valerie's father retired early due to ill health, Valerie's mother took hold of the financial running of the house taking cleaning jobs until well into her 60s:

> Now I realize my mother ran the home, she was the strong person… She had no life outside of the home really; she was up at five, out cleaning…I remember sitting with her when she was dying and her arms were very big and I remember looking and thinking 'yeah she's got cleaner's arms, she deserved better than this' (Valerie, first interview July 2004).

Valerie's mum came from a 'middle to upper-class background'; her mum's dad was 'very high up in the army'. She discusses how there was this huge family divide in terms of class,

her one grandmother lived in a big, expensive house, whereas her other grandmother, her father's mother, was 'very working-class, very poor'. The first house Valerie remembers living in was bought with the 'strength of my mother's money' but was gambled away by her father 'a working-class thing to do'. The family was then forced to move to a two up two down and Valerie says of her mother 'she never got over it basically'.

Valerie states that the most important class influence in her life was that of being working-class:

> We couldn't relate to any of my mother's family, they were snobs. My cousins would come over and they had to wear suits, stand with their hands behind their backs…I wouldn't want to be like these people but you were always aware they had a sort of confidence. They spoke well, they went to public school, so then we'd speak and you could see them sniggering because we had working-class accents, or perhaps we couldn't converse in the same way they could (Valerie, first interview July 2004).

This quote and Valerie's constant references to class display a strong notion of her classed identity. This is at a time (1950s/1960s) when it is widely accepted that class and consciousness of class was a strong identity signifier. However, from many of the other interviews, participants demonstrated much less awareness of class, throughout all the time periods under investigation. This would be more in line with the work of Reay (1998: 265) who questions '…the extent to which collective class consciousness ever existed'. Valerie's quote also discusses the importance of accent and this links into Hey's (1997) analysis of accent as a signifier of class.

Valerie attended her local primary school and she states how she 'loved school', 'loved learning'. Both parents encouraged her and her brothers in their education. Valerie attended her local girl's secondary modern school and the assumption was that she would pass the 11+:

> My parents were told 'oh yes she'll pass with flying colours'…And so I deliberately failed my 11+. I could have answered all the questions and I chose not to. I thought none of my friends were going there; I'd be going on my own (Valerie, first interview July 2004).

Valerie's mum was disappointed 'I think my mother saw this was going to be a way out, a way forward for me'. Valerie took CSEs in English, history, art, commerce, maths and religious knowledge and gained a range of passes, mainly 1s and 2s and then went on to follow what she thought was her ambition of becoming a librarian: 'I hated it, I think it was

a bit of a class difference'. Valerie worked in the library for 2 years and then travelled to Switzerland for a while, before returning to college to take some A levels:

> My mum was really angry about that at the time, because as she saw it I had a career and a reasonably paid career for the rest of my life (Valerie, first interview July 2004).

A short while later Valerie was accepted to go to teacher training college. She says that she lasted about two days.

It was in Wales and she spoke no Welsh, so she says she felt alienated, however she says that even in the short time she was there she was making friends and she should have stayed, but:

> I came back and instead of my parents saying 'oh give it another try', they said 'oh we're so glad you're home'. It was easy to come home really. When I did go back to university which was, well I was quite mature then, it was 1991 and I was 41. I think my mother felt 'well why is she doing this, she's got her family now, she's got a house, a mortgage, her husband works (Valerie, first interview July 2004).

Valerie discusses of her earlier and later return to education how 'her mother had never seemed that encouraging'. Valerie completed her degree in literature studies and then later, commenced an MA:

> When I said I was going to do the MA, I was met with a stony silence, then it was 'oh no you've got the children, they've got to get to school. I think she was just anxious, wondering why I was going on (Valerie, first interview July 2004).

In our second interview Valerie discusses how, though education was seen as important by her family, the aim was to get a job, school was seen as 'a means to an end' and that end was a job.

Understandings of Valerie

A gendered division of labour as articulated by Westwood (1984) and discussed in chapter 2 is strong throughout Valerie's life. Because of the time period under study within group one this is to be expected for both middle and working-class women. However for working-class women, financial necessity often meant that they worked in low paid low skilled jobs outside of the home. Valerie's 'classed and gendered' messages were that women worked, but as an aside to having children and a husband, and in times of financial need, as can be seen by her mother's need to work to support her family until well into her 60s.Valerie's parents valued and encouraged education and Valerie 'loved' school; teachers perceived Valerie to be bright. These factors may contribute to an absence in the transcripts of 'cooling

out' (Colley, et.al. 2003) of ambitions by those who educate her. Valerie's ambitions to work in a library may be seen as a step up for the working-classes in line with Buswell (1992), but it remains an 'appropriate' aspiration for an 'able' working-class girl. Gender and class influences interact strongly here as Valerie was being educated at a time when higher education had not yet progressed from an elite to a mass system of education, as documented by Williams (1997), and women of all classes were under represented in (H)E. Valerie can be seen to be operating her own form of 'cooling out' (Colley et.al, 2003) and 'anticipatory socialization' (Bates, 1984) in her deliberate failure of the 11+.

Valerie discusses her awareness of the effects of such a choice, it was a 'plan' and done intentionally, and meant that she could remain in a familiar environment and feel safe:

> I don't know that it was such a silly decision…I think I would have been struggling on all sorts of levels and anyway I think I achieved quite well at secondary school (Valerie, first interview July 2004).

Valerie's multiple classed background is at play in the development of her particular 'classed and gendered learner identity'. Valerie's mother's reaction to her return to education could be seen as an attempt to 'cool' Valerie out of her ambitions. Valerie's mum could not see the point to Valerie's return to education; it was outside the realms of Valerie's anticipated (Bates, 1984) and realized future. She wanted to give her daughter a way out, a better life than her own, but this way out was of a utilitarian useful nature in the form of a career or a job, rather than an academic education. Valerie's mother's reaction to her daughter pursuing a university education demonstrates a perception that (H)E is of little value (Archer, 2003a) when compared to the immediate value of a respectable job.

Ruth's story

Ruth self identifies as working-class. She was born in 1952 to a single Irish-catholic mum. Ruth's mum returned to her full-time work as a nurse when Ruth was just 3 months old. Ruth was cared for in a social services nursery, and then later by a range of informal carers. Ruth was an independent child as from an early age she looked after herself, often until 10.30 at night if her mum was on a late shift. The flat that Ruth lived in was up three flights of stairs; it 'had a front room to live in and a back room to sleep in'. Ruth describes her mum as 'very determined', 'very hardworking' and 'friendly', though she had a 'no nonsense' sharper side to her.

Ruth went to her local primary school 'the teachers were all horrible, very bossy'. She took the 11+ and says of how she got on 'oh terrible, I tried but I wasn't a particularly bright child'. She attended her local secondary school and quite liked it as the teachers were so much nicer; Ruth was in the lower streams at this school. Her mum did not attend parents' evenings and had only a vague idea of what Ruth did at school 'if my report said average, she was happy'. Ruth's aim when she was in secondary school was to work in an office. The only careers advice she received pointed her in the direction of nursing, because she was taking biology, but Ruth never wanted to be a nurse, and her mum didn't mind what she did 'as long as I worked and was doing an honest job'.

In our second interview I asked Ruth what sort of things she had been encouraged to do with her life, her reply was:

> I don't think I've been particularly encouraged to do anything, no nothing, not like – you must go and see the world, you must go to college, or you must strive for this job, there was never anything like that, school never said anything like that either (Ruth, second interview September 2005).

Later in the interview she says:

> If you were poor boys seemed to go for these apprenticeships and girls went into an office, it seemed to pan out that way, and you were just expected to do that (Ruth, second interview September 2005).

When I asked Ruth what her overall impression was of what was expected of a woman when she was younger, she said:

> My expectations were get married, have children…that was the general expectation for girls in my area at that time…We were hoping that we'd find somebody nice that would look after us, we'd bring up their children and you'd just live happily ever after (Ruth, second interview September 2005).

Ruth took and passed at levels 1, 2 and 3 several CSEs in biology, nursing, English, business and commerce. When she left school she already had an office job lined up and she moved between similar types of jobs for the next couple of years:

> I worked full-time, similar sort of work, though I didn't like it so I was quite pleased when I found out I was pregnant – I could leave, I wasn't married when I got pregnant so I got married very quickly afterwards, I was 18 (Ruth, first interview September 2004).

The marriage was a 'disaster' and by 19 Ruth was separated, looking after her daughter and back living with her mum who said after a couple of months 'right you better go out

and look for a job and I'll look after (daughter)'. Ruth began office work with a temping agency before getting a permanent office job which she stayed at until she had her second child (Ruth married again at 24 and had her second daughter at 27). Ruth took the next 4 years off until her daughter was at school and then returned to the office work she was doing before – part-time.

Ruth has stayed in office and clerical work since, she returned to education just before our first interview when she took a 'women's writing' course advertised through her union. Ruth has recently taken her GCSE English Literature and is now reviewing her options.

Understandings of Ruth

For Ruth, classed and gendered messages regarding education were ambiguous. From her mother there is an attitude which conveys quite clearly that she must work hard, that she must do 'honest work' but no guidance, assistance, or even acknowledgement of school and education, which again brings to the fore the perceived 'value' (Archer, 2003a) of (H)E .

Ruth's early requirement to be an independent child able to get by, is in line with Bourdieu's theories in making 'choices of the necessary' (1986) – Ruth is not afforded the luxury of a considered educational or occupational choice as she, and her mother, struggle to get by. Within the educational environment there are no signs from Ruth that she is encouraged or helped by those who educate her to fulfil dreams or passions, rather she is relegated to low streams, and the most useful careers advice she gets is how to write a generic letter of application for a job, which she still utilizes to this day. Within Ruth's account and many of the other interviews there is a recurrent theme of the damage that relegation to lower streams has upon the learner identities of children and consequently of their adult learner identity. Plummer (2001) documents the processes of placing working-class children in lower streams that has gone on. The accounts of the group three participants of this research testify that this is still in operation with 4 out of the 5 girls being placed in low sets.

Ruth often refers to herself in our interviews as 'rather lazy' or as 'taking the easiest route'. There is nothing in the interviews which I feel substantiate these remarks, any more than her continued reference to a lack of intelligence. Ruth's resilience as a child and ability to look after herself, her tenacity in raising her daughter at a time when it was very difficult to be a lone parent; and her grasp of a responsible and difficult job today as a schools admissions officer – refute that she is any of the things she says she is. Instead Ruth's perception of herself as lacking may come from 'classed and gendered' messages in the form of ambivalence regarding education from her mother – which seems largely due to more pressing priorities such as providing for her daughter, and to a lack of interest in Ruth from those who educated her, and who deemed her inadequate. This may be an effect of being placed in lower streams which has stayed with Ruth into adulthood. Griggs (1989) discusses the inadequacy of education offered to the working-classes. This overview of Ruth's life is within the group one time period of the tri-partite system. The interview data collected from both group two and group three participants, also demonstrates continued inadequacies within some educational provision for some working-class girls today.

Clare's story

Clare feels she came from a working-class background. Her dad was a lorry driver and her mum stayed at home whilst her and her brother and sister were small, she then did part-time 'low skilled' jobs. Clare was born in 1950 and lived in a council house. She attended her local primary and secondary school. When I asked Clare about whether she had been encouraged in childhood her answer is strikingly similar to Ruth's:

> No, I don't think we were encouraged to do anything really, I wasn't encouraged to do anything at school (Clare, first interview September 2004).

Clare also refers to the fact that her parents had little knowledge or interest in what she was doing at school. She then goes on to say that she remembers being taught in secondary school:

> To look after the home, I can remember doing things like washing and learning how to iron. There was a little flat in school; it had a washing machine and everything (Clare, first interview September 2004).

This form of domestic socialization is 'typical' of Clare's generation and of the fact that because she failed the 11+ she attended a secondary modern instead of a grammar

school, it is also in line with the literature reviewed which stresses the domestic socialization of working-class girls in particular. Clare says that since she studied sociology she knows the reasons why she failed the 11+ and it makes her 'bloody angry'[44].

Clare cannot remember having any particular ambitions or aspirations at school, she had thought maybe of becoming a nurse. Clare was in the middle sets in school:

> The C and Ds were the middle stream and they were groomed for office work and things like that. The E and Fs were factory fodder (Clare, first interview September 2004).

Clare took a range of CSEs including biology, home economics and sewing and she achieved passes from 1-3.

Clare has no memory of why she chose these options, but she does recall that she loved history but she could not take this as an option because:

> It wasn't an option unless you were in the academic A and B classes where I suppose they wanted you to go and do university (Clare, first interview September 2004).

Clare worked in the careers office while at school but she says that the only advice on offer 'was to go and get a job, you could get a job anywhere then'. Clare's first job upon leaving school was as a pharmacy technician which she did for 2 years. She then went on to office work and at 20 she married and had her son a year later. She didn't work then for a while 'it was expected that you would stay at home and look after the children'. She had her second son and stayed at home until her children were 9 and 11, then she took part-time shop and office work.

In the meanwhile Clare returned to education. This was prompted by conversations between her and her friend who had passed the 11+ 'we used to talk about doing our O levels, but it was talk for a good few years' and 'we thought we might better ourselves a bit'. Clare took English, history and sociology and passed with two Bs and an A. Clare later enrolled on an access course before beginning her history degree at a post-92 university. She later went on to take her secondary PGCE and she now works as a basic skills tutor in the post compulsory sector.

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[44] Plummer (2000: 15) draws attention to the class bias of selective tests.

Understandings of Clare

Clare was quite clearly trained and constrained both within the family and school. Her parents had no knowledge of the education system and few resources (economic, social and cultural) (Bourdieu, 1986) with which to help her. The education that Clare received was a product of her generation, her gender and her class and it was '…based on the domestic ideology of the 'good woman'…' (Plummer, 2000: 16). Clare can clearly be seen to be undergoing processes of 'anticipatory socialization' (Bates, 1984) in terms of her time spent in the school flat, and the options that were available to her. Clare was also undergoing processes of 'filtering' akin to the work of Bates (1990) in that her and girls like her were placed in the middle-streams where she was very aware – even at the time – that she was being groomed for office work or similar, and that those filtered onto the A and B streams were those designated for greater things.

As with Brine's (2006: 431) 50-somethings who experienced the grammar system and secondary modern under one roof, Clare:

> …received contrasting experiences of the same school, where different gendered-classed identities, aspirations and expectations were constructed.

Group two: Introduction of comprehensive schools

Cathy's story

Cathy was born in 1959, her father worked the docks for most of his life and her mother did shop work until her children were born, after which she stayed at home with the children until they were older, before returning to part-time shop work. Cathy identifies strongly as working-class. Cathy and her family lived in a council house which they purchased in the 1980s, under the Right to Buy scheme (RTB). Cathy is the middle child of two sisters and, like her sisters, went to her local primary school before transferring to her local comprehensive school. She frequently played truant from secondary school and consequently left with one O level:

> I played truant quite a lot and I'd kind of given up on the education system by the time I'd gotten into senior school, I was scared most of the time, scared of being bullied, scared of teachers…(Cathy, first interview July 2004).

Cathy remembers expressing an interest as a child with wanting to be a doctor:

> I can remember saying to my dad that I wanted to be a doctor and he completely dismissed it, he said you've got to get a load of exams which kind of assumes I wouldn't be able to (Cathy, first interview July 2004).

In some additional notes Cathy says:

> I didn't think anything of my dad's reaction at the time but now I know from experience that when middle-class children (generally speaking) express an interest in becoming a doctor the parents will do their utmost to support this (Cathy's written notes, October 2004).

Cathy discusses the lack of support that her family gave her in terms of education:

> I don't think their level of knowledge was high enough for them to help, but I didn't ask them for help (Cathy, first interview July 2004).

When she left school she took a job as a clerical assistant which she hated. She was then unemployed for a while and spent some time campaigning for animal rights. Cathy has had jobs ranging from working in a co-operative to cleaning. Cathy says that her ex partner of 18 years, who was in (H)E, was instrumental in her decision to enter university, as was her involvement in animal rights where she says she mixed with many middle-class students and came to realize'…you get a grant to study and they're no brighter than I am'.

In her mid twenties Cathy began to take Open University (OU) courses, she left the OU with enough maths and science credits to count as a degree. She then applied to do a full-time degree in Literary studies in a post-92 institution, then later went on to do a full-time PGCE in the post compulsory sector. Cathy is now working as an Adult Educator and has recently completed her MA.

Understandings of Cathy

Plummer (2000: 147) discusses the conflicting emotions of pride and success that parents of working-class children can convey to their children and also of the '…intimidation, humiliation and belittling…' that can go on. When Cathy recounts the story of her father's reaction to her discussion of wanting to be a doctor she is clearly still angry about this 'if I'd been from a middle-class background I would've got 100% support'. She also discusses her parents' lack of knowledge of education and has now come to understand this as linked to the class background she grew up in.

Cathy is clearly positioned as active within the construction of her educational biography and is moving outside of traditionally defined boundaries from an early age, but not in the way that discourses of new times individualization claim, or of rational assessments made in times of 'risk' (Beck, 1992). Cathy played truant in school because of bullying and because she had 'given up on education' but as she articulates later, had she been from a 'better' background she feels the school would have shown more resistance to her truancy. Within Cathy's resistance to traditional life trajectories, classed and gendered identities are at play and her classed 'habitus' re-asserts throughout our interviews as her most deeply embedded self:

> I remember feeling affronted by the assertion that class no longer existed…it made me feel frustrated and angry, like part of myself was being denied or negated in some way (Cathy's notes detailing a discussion she had in a women's study module, October 2004).

Cathy makes a clear point in our interviews of how she came to gain her understandings of what (H)E might be like. She learnt about university from her partner of 18 years who she describes as 'middle-class' and who did a degree in Philosophy. Cathy also says that the contact that she had with lots of 'middle-class' students when involved with animal rights taught her that really they were not any more intelligent than she was and she came to realize that maybe she could go to university too. This is the sort of 'hot' or 'grapevine' knowledge that Ball and Vincent (1998) highlight as valuable information which working-class students are often denied. In Cathy's case it was one of the push factors for her in going to university.

Susan's story

Susan self defines herself as working-class. She was born in 1963 and lived in a council house, her father worked the docks, she has two sisters, and her mum only ever worked in low pay, low skill jobs. Susan went to her local primary and secondary school and from an early age was aware that she was considered to be bright by her teachers. Susan describes her mother as 'intelligent' and says that she feels her mum missed out on many opportunities and would have wanted a different life to the one she had.

Despite Susan missing the majority of the last two years of secondary school she left with five top grade O levels. When I ask her why she did not attend for the last two years she replies:

> I messed about at secondary school. There were a couple of really inspirational teachers, all the rest I got the feeling didn't give a damn about us. Some of them at the end of the day were out the door quicker than we were (Susan, first interview October 2004).

Susan describes her school as 'white working-class' and of the careers advice she received:

> They didn't have careers really, it was office work or shop work. They'd say 'what do you want to do' and you'd say maybe 'I want to work as an officer on a ship, or be an air stewardess' and they'd say 'you've got to do a lot of training for that, they'd put you off every time'. My friends and I talk about this when we get together, we're all really quite bright and no teacher suggested staying on to us (Susan, first interview October 2004).

Susan left school and went into office work before she got bored, left and began to travel.

Susan lived with a long term partner from a 'middle-class' background who she says had a partial influence on her decision to engage with (H)E, but she attributes this decision mostly to her sister, who had begun studying with the OU and she also recalls a defining moment:

> I remember I wanted a bag of chips and I had to count out my pennies and I couldn't have a bag of chips and so I had an overall plan. My plan was to get to university, get a degree and get a job (Susan, first interview October 2004).

Susan began her post compulsory education with the OU where she studied a range of courses. She then went on to do her degree in Physics at a pre-92 university and then her secondary PCGE (again at a pre-92 university)[45]. Susan has worked in a range of secondary schools as a teacher; she is now a mentor working with 'gifted and talented' working-class children.

When I ask Susan the impact that class has had on her life, she says:

> I'm very aware that I am from a working-class background. When I started studying with the OU I didn't feel comfortable to be able to contribute verbally or written, they were all very middle-class and they all spoke posh as I call it (Susan, first interview October 2004).

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[45] For a discussion on pre and post-92 university participation and working-class women see chapter 7.

Understandings of Susan

Susan displayed active resistance both in the family and in education to traditional trajectories designated to her because of her class. But this did not result in her taking the decision to move through the school system in a traditional format – gaining O levels, A levels and then attending university which would be the more taken for granted route for a middle class student who was considered 'bright' by her teachers. Instead Susan played truant and rejected the school system.

Despite the perception of brightness in Susan she was still subjected to processes of 'anticipatory socialization' (Bates, 1984) in the careers service attempts to 'filter' her onto office or shop work, which is work deemed suitable for working-class girls. She is also 'cooled out' (Colley et.al, 2003) of ambitions such as becoming an officer on a ship, by school and her family. Susan articulates attempts to support her educationally by her family but is strongly aware of the limits of their knowledge in supporting her:

> I don't think mum and dad had very high aspirations for us. They didn't have aspirations for themselves so they didn't see they had three very bright children (Susan, first interview October 2004).

There are many aspects to the construction of 'classed and gendered learner identities' and, as In Susan's case; a perception that you are bright is sometimes not enough. Susan knew she was bright yet it was not until many years past her post compulsory schooling that she utilized this. School processes and family processes can be seen to have stalled Susan's educational trajectory. As Plummer (2000) parents who have not benefited from education themselves may not see the benefit for their children, they may resent the possibility of greater success for their children, or they may be so caught up in 'making choices of the necessary' (Bourdieu, 1986) that educational concerns are relegated to less importance.

Susan makes similar references to Cathy to particular push factors for her to attend university. As with Cathy Susan acquired 'hot' or 'grapevine' knowledge (Ball and Vincent, 1998) through her partner who had already passed through university, and her sister who had just begun studying. In acquiring this knowledge the result was that barriers to university participation began to be broken down. For both Susan and Cathy they both came to see university as a plausible possibility because they began to feel less intimidated by the idea of attending university. They both knew and associated with people who were, or had

attended university and feelings of not having what it takes to go to university lessened somewhat. Later in this analysis it will become clear that despite this lessening of intimidation to the extent that they both entered (H)E, once in the environment a sense of intimidation and inferiority by both women was often described.

Anne's story

Anne was born in 1964, her father was a self employed painter and decorator and her mother worked part-time in a laundry; Anne has three brothers. She lived in a council house, went to her local primary and comprehensive school and left school with no qualifications and, in fact, didn't attend in the last year of secondary school. Anne has recently been diagnosed with dyslexia. Anne defines her class as '…probably working-class'.

Anne attributes many of her educational difficulties to the fact that her parents knew nothing about what she did at school[46] and '…didn't tell us the importance of education'. In secondary school Anne was put into low sets and this obviously had a profound effect on her and she explains that it made her feel 'hopeless'. Anne was very quiet in school, her parents did not attend parents' evenings and '…didn't even know I was in a unit, they never asked and I never told them'.

In secondary school there was no resistance from Anne's parents to her staying home from school:

> I had 3 brothers and my mum worked. If I promised her I would do the housework then she would let me stay home. My dad didn't mind I was very good at domestic cleaning (Anne, first interview October 2004).

Anne felt that school had let her down and that she was an easy target for the teachers who knew that her parents would not intervene. The school put her in a 'unit' and did not try to help her, she still does not know why but feels it may have been her behaviour but she says she was very quiet, not a badly behaved student. In terms of exams:

> I was told by individual teachers that I wouldn't get passes, so I thought well there's no point…I stayed at home my last year (Anne, first interview October 2004).

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[46] In contrast Anne is a very involved parent in her children's education. Mann (1998) Reay, (1998a) and Lareau (1997 and 2000) discuss the impact of mothers'/parental involvement in schooling.

Anne went on to do a series of shop jobs when she left school, before becoming pregnant. During her children's early years she stayed at home until she went back into education to try and find out what she was good at. Anne did some computer courses before she began an access to social work course. This year she is completing her Diploma in Social Work, having to retake some areas before being awarded the full Diploma.

Understandings of Anne

Anne's life at secondary school is one of profound sadness, and from the offset of predicted failure. As with some of Plummer's (2000) accounts she was monumentally failed by the education system, where she was constructed as a failure and there appears to have been no attempt to utilize the education system to help Anne. The fact that Anne ever stepped inside an educational environment again is testament to a great strength of character. Plummer (2000) discusses the self-fulfilling outcome of assigning children to low sets and that the fact that it is so often working-class children, it also results in '…accentuating social class differences in academic performance' (ibid: 23.).

It was not just assignment to low sets which is a part of Anne's educational trajectory but also the lack of understanding or assistance that she seemed to receive. Anne says that all she can remember doing in secondary school was writing 'simple stories'. The fact that teachers told her she would fail, should go against every fibre of a teacher's being and I am sure that the majority of teachers reading this would be outraged. Sadly though, Anne's situation is one that is not isolated. Only recently I was discussing similar situations with a college tutor who works with young adults in the foundation stage and she recounted many similar experiences to me that are described to her from the students she teaches. When I asked her about the social background of her students she said 'oh they're all from poor backgrounds'. Interestingly, parental support for this group in college is reasonably high with attendance at parent's days and open days frequent.

The destruction wrought on Anne's 'classed and gendered learner identity' was compounded by the lack of knowledge or interest that her parents showed in her education and this may stem from many reasons such as: lives too busy with the business of 'getting by', lack of understanding, or even fear because of their own experiences in education. Anne stresses that though her family did not help her educationally they taught her 'right from

wrong and how to be strong and caring'. This statement suggests that Anne's parents' lack of educational help did not stem from a lack of interest in their daughter and her well being.

Rather than processes of 'filtering' (Bates, 1990) 'anticipatory socialization' (Bates, 1984) or 'cooling out' (Colley, et.al., 2003) Anne seems to have undergone a process of educational *exclusion*. The effect upon Anne's sense of her learner identity continues today but she is progressing well in (H)E and when I ask her at the end of our second interview 'how she would describe herself academically' her answer is 'improving' and when she gains her social work diploma she would like to consider topping up to a degree.

Group Three: 1988 Education Act and marketization of education

In this younger cohort, self identification of class proved difficult as most have little understanding of the term. As such they are all identified here as working-class under the definition of class set forth in chapter 1.

Rachel's story

Rachel was born in 1986. Her dad is a construction worker, though she has not had much contact with him. She was raised by her mum who has not worked whilst she has been bringing up her children. Rachel has two sisters and a brother and has several step sisters and brothers. She grew up in a council house with her mum and her step dad who was a mechanic; he died when Rachel was eight. Rachel now lives in a rented house with her boyfriend.

Rachel went to her local primary and secondary school; she didn't enjoy primary school as she was bullied. Rachel's mum used to help her with her reading but her mum is dyslexic so when she got stuck she would go to her gran for help.

When she was in primary school Rachel thought about being a nurse, but from year 8 or 9 she has always wanted to work with children:

> I think somebody in the family was born, and I kind of grew to it and my mum was always saying to me 'oh you're so good with children' and I kind of changed my mind, I thought 'well maybe child care's for me then' and I really did enjoy it, but now it's getting on my nerves (Rachel, first interview July 2005).

Rachel much preferred secondary school, where the bullying stopped. Her mum did not attend parents' evenings as she '…found the teachers a bit intimidating and they would look down on her and things like that…'

Rachel discusses her options choices:

> We didn't get many options…I gave up on PE, I was good at PE I don't know why I gave it up, because I wanted to do childcare I couldn't do both (Rachel, first interview July 2005).

In our second interview I return to this subject and try to find out why Rachel dropped PE:

> I was quite disappointed that I didn't do PE. I used to love PE and art, I was really good at art, I was predicted an A. I don't know why I didn't do them. I didn't think you could get much of a career out of art and sport and things (Rachel, second interview March 2006).

I then ask Rachel if she thought she would have pursued these subjects if somebody had explored those options with her more clearly:

> Yeah, I got loads of leaflets on childcare, but that was the only area I got any help in really, I didn't get any other help. Lots of the girls took childcare (Rachel, second interview March 2006).

I know Rachel's school and it is in a less affluent area, so many of the students are working-class, the school has a 6th form but Rachel never thought or was encouraged to go onto 6th form:

> I didn't think about going on to 6th form. A few people from less well off backgrounds went…but I think they are more middle-class people in 6th form, they can get the grades more (Rachel, second interview March 2006).

I asked Rachel if she felt that she had been encouraged to reach her full potential at school or if anyone had ever made an effort to find out what her dreams were or what she would really like to do and to both questions she answered 'no, not really'. Rachel left school with 8 GCSEs ranging from C to E grades. She then went on to college and completed her level 3 DCE course where she was awarded two Cs. She now works full time as the manager of a florist shop which she has worked and trained in since she was a young teenager.

She might one day think about university or opening her own shop, but for now she is happy with the job she has, she says:

> I don't use a lot of my education. When I open up my own shop I'm hoping to teach floristry to children, I'm hoping to do special needs, I think I'm quite…..well a little bit bright (Rachel, second interview March 2006).

Understandings of Rachel

From my professional experience in the early year's sector it is evident that there is a recruitment drive currently underway in childcare, as there is a gap in current supply and demand. This links into Buswell's (1992) research which makes the point that particular groups and individuals are targeted for low-skilled and low paid vocational pathways as demanded by the economy. Child care is notoriously low paid, and though the skill required in early years care and education is reluctantly being recognized, as with Kilminster (1995) it is working-class girls that continue to be targeted for such work. As with Bates (1984 and 1990) and Buswell (1992) it is more often the upper working-class girls or lower middle-class girls that are 'filtered' toward the higher end of the educational spectrum in terms of training in these areas and eventual entry to university.

Rachel's school is in a less affluent area and there appears to be an emphasis on vocational rather than academic education in her school. There were more leaflets available and careers and options choices were largely geared to these choices. Rachel is good at other subjects, she was predicted an A in art, she loved PE, the career choices open to Rachel through these routes are large and varied, yet no one offered her this advice, she was steered on to the childcare pathway. This lack of information is directly in line with Hutchings (2003) who analyzes the different kinds of information given to students on various pathways and in a range of settings, she concludes that:

> The issue of concern here is that those on courses at lower levels are often told very little about the pathways that could eventually lead them to higher education, and so they may not consider working towards that destination (ibid: 102)
> .

Rachel's mum was interested in what Rachel wanted to do but did not seek information or help Rachel in her choices. She did not attend parents' evenings, or options' evenings. Hutchings (2003) discusses the impact of parental knowledge of HE '(however outdated)' (ibid: 101) and clarifies that it is more likely to be parents from middle-class backgrounds, who have experience of HE, who will offer strong support in university application. Rachel's mum, like many other parents in this thesis, were supportive of their children's decisions, but more often than not comments such as 'do your best' 'try hard' or 'we're happy as long as you are' were the responses given to requests for advice and help. Reay and Ball (1998) term this unfocussed advice which is reluctant to steer young people in any direction as '…a working class discourse of 'child as expert'' (in Hutchings, 2003: 101).

Rachel was left to make career and study decisions largely on her own as were many of her friends. The most accessible information was vocationally oriented and the result was that:

> A lot of my friends took childcare. A few retook GCSEs, you know IT, stuff like that. The others are in office work, hotel work, work as a receptionist (Rachel, Second interview March 2006).

Rachel has clearly been steered away from other routes toward childcare and this links directly to Bates (1984) 'anticipatory socialization' where schools promote a vocational curriculum, and option and career choices are geared round this. This was the case for Rachel, and from Rachel's accounts appears to be the case for most of the other girls that she knew, with really only the middle-class students going on to 6th form, which in Rachel's view is because they can 'get the grades'. This links into arguments that I will develop in chapter 6. From Rachel's comments it appears that she has made connections between class and ability and her 'classed and gendered learner identity' is fragile in terms of her own ability.

Charlotte's story

Charlotte was born in 1987 and lives with her Nan and her Uncle in the family's council house. Charlotte is an only child and never knew her father. She was brought up by her mum and her nan before her mum took her own life a few years ago after struggling with alcohol addiction for many years.

Charlotte went to her local primary and secondary school, she liked primary school as it was small and the teachers were nice. She says that her mum would help her with school work if she asked like reading, but in terms of checking that she had done homework Charlotte was really left to her own devices. Charlotte looked at three secondary schools, she liked two schools out of her area but chose on her own to attend her catchment school which she really liked, however she says:

> It was one of those schools where everybody went 'oh if you go there then you're gonna be thick', it did have a bad name about it (Charlotte, first interview July 2005).

Charlotte 'really liked English' and, like Rachel, 'loved PE' and thought she might like to be a teacher when she grew up. Option choices for Charlotte were decided one Friday morning with her tutor.

Charlotte says you could get advice if you wanted but you had to go and find them:

> It was like, come and find me, so you'd go and find her and she'd say 'I'm busy can you come back later?' (Charlotte, first interview July 2005).

Charlotte says that no one at school ever really tried to find out what she might be good at or what she would like to do, university was never really discussed, and at home she sought advice from her auntie who '…always thought I would be good working with children'. Charlotte thought she might become a paediatric nurse, and then when she did work experience in year 10 in a school, she thought once again that she might like to teach. Charlotte left school with 8 GCSEs mostly at B and C grade, her maths was a D. She recently finished her level 3 DCE where she attained a grade C overall. Charlotte still discusses wanting to go to university but she is afraid to leave home, the overall impression I get from our interviews is that Charlotte is actually afraid of university. She also says that it has been hard getting the help and advice about university in college:

> I ask to go to the library to find something out because I haven't got the internet at home and my tutor says 'no, I've got something for you' and then it's never sorted out. And things like filling out forms and stuff for uni. She says she will help me out with that and then she never ended up doing it and by the time she came round to it, it was too late. I haven't got my C in maths either, so she says just write it down, but I can't they will check, surely I need to get it to get into uni don't I? In the end I just give up, I can't be bothered to keep hassling (Charlotte, first interview July 2005).

Charlotte is now working full time as a Nursery Assistant in her local nursery where she is enjoying her work. She may one day go on to university and pursue her ambitions of becoming a teacher or nurse, but when I ask her 'where she sees herself five years from now' she says:

> I'm not sure, I think I wouldn't be happy just being an assistant, I think if I was to start off as an assistant I would have to go the whole hog of becoming a nurse or a teacher. I think yeah, just to make everybody proud, cause I've said all these things, and now I've said them I've got to do them (Charlotte, first interview July 2005).

Understandings of Charlotte

Charlotte has had to struggle largely on her own and with little support from her family in terms of education. Losing her mum in her early teens was difficult for Charlotte and undoubtedly has had a huge effect, along with her class background, on any consequent decisions that she has made. Despite having gone through all of that, and gone to a school where the A-C pass rate is low and it is difficult to 'put your head down and study',

Charlotte has still achieved 8 good GCSEs. This achievement is testament to Charlotte's ability yet throughout our interviews Charlotte makes many references to her lack of intelligence. Charlotte does not perceive herself as an able learner and this is partly due to her perception that her '…family aren't exactly the brightest of families' which suggests that Charlotte is making a link between her background and her ability.

Charlotte's tentative ambitions to become a teacher or a nurse, may be being stifled because of her lack of confidence in her abilities, so she may be 'cooling herself' (Colley, et.al., 2003) out of these ambitions. However the difficulties she has encountered in gaining information upon which routes to take, the options open to her and actual university application, at home, in school and in college have done nothing to alleviate her fears and anxieties, instead causing her to come to the conclusion that it really just is not worth all the hassle.

Hutchings (2003) problematizes the findings of the Dearing Report (1997) which states that making information more widely available will mean that more people will attend university. Hutchings demonstrates that for working-class students the issue is much more complex than this. She cites several areas of complexity: 'there is no 'moment of decision' (ibid: 97) to enter HE; HE participation may not be 'on the agenda' (ibid: 97), and decisions about HE participation are often emotional rather than rational. Hutchings goes on to suggest that rather than more leaflets, trust is the issue, with students wanting somebody they can trust and somebody constant that they can go to for help. In Charlotte's case when she asked for help she was mis-informed and the help was sporadic. If Charlotte had a constant and reliable source that she could turn to for help and advice she may pursue her ambitions to become a teacher or a nurse? However, I know Charlotte outside of a professional capacity and am still in touch with her. I have often offered her my help and advice and she knows that I would follow through, yet she has always declined my offers and I no longer bring it up for fear of her thinking that I am pushing her too much. Brine and Waller (2004) make the point that certain groups face greater risks in negotiating (H)E and in Charlotte's case the risks are many, not least of which the risk she faces in 'letting everybody down' which is directly linked to her 'classed and gendered learner identity'.

Faye's story

Faye was born in 1987, she has two older sisters, two step sisters and four step brothers, and she lives in a local authority house with her mum. Faye's mum and dad split up when she was about 10, she doesn't see much of her dad now. Faye's mum has no qualifications and has worked in factories and as a childminder, she is currently not working. Faye went to her local primary and secondary school. She liked primary school 'they treated me as an individual and with respect'. Faye says that her mum attended meetings and talked with the school about how she was getting on, and she would help with her reading.

Faye found secondary school boring and says that she 'didn't get along with some of the teachers' and she 'was in the class where all the dumb ones were'. However, she also says that this may have worked out for her because she got lots of one on one attention, she worked hard and her grades improved, though it had an effect on the way she felt about herself 'I felt like a right thicko'. In terms of option choices at school, Faye says:

> We had meetings to go to like parents' evenings. It made me decide what I wanted to do. I chose PE GCSE at first, instead of business studies and then the teachers were saying 'oh, it's quite hard' but I thought I'd be able to do it, the teachers were saying that 'it's quite a lot of coursework to do compared to others (Faye, first interview July 2005).

Faye chose business studies in the end even though she was so good at PE that she was asked to represent the school in the hurdles team at the local university trials.

Faye's mum was involved in Faye's schooling, but she didn't make any huge efforts to check that Faye did her homework; consequently Faye rushed her homework in the mornings at school. In terms of the careers advice she received at school Faye says:

> I wanted to be a physiotherapist at first, working with children and then they ask loads of questions don't they, that sort of tells you what you want to come out to be, and it was like childcare (Faye, first interview July 2005).

There were no 'proper' conversations with Faye or the people she knew at school about university. Faye says however:

> I didn't want to be like my mum is, struggling. I do want to get a good job, cause I've seen what she's been through and it's not nice, so I want to go and get a job and go to university (Faye, first interview July 2005).

Faye left school with 6 GCSEs at C and D level. She has completed her level 3 DCE course where she attained E grades. Faye is currently retaking her maths GCSE. She applied to university this year but was unsuccessful in her application. Faye has worked full-time as a

nursery assistant since leaving college and this has strengthened her desire to become a nurse as she does not want to spend her whole life in a low paid job.

Understandings of Faye

By being placed in the lower sets at school Faye's learner identity has been damaged which backs up Plummer's (2000) research upon the effects of allocation to low sets upon working-class children. However by being placed in these lower sets, in Faye's case, it has also served to raise her attainment because of the intense teaching she received. If Faye had been able to receive this one on one attention without the humiliation of being placed in bottom sets, it is possible that her confidence in her learner identity could have been raised alongside her attainment. In a similar way to Rachel's story, Faye is 'socialized' (Bates, 1984) or 'cooled out' (Colley, et.al., 2003) of her desire to pursue PE, and when she attends careers advice sessions the career path for her that emerges is one of childcare, despite the fact that she articulates desires to become a paediatric nurse. Hutchings (2003) further criticizes the simplistic interpretation of a lack of information that the Dearing Report (1997) puts forward in terms of access to information in that:

> …information is not neutral. The person presenting the information does so from a specific perspective and with a particular purpose in mind (Hutchings, 2003: 98).

The information Faye received was not 'neutrally' given in response to the career that she articulates a desire to pursue so that she can then make an informed choice whether or not to follow this path. Instead she is told childcare is a more suitable path for her than nursing which would require a degree. Faye's qualification levels at present make it unlikely that she would be currently accepted at university, but unless you accept the fact that current levels of attainment are predictors of future levels, then there is no reason that she cannot be encouraged to improve her grades. It is possible that taking into account her current grades and her background, that non neutral assessments of her likely transition to university are being made by those who offer Faye advice, and that she is being steered away from these ambitions, rather than given the advice she seeks, and being encouraged to try again.

Kilminster (1995) stresses that in FE working-class women are time and again steered into 3 predominant areas of: hairdressing, secretarial studies and health and social care. Faye was good at PE and was interested in physiotherapy but no one helped her to find information in these areas. Faye appears to have had difficulties at school and in her own view was not a

model pupil. Developing these interests of Faye's may have been a way to re-engage her in the system. Instead Faye can be seen to have been 'filtered', 'socialized' and 'screened' (Bates, 1990 and 1984; Buswell 1992). Her 'classed and gendered learner identity is fragile. Each time I meet Faye, I am afraid it will be the last, and that she will have given up on her career ambitions, having been told once too often that something is too hard for her. Like Charlotte, Faye articulates a deep need for help in accessing information from a constant person that she can trust, as well as reassurance that she is capable of the path she so wants to follow.

Concluding comments

This research finds insufficient evidence to suggest that a lack of aspirations is behind differentiated participation in post-16 pathways, which is often cited as a major cause. All participants had or have their dreams about what they would like for themselves. In all three groups there are instances of 'cooling out' (Colley, et.al., 2003) of aspirations, or of appropriate 'socialization' (Bates, 1984 and 1990, and Buswell, 1992) on to what are deemed as more realistic and fitting pathways. There are instances of 'classed and gendered' messages being sent to these women, within each time period identified, which have strong influences on the decisions that they make and on their learner identities. The messages being conveyed within each group are often persistent and display that classed processes have not lessened through the three time periods under investigation.

There are many instances in each group of a lack of information being available upon (H)E participation and entry to university both in the family and the home. Where information is available it tends to be of the 'cold' rather than 'hot' knowledge identified by Ball and Vincent (1998). Where 'hot' knowledge in the form of the direct experience of (H)E gained from friends and relatives is available it has been discussed by participants as a push factor in the decision to participate in (H)E.

There is a lack of understanding of the emotional rather than the rational impact upon choice making in terms of (H)E participation and the availability of information. Making information more available to groups and individuals who do not view university as 'on the agenda' (Hutchings, 2003) will not necessarily have the effect of equitably widening participation.

Parental involvement in study and career choices is articulated by most participants as low. However this should not be confused with a lack of interest or a lack of parental care for the overall well being of participants. More generally the pattern that emerges is one of 'unfocussed' involvement and advice from parents which may stem from a range of reasons. Reasons such as: a lack of knowledge and experience of (H)E, failure to appreciate the value of a long term education rather than the short term gain of a job, and emotional distance from the education system as a whole which may be due to a personal lack of engagement with education or fear of a system that did not serve their own interests well. These myriad possible reasons result more often in parental perception of the 'child as expert' (Reay and Ball, 1998) rather than parental intervention, help and advice upon study and career choices.

Careers advice in school and FE is often discussed as lacking or insufficient, and can be demonstrated as non-neutral and informed by perceptions of most likely pathways. Where it is in evidence it tends toward a vocational rather than an academic focus with most of the participants steered toward pathways identified by Kilminster (1995) as the most likely pathways for working-class women. Most of the women in this thesis have been steered toward secretarial, clerical, shop, or childcare work.

In group one and two it was most usual for the women to leave school at 16 and to pursue a job. By the time of the third group most students are staying on in education post-16, but they are tending to go to college with much less emphasis on entry to (H)E, rather than 6th form and then onto (H)E as with their middle-class counterparts. Colley et al (2003; 472) draw attention to the fact that 'almost three-quarters of 16-year olds now continue to participate in full-time education'. This participation is differentiated, and as Field (2000: 113) it is mediated by class 'lifelong learning has raised the stakes, and helped embed inequality'.

In all three time periods the women in this study have articulated difficulty in negotiating both the compulsory and post-compulsory sector of education. The women have demonstrated learner identities which can be seen to be affected by gender and class. Individualization processes would assume that today there exists greater opportunities to remake the self and 'crisis of masculinity' discourse suggests that women negotiate the remaking of the self with greater ease than men. Meritocracy literature tells us that nothing

other than ability and effort is required to be educationally successful and therefore the educational and occupational outcome that one achieves is 'fairly unequal' (Saunders, 1996). Equality of opportunity legitimizes, underpins and validates the widely accepted assumption that the British education system has overcome the worst of its capacities to generate inequalities. This research refutes such assumptions, arguing that class inequalities are becoming more deeply embedded in a system of education premised on choice and competition. So far this analysis is suggestive of evidence of processes of the 'embodiment of innate in/ability and/or inferiorization' which characterizes the learner identities of the participants. The following chapter will be an in-depth analysis of these processes.

Chapter 6

Embodiment of innate in/ability and/or inferiorization

Introduction

The previous chapter referred particularly to the lives of 9 of the participants. This chapter will draw more generally upon all the interviews conducted to demonstrate the processes of 'embodiment of innate in/ability and/or inferiorization' which came through as clear themes from the interviews.

In the conclusion of the last chapter I stated that this research found insufficient evidence to support that a lack of aspirations is a major cause of differentiated engagement in (H)E for working-class women. Within chapter 5 'classed and gendered constructions of learner identities', that can be the result of processes referred to such as: 'cooling out' (Colley, et.al. 2003), 'anticipatory socialization', 'screening' and 'filtering' (Bates, 1984 and 1990), and 'under-education' (Brine, 1999) were explored. A range of other areas were discussed in relation to the participants' words, such as the often inadequate advice that is offered to working-class students upon study and career choices. Attention was drawn to the possibility that information may not be given 'neutrally' (Hutchings, 2003) and that it may be infused with perceptions that particular and vocational pathways are the most usual and suitable destinations for working-class students, rather than focussed emphasis upon academic opportunities.

Previously an overview of current theory surrounding the participation of under-represented groups in (H)E identified five major reasons for under participation: lack of information, lack of value, lack of entry qualifications, financial risk, and class identity. The importance of each of these reasons has been acknowledged, however it was stressed that understanding the formation of class identity is critical, and that emotional rather than rational thought processes often impact upon (H)E engagement for working-class women (Hutchings, 2003). The literature reviewed in this thesis, which refers to the words of working-class participants, returns time and again to different aspects of class identity, despite post-modern claims of the 'death of class'. The primary data that I collected through the auto/biographical interviews carried out in this research are infused throughout with explicit

and implicit references to class and the resultant identities of class. Emotional aspects of whether or not to engage with the structures of (H)E often came through the data and overshadowed rational aspects. This may be a result of shared and similar life experiences which go to make up a 'deeply embedded class habitus' (Bourdieu, 1977). The theory in this research repositions class and class identity as central to the ways that working-class women engage with the structures of (H)E . This is done without essentializing class (acknowledging the presence of multiple identities, and multiple factors which impact upon decision making) or collapsing into reductionist claims (agency and structure influence our biographies).

This chapter will now focus on an area identified in chapter 3 – the connection of intelligence, ability and class. Briefly I will return to some of the literature in this area to demonstrate the impact of hereditarian theories of intelligence which emphasize innate and heritable abilities within groups. I will establish that such theories have had, and continue to have, an impact upon educational theory, policy and practice. The words of the participants will then demonstrate processes of such connections and the effects that this may have upon learner identities and the emotional and rational choices that are made in relation to engagement with (H)E.

Connecting intelligence, ability, and class

The literature reviewed here marks a return to and extension of the ideas put forth in chapter 2 and 3. The purpose of extending this review is to strengthen the foundations for the data analysis to follow.

Steedman's book 'The Tidy House' (1982) explores the narrative accounts[47] of three working-class girls. Behind these accounts are emotional and social processes which transform the working-class girl into the working-class woman. Steedman (ibid: 5) discusses the 'passive absorption' of attitudes, values, and theories that take place within education in terms of the educators and the educated.

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[47] Written by three working-class girls – Lindie, Melissa and Carla - over a week in 1976, documenting the lives they thought they might have.

Theories of innate intelligence and heritability have abounded in educational literature and as Steedman (ibid: 5) states:

> It is almost impossible for a teacher to look at a room full of children and not to see them in some way as being stretched out along some curve of ability…This is the historical inheritance we operate with, whether we do so consciously or not, and it has become a matter of 'common sense' and common observation rather than a matter of theory to know as a teacher that children of class IV and V parents are going to perform relatively badly…

To this we might add that the working-class girl may come to recognize her place as low down the 'curve of ability' so that she comes to 'embody a notion of innate in/ability and/or inferiorization' which can lead to a sense of 'lack' as she 'passively absorbs' the construction of herself as historically less able and inferior.

Simon (1971, 1990) and Simon and Taylor (1981) are fierce opponents to theories of inherited intelligence such as those proposed by Hernstein and Eysenck[48], and Jensen who Simon (1971) discusses in some detail. Jensen in the late 1960s and early 1970s re-ignited the intelligence and hereditary debate stating that compensatory forms of education had done little to change the balance of the genetic spread of intelligence.

Jensen asserted that there were two levels of intelligence:

> Level I corresponds to the ability for "associative learning", i.e. simple rote learning, power of recall, etc. Level II corresponds to the ability to grasp concepts, solve problems, in short, to *think*…He postulates that these two levels are, as a result of genetic factors, distributed differentially among the population "as a function of social class". Education should be differentiated accordingly (Simon, 1971: 243).

Simon makes his position clear, that education not heredity is the prime factor in human development and that social environment rather than genetic endowment affects educational outcome. Gray (1981) examines whether equal opportunities had reduced social inequalities in education in terms of class.

He discusses two versions of equality of opportunity. The first is:

> …when the average member of any social class has the same chance of reaching a particular stage of education as the average member of any other social class (ibid: 83).

The second is the liberal definition which:

> …posits that equality of educational opportunity exists when children of equal *merit* have equal *access* to the various stages of secondary and tertiary education (ibid: 83).

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[48] Discussed in chapter 3.

With the former definition he concludes that there has been little progress. With the more liberal view (which is the view that is widely accepted today, that equality of opportunity is about access linked to merit, rather than outcomes) then it might be argued by more liberal theorists that with the expansion of secondary, further and higher education then some headway has been made. Alternatively it could be argued that as merit is so often linked to social class and arbitrarily defined and measured by the education system then this more liberal definition is mutually self justifying. Those children from higher social classes who are viewed and/or who come to self view themselves as having greater merit are allocated access based upon that merit. In turn their achievement remains higher because of greater access; however explanations for higher achievement are often constructed as being the result of genetic or 'innate' and unequal endowment of intelligence, ability or the desire to work hard.

Equality of opportunity discourse makes less visible the fact that lower achieving children from lower social classes have unequal resources through which to take advantage of opportunities and increased access. If access is constructed as more open and achievement based upon nothing other than effort and ability, then if the working-classes do not improve their overall educational performance in terms of accreditation, this can be explained as individual failure linked to unequal distribution of merit and ability, and/or a 'lack' of effort. This rhetoric feeds into hereditarian theories and justifies the work of other theorists that the British education system is unequal but fair and most probably meritocratic (Saunders, 1996). Much of the debate over intelligence and innateness focuses on 'race' as well as class, Burt (1959, 1959a) was one theorist who focussed primacy on class. Gould (1996: 314) states:

> If race is America's primary social problem, then class has been Britain's corresponding concern.

Class has been - and continues to be – a prime factor in theory, policy and practice which designates who gets what and why in terms of educational resources within the British education system. 'Race', ethnicity and gender cross cut the inequalities associated with class. Class is described as having less of an impact upon educational inequalities than in previous times.

This research argues that the impact of class can be seen to be more deeply embedded in the third time period under investigation here – Brown's (1990) 'third wave' characterized in

this research by the group three participants. This research clearly repositions class as a primary factor in determining 'how and why working-class women engage with the structures of (higher) education'. Class remains a major contributory factor as to why working-class women continue to be under-represented in academia and (H)E, and over-represented in vocational education and in areas in FE as identified by Kilminster (1995) such as hairdressing and caring courses. Class remains a major contributory factor in why working-class women continue to leave education at an earlier age than their middle-class counterparts and to leave 'under-educated' (Brine, 1999). Class continues to inform the perception, albeit unconsciously, that educators may have upon the likely performance of different groups (Steedman, 1982; Gaine and George, 1991; Plummer, 2000; Gillborn and Youdell, 2000 and 2001).

What this research will now demonstrate is that many of the working-class women in this study display notions of themselves as socially and educationally inadequate, less able, and/or inferior. They explicitly display this throughout our interviews yet, most of the time, deny this or seem unaware of their capacity to undermine their abilities and capabilities. Therefore I refer to this process as the 'embodiment of innate in/ability and/or inferiorization'. Both the educational and home environment can be demonstrated to have a role in shaping learner identities characterized by 'in/ability and/or inferiorization'. A sense of 'lack' can be the result of this embodiment process and can be identified as one reason which may contribute to 'how and why working-class women engage with the structures of (higher) education'. A sense of 'lack' might have the result of preventing some women from engaging, whilst it may be part of the push factor for other working-class women to re-engage with education.

The participants of this research and embodiment of innate in/ability and/or inferiorization

9 of the participants have been introduced so far in chapter 5 of this research within Brown's (1990) 'three waves' of education; all 16 participants will be discussed in this chapter. In group one (identified by the 1944 Education Act and tri-partite system of education) are Valerie, Clare and Ruth. Joining them in this chapter will be Carla and Wendy. This group received their secondary education in the early 1960s within the tri-partite system

In group two (identified by the introduction of comprehensive schools) some analysis of Anne, Cathy and Susan's words has taken place. Rebecca and Rose will become part of the analysis within this chapter. These women all received their secondary education in the early to mid 1970s within comprehensive schools.

Within group three (identified by the 1988 Education Act and marketization of education) Charlotte, Faye and Rachel's interviews have been partially explored. Emma, Natasha and Natalie will become part of this group. These participants all received their secondary education in the early to mid 1990s within a marketized system of provision.

Embodiment of innate in/ability and/or inferiorization: the evidence

Most of the women in this study display a strong sense of educational 'in/ability and/or inferiorization' from early childhood onwards.

Group one

Those women educated in the tri-partite system.

Wendy has carried out the role of Education Welfare officer (EWO) for some time now but has recently began work as a student advisor because she does not want to have to undergo the training it requires to become qualified to officially carry on with her post as EWO. Wendy recounts many stories to me from her early schooling onwards which affect her view of herself today and her capacity to undergo the education it would require to continue as an EWO. The following words are from Wendy (first interview October 2004):

> Every time a full-time job comes up they want people with qualifications. I don't really think I've got the academic ability to achieve them. Because I'm so entrenched and I don't think I'm able to do it. I was a very average person at school and primary school didn't give me a lot of self-esteem really because I found reading as a 7 year old very difficult.

She discusses her allocation to streams:

> We also had streaming, like there was the top class and then there were the lower ability classes and I was in the lower ability classes (Wendy, first interview October 2004).

In relation to her parents' involvement in her schooling and career, Wendy states the following:

> My parents went to parents' evenings. I expect they said I was progressing, but I was just what they classed as very average. Wendy tries but….

> My parents didn't expect me or any of us to go onto further education. They didn't want me to go in a factory either; they wanted me to work in an office because for our family if you worked in an office that was a step up (Wendy, first interview October 2004).

Wendy demonstrates a perception that particular people stay on past compulsory education:

> I would say generally working-class children from the estates aren't thought of as to go on to further education (Wendy, first interview October 2004).

Wendy clearly articulates awareness that she views herself as lacking in ability, even now when she competently carries out professional roles. Her comments demonstrate her awareness that in the family and in school young people from a working-class background were not targeted, in the time period which she is educated in, even for further education. Wendy was, like many of the other women in the study, relegated to lower sets. Plummer (2000) discusses the connections between class and streaming and the research here finds evidence that suggests that there are different expectations of working-class children to middle-class in terms of ability. As with Gaine and George (1999) working-class children are having to 'prove ability'. Many of the women in this study were placed in lower streams, many of these women do not understand why. All of these women have gone on in later life to lead successful, productive lives, despite this early definition of themselves as 'less' able.

This research finds evidence that the education system is increasingly monopolizing the means by which to be socially mobile, so that those groups who in the past could 'make it' without formal qualifications, now find it harder to do so. This affects all of the groups under analysis. In Wendy's case, though she can competently carry out the role of EWO she cannot continue in this capacity unless she returns to education. Wendy's previous bad experiences of education have led her to fear the system and doubt her own capabilities. A result of this is that she may self impose boundaries as to what she can and cannot achieve. As with Bourdieu (1986) Wendy's self imposed 'classificatory scheme' (ibid: 483), which can be viewed as a product of the social space she occupies, has made it emotionally as well as rationally difficult for her to '…transcend 'the limits of (her) their minds'' (ibid: 484. My addition in brackets).

Carla, from group one, also describes herself as average and displays a sense of lack (first interview September 2004):

> I was an average pupil… I hated maths; I'm still not very good at it.
>
> I don't think I was very ambitious, I didn't want to be anything particular when I left school; I left when I was 16 and worked in an office.
>
> If I'd had any potential and wanted to stay on at school, I think my parents would have found the money.
>
> I never even thought about university, it just never entered my head.

Carla's comments suggest that she aligns her personal prospects almost entirely within the education system; that potential can only be brought out within education. She articulates the possession of no potential and of absolutely no connection with the world of university which she views as completely out of her realm.

Valerie, Ruth and Clare, from the group one cohort and already introduced in chapter 5, discuss similar feelings of 'lack' in terms of ability. In chapter 5 I outlined Valerie's deliberate failure of the 11+. Valerie clearly states that she liked primary school: 'I loved learning in junior school; I was in the top layer'.

Valerie also makes it clear that her parents were educationally supportive. Yet of her failure of the 11+ she says:

> I don't know that it was such a silly decision…I always felt I would have been struggling, because you know you would have had brighter people there, people that had been in a certain type of education (Valerie, first interview September 2004).

Ruth's opinion of herself as a young learner is articulated in chapter 5 'I wasn't a particularly bright child'. Ruth was also in some of the lower sets in school and of her schooling she says:

> In primary school the emphasis was on going to grammar school, so unless you were a bright child there didn't seem to be the same interest in you (Ruth, first interview September 2004).

In our second interview Ruth discusses in more detail some of the educational steps she is undertaking. She has recently finished a level 3 writing course and her GCSE in English. Ruth is quite shy about discussing this and does not want the people she works with to know as: 'perhaps they'll think I'm being a bit silly'.

At the end of the second interview I ask Ruth 'what sort of people does she think go to university'? She replies:

> All sorts go to university now, even children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Having said that though, although they may do well, it may be more in skilled work, not that they necessarily go to university (Ruth, second interview September 2005).

Ruth is well qualified to discuss destinations of working-class children; she now works as a School's Admissions Officer in an area that has some of the worst performing secondary schools in England and which is overwhelmingly populated by working-class students. She says:

> I think university is still seen as a more affluent choice, even today. I don't think anybody I went to school with went to university. People who go to university would have to be just somebody terribly clever. I would expect people who went to university when I was at school, would have been bright rich people (Ruth, second interview September 2005).

> If somebody told me they were going to go to university when I was at school, I'd of probably laughed actually, I'd of just looked at her as if she was, you know, thinking above her station (Ruth, second interview September 2005).

These comments demonstrate that Ruth is struggling to piece together current educational rhetoric of increased participation in (H)E. On the one hand 'all sorts go to university now' but on the other her experience of the education system in a professional capacity tell her this is not so. She describes in our second interview some of the heartbreaking struggles of less affluent parents to get their children into better performing schools, which she says just does not happen. One comment she recalls is of a struggling parent who says 'just because I live in this shit hole doesn't mean I have to send my kids to school here'. Ruth has a deep understanding of the unequal resources that different parents have to secure good school places for their children and she understands the impact that this has on later participation within (H)E. As with Bourdieu (1986: 477) school places are 'frontiers' which are to be 'attacked' and 'defended' by the most knowledgeable and powerful. Equal access to good school places is more rhetoric than practice as demonstrated in earlier chapters by the Sutton Trust (2005) and is part of the process whereby '…participation in higher education is not an equal or possible 'choice' for everyone' (Archer, 2003: 20).

However, this sort of barrier to (H)E is a conscious and more tangible barrier, more easily explained and articulated. Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody (2001: 50) draw attention to the pre-occupation within Marxist and neo-Marxist theorizing to draw attention to: ''consciousness' and thus the 'conscious' aspects of identity…'. To gain deep

understandings of working-class participation and non participation with (H)E a grasp of the unconscious, emotional and psychic aspects of identity are stressed. Ruth's comments quite clearly demonstrate that she is making unconscious connections between class and ability as in 'bright rich people' who go to university, and 'thinking above her station'. Ruth states earlier that she does not want anyone at work to know what she is doing educationally. This may be because of her own fear that perhaps her colleagues might think that she is 'thinking above her station' which may be connected to her own sense of 'lack' which might unconsciously lead her to agree with this diagnosis. It also might be tied up with her feelings of inadequacy and wanting to shield from colleagues how 'far behind' she feels she is because of her lack of qualifications.

Ruth has taken some steps back into the world of education and she has enjoyed this, however in our interviews she states that it is unlikely that she will take it any further. Ruth discusses that she has other things going on in her life such as, her husband, her children and her grandchildren. She also discusses that it would not really be worth it now, and she expresses many doubts over her capability to study at a higher level than she has. Ruth's decisions over whether or not to take her tentative steps into (H)E any further are sometimes articulated in response to 'rational' and 'pragmatic' (Archer and Leathwood, 2003) themes, but more often they present as mediated by 'emotional' responses. These responses are often conveyed, and need to be understood, in between the words of our interviews, such as in Ruth's need to hide her educational advances from friends and colleagues in case they think her 'silly'.

Ruth was held back in her compulsory school days from academic advances like so many working and middle-class girls of her generation. However Ruth has been encouraged by her writing course tutor and told that she is capable of further study. She has achieved well in the educational steps she has taken, and has the financial freedom and time to pursue a goal of (H)E. Her husband has said 'he doesn't know why I bother with work hassles' but Ruth says 'she needs something for herself'. That 'something for herself' could be (H)E, but from the interviews I conducted and Ruth's responses, for the foreseeable future, it seems unlikely that Ruth will attempt to enter university. This is not because she lacks the skills, but more because she has a self perception of 'lack' and portrays embodied and 'embedded' '…tacit/common-sense notions of 'what is appropriate for people like me' (Archer and Leathwood, 2003: 176). Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody (2003: 50) state that: 'it is implicit

that the working class must make a psychic transformation…'. To gain a deeper understanding of 'how and why working-class women engage with the structures of (higher) education' it is also paramount that research acknowledges and attempts to understand the complexity of psychic and emotional aspects to (H)E participation and non participation.

Clare began her secondary education in the lower sets, but she did manage to move into middle sets, however she says:

> I knew that the A and B people were better than me. I think the teaching was different as well, I think you got better teaching than the teaching if you ended up in the lower classes (Clare, first interview September 2004).

Throughout our interviews Clare makes reference to a continued sense of 'lack', of not feeling adequate, particularly in relation to her participation in (H)E and then later to her participation in education as a teacher (this will be explored in chapter 7). Her comments, regarding the way that some of the people she now teaches feel about themselves, are interesting and fit in with some of the findings of this research. The people that Clare teaches are in Clare's words from 'poor' or 'working-class' or 'disadvantaged' backgrounds. I ask her: 'does she think that working-class kids think that they are not clever'? She replies:

> Yeah, I would say that…they get it from parents, friends, kids, teachers, I hope not from teachers anymore, but I don't know. The adults that I teach now…most of them, a lot of them are dyslexic, but it wasn't recognized then, they were just stuck at the back of the class and told that they were thick (Clare, second interview October 2005).

Returning to her own educational experiences, I ask Clare 'whether there were girls around when she was growing up who had careers'?

> No, I wouldn't have thought so, no. If you were considered a bit thick or a bit slow you would go into a factory, if you were a little bit clever, but not grammar school, you would go into an office, the exceptionally clever ones who went to grammar, who obviously came from middle class backgrounds anyway would've gone to university (Clare, second interview October 2005).

To clarify whether she is connecting class and ability here, I ask her 'so most of the working-class girls you grew up with then wouldn't have been considered exceptionally clever'?

> There might have been one or two, but as I said it was probably girls that might have been more middle class. I wasn't thought of as being very clever anyway…I think if I was pushed at school I could've done a lot more but I wasn't because I was fitted into the category that they wanted me to fit into (Clare, second interview October 2005).

When we are discussing her career choices at school I ask Clare 'If you had said to the teachers that you wanted to do something more, something different what would their response have been do you think'?

> To put you down probably, in a nice way if it was possible I'm sure, I can't recall any of the teachers being out rightly cruel, but I think they might have tried to put you off, and said 'oh no my dear you'd probably be much better working here' (Clare, second interview October 2005).

This last line resonates strongly with the words of Steedman (1982: 7) who contemplates all the 'mild and genteel ways' that working-class children are shown that they lack intelligence and ability. Clare has clearly picked up connections between class and ability and she embodies this connection even now and even though she is a highly educated woman herself. Her experiences of being 'in the thick group or the not so thick group' have resulted in a continued and deep sense of 'lack' as will be demonstrated in chapter 7.

Group two

Those women educated in the comprehensive system.

Rebecca didn't enjoy primary school:

> I had a real problem learning to tell the time and I thought I was stupid. My teacher would make me get up in front of the whole class, there was a big clock and I had to tell what the time was and I couldn't do it. She humiliated me… (Rebecca, first interview September 2004).

Rebecca is from group two; most of whom did not take the 11+, but Rebecca herself sat this test:

> I picked up that I wasn't bright…I took the 11+, it was painful, cause even now I hate tests and exams…It was a very unfair way of testing people. I remember doing it, I just felt terrified, I don't think the questions were relevant to me (Rebecca, first interview September 2004).

Rebecca did not pass the 11+ and says that 'I didn't do very well, I was hopeless at exams'. I asked her 'what she wanted to be when she was at school' and she replies:

> I had a careers interview, if you could call it that. I was given options to become a secretary or a teacher. I went home thinking I don't want to be a secretary, I can't be a teacher because I'm not clever enough (Rebecca, first interview September 2004).

Rebecca did later become a teacher, though she discusses many moments when she has struggled with her learner identity. Rebecca picked up from an early age a perception of

herself as lacking in terms of academic ability, even though she comes from a musical and artistic family who taught her the value of education. The language that Rebecca uses throughout our interviews signifies a deeply emotional response to the education she received as a child. In the sentences above Rebecca uses the words: 'humiliated', 'terrified', 'not clever enough' and this mirrors similar language throughout the interviews.

Like many of the women in the study, Rebecca's sense of 'lack' has not resolved itself through educational attainment. Though a teacher herself she discusses a continuous sense of her difference to most colleagues, and has a sense that her background has held her back from promotions. She recalls 'staff room' conversations which have angered her because of their joking and belittling references to the ways of working-class life, though she has never had the courage to challenge such conversations. This demonstrates that education can be a social equalizer, but also that even upon attainment of necessary credentials, class still has the possibility of holding you back. Even if this is only a perception held and not true in practice it has still, in Rebecca's case, had the effect of stifling her ambitions and desires as a teacher. Many of the conversations I have had with Rebecca and other working-class colleagues bring to mind Carolyn Steedman's (1986: 2) powerful words in relation to continuing class divides despite becoming educated:

> I read a woman's book, meet such a woman at a party (a woman now, like me) and think quite deliberately as we talk: we are divided: a hundred years ago I'd have been cleaning your shoes. I know this and you don't.

These comments link with Skeggs (1997) and her analysis of working-class respectability, where her participants both resist and attempt to emulate middle-classness, to fit in, but often understand their working-classness to be inscribed and inescapable, and as something which sets them forth as different and lacking. Many of the women in this study, both reject and desire, characteristics which they associate with being middle-class. Characteristics which are identified by Rebecca and other participants variously as: 'lacking common-sense', 'taking things for granted', 'articulate', 'confident', 'more options' and 'not having to struggle'.

Rebecca states that she feels that she is viewed differently by colleagues because she is not from a middle-class background, but also throughout our interviews she displays a desire to be seen as different and to embody characteristics of being working-class which she views as valuable. Just as other participants, Rebecca displays a complex desire to change, but also

a rejection of what she sees as the necessity to change, as well as a strong connection and faithfulness to her roots. Characteristics which participants associate with being working-class are described both negatively and positively. Participants identify: 'less choices' always having to struggle', 'misery', 'pulling together', and 'a sense of community' with being working-class.

Rebecca describes herself as working-class, and materially her background substantiates this, yet Rebecca also had what might be described as middle-class cultural influences in her life as a child which I previously explained when discussing her mother's musical talents. Rebecca states however that even though she is now in a job:

> which is considered a professional job. I wouldn't go along with all the middle class attitudes that are associated with that (Rebecca, first interview September 2004).

Variously Rebecca articulates some of those attitudes as: sometimes 'prejudice' and 'intimidation' toward people, but she also states that education and professionalism has given her: 'confidence', the ability to 'be myself', and knowledge that 'I'm capable of doing more'.

As identified by Archer and Leathwood (2003: 177):

> It is important to note that respondents did not simply take up, or resist, dominanat discourses around HE participation and class identity change, rather they engaged in complex, sometimes contradictory negotiations.

Rose is the youngest of 6 children; she grew up in a 'poor area', and lived much of her childhood in a caravan. She describes her childhood as 'loving', but Rose was a 'loner' who never felt like she fitted in at school 'I knew I was poor; don't bother with her she's the poor one'. Throughout our interviews Rose displays a severe sense of 'lack' which is combined with a competing desire to 'remake' herself. In line with 'new times individualization' discourse there is a desire to change, however for Rose the opportunities with which to do this are severely compromised (Skeggs, 1997).

As with the work of Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody (2001) Rose has spent many years in jobs that she describes as 'limited' because of her lack of qualifications, and lack of confidence in her ability to attain the necessary qualifications to enter university. Neither has Rose's situation been 'mitigated by light at the end of the tunnel' (ibid: 68) more often when she has made attempts to change her biography she has been held back by the advice of

educators, and by the demands of her very tough life. Rose's tenuous attempts to 'remake' herself or to reconstruct her biography are in sharp contrast to Gidden's (1991) and Beck's (1992) concepts of 'reflexive individualization' and rational 'risk' assessment and more in line with Bourdieu's (1986) 'choice of the necessary' or alternative reflexive self which is shaped by . 'habitus' and accounts for the 'life world' (in Lash, 1994: 156) in which participants are situated.

Giddens and Beck argue that the individual and its history can be viewed as separate from their social space. Beck (1992) explains the individual as participating 'in a market of exchange' (ibid: 95) where inequality becomes 'individualized' and

> The educated person becomes the producer of his or her own labor situation, and in this way, of his or her social biography (ibid: 93).

For this theory to be substantiated, then I would expect to see, at least from those who have come through university and are out the other side, much fewer references to the inadequacy that they felt before they were educated. I would also expect to see more rational and pragmatic choices being made by both the participants and non-participants of this research upon their 'social biographies'. Whilst rational and pragmatic choices are in evidence, emotional and psychic impacts upon choice are discussed more often by participants. Rose, who describes herself as 'just working-class', talks about the times that she has returned to college. First she did a return to learning course. Then she took her maths GCSE, which she quietly admits to passing, at the time of our interview she had just completed a level 3 writing course with the WEA. She says that she would like to learn more about the theory of mental health so that she could help the people she cares for and get a better position, also that:

> I want to do something, to learn, there's this thing in me that wants do something, but I just don't know where to start doing it, or how to start doing it (Rose, first interview September 2004).

Throughout both our interviews Rose continues to put down her achievements and denigrates her ability to do more than she has. I have telephoned Rose and given her details of access courses that she could enrol on, but to date Rose has not followed these up. In contrast to Giddens and Beck, Bourdieu's theories see structure and agency as inextricably linked; field and habitus as complicit. Rose's class (as well as her gender and generation) has firmly oriented the shape of her biography and the effects of class upon her life remain clear despite 'death of class' rhetoric.

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In agreement with the assertions of Reay, et.al. (2005: 95) '…Beck overstates the irrelevance of traditional affiliations'. As with the working-class participants of their study, for Rose 'class remains' (ibd: 95) a very important element of her identity and of her sense of self.

Rose's parents had little education and were less able to help her with school work, from an early age she was designated as 'a bit slow' and she felt that people (teachers and peers) did not bother with her because she was 'the poor one'. In secondary school Rose describes how:

> If you were that bit slower then you kind of got 'oh well you'll go into a shop or you'll go into a factory' or whatever, they kind of split us up (Rose, first interview September 2004).

All of these processes which Plummer (2000) Gaine and George (1999) Gillborn and Youdell (2000 and 2001) and Steedman (1982 and 1986) amongst others, have identified as often being mediated by the signs of class and the perceptions of likely achievement, conspired to make it less likely that Rose would make rational, pragmatic, risk assessments and reflexively choose her social biography.

Rose's sense of 'in/ability and inferiority' comes through clearly in our interviews from the way that she belittles her achievements, finds constant excuses not to follow up possible learning opportunities to pursue her ambitions, and even to the way that she carries herself in our interviews and uses humour and jokes to mask her fear of the education system. Though Rose has returned to education, she has not always completed courses and she has described the difficulties that she encounters in finishing courses. Rose's attempts to rewrite her biography have been fraught with fear and instability which is in line with Brine and Waller's (2004) assessment of increased risks for working-class groups who negotiate educational structures. Once again this research finds insufficient evidence to suggest that a lack of aspirations or ambition, or effort, or ability lies behind differential participation. Rather a sense of 'lack' which curtails ambitions or leads to perceptions of unequal ability, combined with the everyday practices of life for some working-class groups more often than not results in 'choices of the necessary' (Bourdieu, 1986). This is in opposition to liberal/neo-liberal theory which asserts that groups and individuals have equal opportunity to make advantageous and rationally assessed choices within the British education system with which class has little or no effect.

Unusually both Cathy and Susan had a self perception that they were bright from an early age, but as discussed in the previous chapter, neither did very well in school, and both went to university through non traditional routes. Cathy in particular continues to have issues regarding her self-esteem, 'I feel quite uncomfortable talking around middle-class people'. Cathy says that she chose to begin her university career with the OU because she would have found a university environment 'intimidating'. She began to feel better about herself once she had begun studying with the OU as there were lots of people there with 'gaps in their knowledge', but she describes how she 'shook the whole way through' many of her classes.

When I asked her 'what she was scared of' she replies 'not getting it, being exposed as a fraud, being on a flippin degree'. Cathy talks about class in a way that displays that she understands that being working-class can be viewed from a perspective of 'lack'. In our second interview she tells me that the words working-class make her think of:

> Less choice, a difficult life, always difficult, an expression that comes to mind is 'for the misery portrayed in the set of a face'…yes you can see it in people, it's etched in their faces and their postures, struggle, struggle, less choices and when you make the wrong choices less cushion to fall back on. The words middle-class make me think of articulation, confidence, more options……..niceness (laughs) or knowing what to say and when to say it. I've met unconfident middle-class people but generally, I think, middle-class people are more accepted within this society, this society is geared around being middle-class (Cathy, second interview August 2005).

For Cathy her perceptions are that middle-class people are more able to negotiate the structures of society because they have a middle-class orientation and she sees this as reflected in the bias of the education system in which she 'couldn't see the relevance or the point'. Cathy's accounts are examples of Bourdieu's (1977) theories surrounding 'habitus'. Those who have middle-class experiences which go to make up the history of who they are and how they are, can more easily negotiate the middle-class bias of education within their comfort zone. The idea of middle-class bias of education is discussed by many theorists in the literature reviewed, and elsewhere, as with the theories of Bernstien (1971, 1975, 1990 and 1995).

Cathy does not discuss class differences in terms of deficit in the same way that some of the other participants do, indeed she views what she would describe as working-class characteristics, such as a 'strong sense of community' as positive aspects.

However she often describes a sense of 'lack' in terms of her working-class self:

> I'm a bit ambivalent about being working-class. Sometimes I do identify and other times I think, well it hasn't been that much of a positive experience for me really (Cathy, first interview July 2004).

Cathy also displays a sense of 'lack' at times in relation to her own impressive achievements, underplaying them quite substantially, such as when she describes her understanding of why she was accepted at university:

> I think it was at the time when they were giving universities more money to get more people in. So I suppose I've always had that as well, that if I've got accepted on something I suppose there's a reason why I got in. Not through my own merit or because I'm good enough, it's because like 'oh yeah, well they're taking loads of people anyway (Cathy, first interview July 2004).

Susan has a strong notion of herself as an able learner 'I knew this from when I was 5 or 6'. She liked being bright but felt that because her school was 'in a rough area it may have alienated her'. As with the literature reviewed, managing brightness in a working-class environment can be problematic. She describes the education system as:

> Littered with middle-class people imposing their middle-class views on working-class kids. I don't feel comfortable and I don't fit in (Susan, first interview October 2004).

This statement is in line with Steedman (1982) who discusses the many ways in which working-class children are made to see that they are not very clever. Susan continued to view herself as able, but still she felt 'uncomfortable' or inferior because of her working-class background. Many of Susan's comments demonstrate that she was 'able' in that although she wasn't often at school she still left with good results.

Susan's teachers viewed her as 'cheeky' and 'cocky'. This relates back to the words of Dyhouse (1977) and Purvis (1991) who reviewed the challenges of working-class girls to their position in society at the turn of the century. Behaviour which is not timid, or does not accept social positioning can be viewed negatively in working-class groups and individuals.

Susan's 'brightness' was not enhanced through school, and her attitude did not equate with what the school saw as a valuable asset to be encouraged and nurtured. As with the earlier work of Giles (1992) working-class girls are often socialized into a passive model of how to be a girl and later a woman. Skeggs (1997) draws attention to respectability, that is an '…ubiquitous signifier of class (ibid: 1). She goes on to state that the working-classes have always been viewed and continue to be viewed as in need of control and that respectability

has become viewed as '…a property of middle-class individuals defined against the masses' (ibid: 3). She describes how the women in her study '…are aware of their place' (ibid: 3). Though some of the women in this thesis describe a dis-identification with class, in line with the work of Skeggs, their actions and response to questions remain infused with class.

In Susan's case she rejects the expectations of her behaviour both in terms of her class and gender and instead of her behaviour being viewed as 'enquiring', 'inquisitive' or a sign that she is not being stimulated and may need harder work, it is viewed as inappropriate and she is more strictly punished. The result is that she dis-engages with the system of education until later. Susan is a teacher who now works with 'gifted and talented' young working-class people and instead of labelling them as 'cocky', her response is to give them more responsibility and harder work, and to respect them and acknowledge that they may bring different and sometimes competing cultural expectations of behaviour. Whilst funds remain for her work she discusses that the signs are positive that some students are re-engaging with education when they feel involved, stimulated and valued and when what is taught is made relevant to them.

Plummer (2000) draws attention to the very difficult relationship that working-class children have between '…home/school assimilation and alienation' (ibid: 161). Drawing on the work of bell hooks (1994) she describes the tension between the behaviour expected to be successful at school, and the behaviour that is required to fit into friendship groups, and within the family that some working-class students feel. School mirrors those behaviours most associated with middle-class culture, this can and often does cause problems for children and young people from working-class backgrounds to adopt behaviour fitting to both environments. Once again what arises from the data of this research and the literature surveyed is a requirement for working-class groups and individuals to change, cover up, or fit in, to get on within the education system. Susan and other participants in this study articulate a perception that they need to change accent, or adopt subordinate behaviour, and there appears to be an over-riding fear of doing or saying something considered out of place, or which would evidence a lack of knowledge.

This requirement to change continued for Susan through her university years, and now as a teacher. Susan has worked in private and public sector schools; she describes her relationships with the teachers from the private schools:

> I get on well with them; I still don't feel that comfortable with some of them. I think they think I'm a bit odd or a bit strange in as much as I've got this degree in Physics and I teach, but I've got this Bristolian accent (Susan, first interview October 2004).

Susan has needed a strong sense of a learner identity to carry her through the pre-92 universities that she studied in and I will return to this in chapter 7. However even despite this confidence in her learner identity, she still articulates a sense of 'lack' or of discomfort 'I felt different' and 'I didn't fit in' 'I'm very aware that I'm from a working-class background' and 'they were all middle-class, they all spoke posh, I felt intimidated'. In Susan's case as she has become more educated her confidence has grown and her class background appears to have been more of a push factor which has driven her forward educationally. Susan's sense of 'lack' pushed her forward rather than held her back in the post-compulsory sector and now, as an educated woman, she articulates a strong sense of pride in her working-class self which she now claims to make no attempt to conceal.

Anne's assignment to the school's 'special unit' has been partially discussed in chapter 5, but in both our interviews she returns to this subject often. She says that she never felt encouraged by any teachers:

> I don't remember any teacher having any kind of impact at all upon me, not positively anyway, no way, it was all negative (Anne, second interview January 2006).

I ask Anne 'whether she felt valued at school' and she replies:

> No I didn't. I can't remember anything really personally that went wrong within school, but I know that it was almost as though, or you felt as though, you were being written off. There was a power difference there and I felt that. Maybe because we were lower class, not educated, perhaps they looked at us as a waste of time…When I moved into secondary school, I had my feelings confirmed because I was put into a very low group and I thought 'oh my god' you know 'what's going to happen, I'm not going to get anywhere in this low group, I wasn't even going to be a secretary'. These groups are groups that it is impossible to achieve in (Anne, second interview January 2006).

Plummer (2000) discusses the self-fulfilling effects of being placed in lower sets. First the proliferation of working-class students in lower sets draws attention to social class differences in performance and this is often attributed to heritable, genetic difference; or to cultural difference in terms of expectations and commitment – or a combination of this. As has been explored in previous chapters this is not always conscious but nevertheless these

assumptions continue to underpin theory, policy and practice. The different treatment and expectations of working-class groups is less often examined as a contributory factor toward differences in performance.

Secondly the negative effects of being assigned to low groups can damage self esteem, and cause students to lose interest in education, or '…to take on the characteristics assigned to them (Plummer, 2000: 23). Anne makes many references to her experience in the low groups in school; the profound effects of such an assignment stick with her, just as they do with the women from group three, to be examined next. Many of the women in this study negotiate a severe sense of 'lack' in terms of their ability, and many of these women were assigned to low ability groups.

In group three this sense of 'lack' presents with all but one of the participants who, despite her perception of herself as an able learner, displays a distinct discomfort when faced with the opportunity to engage with pre-92 universities, or in fact with the prospect of university at all.

Plummer (2000: 23) states that:

> …setting has rapidly re-appeared as a consequence of the introduction of the national curriculum and related assessments.

Gillbourn and Youdell (2000 and 2001) draw attention to the increasing connections between class as well as 'race' and ability in their 'burgeoning A-C economy'. The thesis here concurs with these findings that associations between class and ability have strengthened in recent years, as will be displayed with an analysis of the participants' words from group three.

Group three

Those women educated from the 1988 Education Act and within a market system of educational provision.

Charlotte, Faye, Rachel, Emma and Natasha all discuss feelings of academic 'in/ability', 'lack' and 'inadequacy', and feelings of 'inferiority'. Natalie is the only participant in group three to claim to have a reasonably secure sense of herself as an academic and able learner.

Natalie has, at 24 years of age, attained a first class degree, won her faculty prize for achievement, completed her PGCE in the post compulsory sector and worked for a year as a lecturer in a sixth form college. She has also been approached on several occasions by lecturers to pursue her Masters. She demonstrates a strong self perception of herself as bright many times throughout our interviews, yet she also often contradicts and questions this:

> I guess I take it for granted but sometimes I doubt my own intelligence. I think well am I really clever or have I just got a good memory, because I think the only thing I excel at is exams, so sometimes I wonder am I really clever (Natalie, first interview September 2004).

Natalie discusses the strong involvement of her mother upon her education and this is in line with Mann (1998) who discusses the impact of transitional mothers upon their daughters' educational trajectory, and also with recent early years research which draws out 'mothers highest qualification' as an important factor upon cognitive development in key stage 1 and 2 (Sylva, et.al., 2004 and 2004a; Sammons, et.al., 2007). Natalie's mum was at this time going through her own educational transformation, training to become a nurse. However, even with this impact the idea of university is not really discussed with Natalie, only 'teacher training college'. Natalie says of her dad 'he wouldn't mind what I did, even if I wanted to be a waitress it would be ok'. This is in the case of a child who is extremely able and spends her weekends from an early age devouring 'all the library books I could get hold of'. Her father may have had an ambiguous attitude toward her education, yet she recounts how he took her to the library every weekend. There is no clear educational trajectory mapped out for Natalie and this is evident in her continuing confusion and fear of the (H)E system.

Natalie's references to a sense of insecurity regarding her ability are most predominant when she discusses her university choices when she was in school. Natalie activated her own movement from a school that she did not feel suited her needs, so that she persuaded her mum to move her to a higher performing school. Within this higher performing school university was discussed regularly with Natalie, though she had come to associate becoming a teacher with going to teacher training college and at home 'the word university wasn't used'.

She says:

> I remember one of my teachers saying 'it's not teacher training college now, it's university' and I laughed and said 'I don't want to do that'. It was just a scary word because I didn't know anyone that had gone, and I was like 'no I'm not going to university, I'm going to teacher training college' cause that was kind of less scary (Natalie, first interview September 2004).

Though Natalie states that her mum was educationally supportive she was given only vague information from her family regarding her desire to become a teacher. The training required is referred to as 'teacher training college' and the word university is avoided by both Natalie and her family. This vague sort of information connects directly into the work of Reay and Ball (1998) and their research which explores the issue of 'child as expert' in working-class homes. Hutchings (2003: 100) also highlights the 'linguistic complexity' of post-compulsory education which can be seen in evidence from Natalie's confusion over whether she needs to attend college or university to train as a teacher. It is very difficult for a young person to negotiate a very complex post-compulsory system as the 'expert'; having help and assistance from parents and peers in this process makes engagement with (H)E smoother, less confusing and less alienating.

Natalie discusses her sense of coming to terms with her potential and future move to university. The following are detailed notes:

> When I went to (6th form college) they wrote a letter to all the kind of top students in the college, saying 'do you want to come on a day trip to see either Oxford or Cambridge'? I was like 'oh my god, I can't go to Oxford or Cambridge'. At that point I was still quite scared and confused of using computers and technology and things, I wouldn't be able to go on the internet and have a look or anything. I remember thinking 'oh my god, Oxford or Cambridge, sounds like such a scary place'. I asked them what courses can I do there? They said they did a degree which was what they called Social Political Science. You had to do Sociology, Politics and I think one other social science, you could have a degree of triple subject. And um I think I then got really worried, cause I said 'yeah I'll go on this day trip' when I found out and then I got really really scared. And I remember thinking 'I can't do Politics, I don't know anything about it, all I can do is Sociology'. So then I backed out and I didn't go to it (Natalie, first interview September 2004).

I pick up on her conversation regarding university and open days to Oxford or Cambridge and ask her:

You didn't go?
No.

Did anybody from your school go to Oxford or Cambridge?
I think a very few people from college went to it, not a great deal. I mean I'd say 80% of the people who went to that sixth form college went on to university but only a handful went on to Oxford or Cambridge.

Was it just the subjects or was it the place that put you off?
I told myself at the time it was just the subjects, but yeah it was the place, I was too scared to go on the open day let alone apply there.

Do you ever regret that?
Yeah, definitely, like now I think I'm so much more confident, I think why didn't I reply, I think to be honest if I had applied then and by any chance got in, I would've hated it. It's still a working-class perspective, but I still don't think I would have fitted in.

Why, what would have been difficult there?
I don't think I would have got on with any of the people. I think, I'm quite, umm self-conscious about my accent. And… I don't know (laughs) It's a, it's a really stupid mindset because I know now that I'm probably just as intelligent as anybody that's gone there and I could've done really well, but even now I think 'oh no I can't do that' (Natalie, First interview September 2004. My questions in italics).

Natalie's levels of attainment have seen her labelled as 'gifted and talented' yet still her class background impacts upon her sense of herself and resulted in a sense of inferiority that in the end saw her leave one pre-92 university after a year to transfer to a post 92 university. In our interviews this came out as a combination of home sickness, and discomfort with the environment because of her class difference. She also turned down another offer from a pre-92 university upon transfer and she openly says that this was because of 'feelings of discomfort' or being perceived of as coming from a 'deprived background' from other students around her which made her feel inferior.

I will pursue this attachment to post 92 universities in chapter 7 with other participants of this research who have gone on to study at university. However Natalie's transcript regarding this subject displays her sense of 'lack' as related to class as in such statements as 'I'm *probably* just as intelligent' and 'even now I think 'oh no I can't do that'' in relation to going to Oxford or Cambridge.

Archer (2003a: 128) demonstrates that when assessing the 'value' of HE, respondents are:

> …generally aware that while access has been widened, the elite institutions remain mostly closed for working-class groups and this would reduce the value of their degrees in the graduate labour market.

Natasha says that 'she and her sisters are classed as the dumb ones in the family'. Natasha was in middle to bottom sets at secondary school and often misbehaved in school and regularly did not do her homework. She was by no means a model pupil, and often did not get on with the teachers. However she recalls several instances of bad treatment from teachers such as:

> This one teacher slagged me off all the time. He came round and said my family is really dumb, he was surprised at my sister's GCSE results, he said 'I thought she would fail, your brother's going to fail as well'. And then he goes 'there's no point in you doing GCSE' he did it in front of the whole class (Natasha, first interview October 2005).

Plummer (2000) discusses how many working-class children from an early age have an unconscious awareness that they can be viewed negatively and seen as 'deficient' or 'lacking' by peers, teachers and other adults. This underlying perception of your undesirability can have far reaching effects on your sense of self worth. She goes on to note that:

> …it is often not until it is made explicit in adulthood - by the *other* – that we recognise the negative impact of such class-based experiences (Plummer, 2000: 20).

Though being viewed as different or 'other' may be unconsciously perceived, it is often not consciously understood. Therefore it is also not understood that being treated differently may affect performance, and as such is not cited by participants as a reason for differential achievement. Instead, participants tend toward self blame for under-achievement. The affects of such divisions can have lasting effects not only upon self-esteem, but also upon a sense of learner identity and ultimately upon engagement in the post-compulsory sector.

Natasha attended a lower performing school in the area and, as has been discussed regarding other participants, she received very little guidance in choosing her subject choices or in choosing possible career options. She says that she had one careers session where they asked her a range of questions and decided that the best option for her was 'childcare'. Most of Natasha's friends, who she describes as 'similar background' to her, ended up doing childcare. Natasha expressed an interest in the interview in returning to education one day to train to teach; she had expressed this at school but she says that no one ever followed this up with her.

The teacher discussed previously is linking Natasha's apparent (in the teacher's opinion) 'dumbness' with family background, referring to the rest of Natasha's family in the same way. This is in line with the work of Gillborn and Youdell (2001: 82) who state from their research that certain groups, such as working-class pupils 'face a particular hurdle in convincing teachers that they have 'ability'. Natasha is quite 'jokey' and matter of fact when she discusses the label of 'dumb' applied to her and seems to accept this diagnosis. As with Steedman (1982) she appears to have 'passively absorbed' such a definition. At other times she rejects this label and appears openly hurt by it.

Natasha recollects other instances where she was clearly made to feel different because of her background; from her interviews it appears that, at times, 'class-based judgements' (Plummer, 2000:29) were passed upon her and her family in terms of expectations of what Natasha could and could not achieve. Plummer argues that the imposition of middle-class ways of being, and knowledge are not superior to working-class ways, just that they are more powerful. She goes on to state that whilst the British education system continues to be intolerant to alternative ways of being and learning schools will'…fail to make any real connection with the lives of many working-class children' (ibid: 29) and this is evidenced in Natasha's many attempts to avoid school and her descriptions of its irrelevancy to her life.

Emma is now in the second year of an Early Years Childhood Studies degree. Emma went to a primary school that has a catchment area predominantly within an area of social housing and where free school meals take up is higher than average. She says of the deputy head at this school:

> He was not a very nice teacher. He liked the brainy ones as he put it and he made it obvious the ones that weren't so clever. I was in the stupid group; he used to call it the stupid group. Lots of us from this group were later found to have dyslexia. I'm slightly dyslexic, I didn't know until I got to college, I'd already got through my GCSEs by then (Emma, first interview July 2005).

I ask Emma 'how she felt about being put in the 'stupid' group', and if she felt it affected the way that she felt about herself as a learner'?

> I felt awful and I never thought I would be going to university because I thought that was for clever people and people who got A stars that went there. I always thought that university was this posh place where posh people went who had gone to private school (Emma, first interview October 2005).

It is important to draw out the connections that Emma is making here between 'clever' and 'posh', as this demonstrates that in Emma's mind the two terms fit together. Emma does not really understand the intricacies of class, she says so in our interviews, so for Emma posh is possibly the closest she will come to a connection to class. Therefore it appears that her understanding of posh, class and educational achievement are tied up, so that only people who are from a particular background are viewed as doing well enough in education to go to university. This is similar to James (1996) childhood descriptions of some of the other children he went to school with who were different to him in terms of social class which could be identified by accent or speech patterns close to Received Pronunciation (RP). He goes on to state how this and other factors, established a sense of inferiority in him:

> I now recognise that these strong early impressions of schooling did much to structure large parts of my common-sense thinking, especially about my own capacities. Paramount amongst these was the general conviction that factors like income, educational success, housing tenure and even personal attractiveness were all mutually interlocking products of inherent qualities, perhaps genetic personality traits (ibid: 15).

James later went on to a university education and came to question and re-think those 'common-sense' notions, but as with Plummer (2000) those people who do not later have the benefit of a higher education and who are not told otherwise, are more likely to lean toward self-blame for what they see as their educational inadequacies and failures.

Emma says that talking to people that are going to university, talking to teachers and lecturers who have told her she is able and visiting universities has helped to dispel these thoughts. Emma is lucky in that her secondary school gave her extra help, though they did not diagnose her dyslexia, and encouraged her in her education. She states that her college gave her lots of help and advice about going to university. Emma explains that going on placements in schools with her college course has also helped her to decide to go to university as the teachers 'told me I am capable and would be able to do it'. Just as being constructed as less able can have an effect on working-class children's sense of ability (Steedman, 1982; and Plummer, 2000) so can being told that you are able as can be seen in Emma's growing confidence in her ability as a learner.

Although Emma was labelled in her primary school by one teacher as 'stupid' and designated to the 'stupid group' Emma had lots of back up and assistance at home from her parents, though in the beginning even they thought she might be 'overstretching herself' going to university. After initial reservations which Emma says she thinks is 'because no

one else in the family had ever gone' they now fully support her. Emma also received help at secondary school which is a top performing school in the area. She was not diagnosed with dyslexia at this time, but the school was aware she needed extra help. She was given extra tuition, and she says 'one or two teachers gave up their own time to help her'.

Gillborn and Youdell (2000: 194) document:

> …the successive selection strategies that schools apply to pupils (both formally and informally) as they move through their secondary education.

This process is informed by the importance of 5 A-C passes and is mediated by factors such as class and behaviour and potential to improve performance to reach the A-C targets. Their research goes on to say that this is a process which is performed *on* pupils. It can be disempowering (as was the case for Natalie and Faye) when it is viewed as unlikely that a student will improve performance. Emma may also have slipped through the net, but her behaviour and her perseverance, which are all closer to the accepted cultural standards of education may have been taken into account within 'successive selection strategies' that schools may adopt to move forward certain pupils. Emma was also lucky in that she lived near a high performing school. Perhaps another criterion for 'successive selection strategies' may have been, that, under objective categorical factors Emma could be said to have come from an 'upper working-class' family (her family owned their own house and both her parents were in paid employment). This may have also have been a contributory factor to the help she received, as it may have been perceived that taking all these characteristics into account, she was more likely to achieve the 5 A-C passes which helped to ensure her eventual entry to university.

Rachel discusses educational experiences which lend weight to the possible existence of 'successive selection strategies'. She knew that her secondary school was not considered to be a high attaining school 'academically it's not that brilliant, the results aren't amazing'. The school attracts a higher proportion of pupils on FSMs, and has a low A-C pass rate. Rachel also says that she 'wasn't that brilliant at school' so her behaviour did not mirror the most desired cultural norm in that she was not subordinate and passive. She says that teachers 'didn't spend that much time individually with you'. It was only the ones that were seen to be going to do better who got more time. She has stated that her mum did not attend parents' evening, so it may have been perceived by the school that parental support was not high. This is directly in line with Gillborn and Youdell's (2000 and 2001) findings regarding

allocation of resources and teaching time to those students designated as most likely to attain 5 A-C GCSE grades, and to their assessment of the 'selection strategies' that schools use in determining allocation of resources.

There is a 6th form in Rachel's school; I asked 'was she encouraged to go to 6th form'? She said:

> No, I never thought about 6th form. A few people from less well off backgrounds went to 6th from, but I think they are more middle-class people in 6th form, they can get the grades more (Rachel, second interview March 2006).

Rachel does not hold a clear distinction between middle and working-class, she discusses this at the beginning of our interview, yet she is making clear connections here between attainment and class: 'middle-class people…can get the grades'. She is also displaying awareness that you are more likely to gain teachers time and attention if you display academic ability which she articulates as lacking. Gillborn and Youdell state that the process of 'selection strategies' is done 'on' pupils. Rachel's descriptions demonstrate that she feels that she is a passive agent in the allocation of teacher's time, yet she is also fully aware of the unequal allocation of resources to her and students similar to her. This perception that you 'lack' the necessary qualities which are deemed as meriting extra help, attention and resources can be dis-empowering, and can result in a self-perpetuating cycle of low self-esteem around ability, attainment and future potential to choose study and career paths.

In my interviews with Charlotte she regularly refers to her 'lack' in terms of intelligence or ability 'I wouldn't say I was ever intelligent', 'I'm average and need a little bit more help', 'my family aren't exactly the brightest of families'. These are some of the statements which come from the first 3 pages of the transcript of our first interview and they demonstrate that Charlotte is making a link between family background and 'brightness' which might be perceived as heritable by Charlotte, as was the case with James (1996). This, and other extracts, demonstrates a kind of resigned hopelessness from Charlotte which is combined with bouts of determination to change her life. Throughout our interviews Charlotte oscillates between a desire to go to university, a fear of university, and a rejection of university. The overwhelming aspect to come through Charlotte's transcripts is one of distinct uncertainty about her future and her capacities. There are many rational and pragmatic aspects to the choices that Charlotte has before her. In our interviews she discusses finances for example.

Hutchings (2003a: 155) states that:

> The financial cost to the student of higher education is often spoken of as the greatest barrier to increasing working-class participation.

Financial issues are an important concern for Charlotte, particularly the complexity of the system and trying to work out what she would be entitled to and how much debt she might accrue. However Charlotte is a highly practical woman who has earned her own money from an early age and is capable, and used, to saving for the things that she needs. At the moment Charlotte is working full time and earning what she considers to be a reasonable wage. This has meant that she can afford some things she once could not, and at present, the long term prospect of greater financial gain from a degree may seem like a less worthwhile option. As Archer (2003a) Charlotte occupies a 'structurally risky' location in terms of (H)E participation and unlike many of her middle-class counterparts since the widening of (H)E, her educational pathway has not been planned with her entry to university '…almost beyond question…' (Reay, David and Ball, 2005: 102). Instead, what lies ahead for Charlotte in terms of continued education is uncertain, and her choice whether or not to enter university is mediated not least by '…desires to fit in and feel at home' (ibid: 102).

In chapter 5 we saw that university was not really discussed as an option for Charlotte and that accessing information for university has proved difficult for her. At the end of our first interview Charlotte makes it clear that her earlier ambitions of becoming a teacher or a nurse are fading fast because of the way that she feels about herself as a learner, and the sheer difficult struggle of gaining information, as well as her fear of 'letting everyone down'. There may be a variety of reasons why Charlotte has let her ambitions go for now, not least of all the fact that she says right at the end of our interview :

> 'I don't think that I am a very intelligent person, I do think I put in the extra hard work that needs to be done, so I can achieve some things, but I wouldn't call myself an intelligent person (Charlotte, first interview July 2005).

Faye's experiences of schooling have been outlined in chapter 5. These experiences can be seen as negative in terms of the effect upon her learner identity, but also positive in terms of the extra help she received whilst being placed in what she described as 'the class where all the dumb ones were'. Faye continues to pursue her ambition to go to university, though she has been turned down for this year.

This is in contrast to the way that she recalls feeling about university in her secondary school days:

> I thought I'm never going to do that, go to university. I'm not doing that, that's for clever people. I don't know why I think I'm not clever, I've just always thought that, it comes from being in low sets at school I suppose (Faye, second interview March 2006).

In our interviews Faye sways from discussing notions of herself as less able, to occasionally and almost shyly admitting that she might be more able than she used to think. Faye has continued to struggle to attain grades that she needs to continue with her ambition to be a nurse. Recently she has been put off the idea of an access course because she would have to give up her job and she needs the money. Previously such courses recognized the diverse needs of non traditional students, not least of which is the financial need to work, and such courses have been historically organized so that people could combine study with work. I checked out her claim that the course may be spread over an entire week, with one or two hours of lessons a day. I also checked how soon it would be before she could have a timetable. The response was that lessons would be organized near the start date of the course, and that it was entirely possible that she would be required to attend every day.

Faye also recalled to me the conversation that she had with the access course tutor who she discusses tried to put her off the course by saying 'it's quite hard you know'. These courses have also been historically planned to help and target those students who lacked entry qualifications to university. Faye has reasonable qualifications to begin this course and only needs to catch up on her maths and science, yet on talking with the access tutor, he also advised me to curtail Faye's aspirations as the course is much more challenging than many people think.

Faye also received advice from the careers centre that she did not need to do this course as she has the entry criteria for university. Faye needs the maths credits this course could offer her, and she needs the direct work experience of working in a hospital that she would gain from this course. Faye appears to have been misinformed and badly informed about her choices. I have attempted to amend this situation but Faye has now missed all the deadlines for courses this year. Hutchings (2003: 98) draws attention to the non neutral dissemination of information. She also discusses that the way information is received and perceived is intricately tied up with the perspective of potential participants. Faye has a low self perception of her ability and has now begun to take on board the subtle messages she is

being given that she is not up to university study. She continues to pursue her ambition of (H)E, but alongside the conflicting information she has received she continues to hold the belief that particular people from particular backgrounds go to university and that does not include her:

> Smart, intelligent people who come from good backgrounds, who have got nice houses and who can pay the fees go to university (Faye, second interview March 2006).

For Faye a complex mixture of rational, pragmatic and particularly - emotional aspects, alongside conflicting and non neutral advice, shapes the way that she engages with the structures of (higher) education.

Concluding comments

With all of the participants there is evidence of a process of the 'embodiment of innate in/ability and/or inferiorization' in their accounts which may result in a sense of 'lack' to greater and lesser extents. In each time period participants discuss with alarming regularity times when they have been referred to as 'stupid', 'dumb', 'a bit thick', 'slow' and at best 'average'. Only 4 of the original 19 participants mention being told or having a perception that they were 'bright' or 'intelligent' or 'able'. Of these 4 women their learner identities have still presented as fragile within given stages of their biography. Some remain extremely fragile despite high educational attainment in terms of accreditation.

Within each time period processes of connecting intelligence, ability and class have presented. This connection far from lessening can be demonstrated as having become more entrenched within group three. Gillborn and Youdell (2000: 195) state:

> Some issues, such as social class and gender, feature as parts of the pupils' accounts without being deployed as organizing principles…Nevertheless it is ability, behaviour and 'race' that feature most prominently in the accounts of inequality in school. Pupils argue that teachers privilege those with ability and seem to connect ability and social class in some of their talk.

A theme which has become more prominent within group three is that educational success in terms of accreditation has become inextricably linked to occupational success. There are now fewer and fewer opportunities to work your way up, or to become socially mobile without qualifications. Also the level of qualifications required to enter and succeed in a career are getting higher and higher with post graduate study required more often within the professions. Whereas in group one, and to a certain extent group two, participants often

made reference to it not mattering so much if you had educational qualifications, within group three it has become a paramount concern. Without qualifications only the least skilled, and lowest paid work is available, whereas in group one 'you could leave a job one week and walk into another the next'.

Today most jobs require qualifications, even to enter at a less skilled or professional level. Many jobs which could once be entered without qualifications and offered training and advancement are now closed off to many groups who have not succeeded in terms of accreditation in the education system. Other jobs, such as nursing, have been professionalized to such an extent that it is now not possible to enter these professions without a degree, whereas in the past those people who demonstrated an aptitude for such occupations would have been able to enter at a less skilled level and acquire the necessary training for advancement through their work.

In the interview transcripts from group three they all demonstrate knowledge that education is the key to advancement and social mobility, but many continue to struggle with the process of entering the institutions that make this possible. This links time and again to the sense that they do not possess some 'magic ingredient' that is required to get on in (H)E. Often the result is that their once high ambitions and aspirations for themselves to become nurses or teachers, dissolve into an acceptance of becoming teaching assistants, nurse assistants, or nursery nurses, as with the experiences of Faye, Charlotte and Rachel who all recount such ambitions but are now all following less aspirant pathways. This links not only with their own sense of inadequacy to follow such pathways but also with the processes they describe in their experiences of secondary schooling. Their accounts demonstrate that often they are given little or no advice in terms of educational and occupational choices, or they are 'cooled out' (Colley, et.al., 2003), more 'appropriately socialized' (Bates 1984 and 1990), or 'filtered' (Buswell, 1992) onto different pathways. As in the case of Faye there has been quite substantial resistance to this, but with each turn she has come across hurdles which make her ambition of becoming a nurse seem too difficult and out of her reach, so that she now talks in terms of 'it's too much trouble' and 'I really don't know which way to turn now'.

Others from group three accept the diagnosis made of them that their ambitions are 'inappropriate' and it may be more suitable for them to follow childcare rather than

paediatric nursing, or training in the area of special educational needs. There is also little challenge from this group when they are steered away from subjects that they enjoy and are good at such as art or PE because they are deemed as subjects that will not usefully serve them in work.

This research finds that social class (as well as gender) is prominent in the accounts of the participants, even though many of the participants are unaware of their constant references to markers of class. In line with Reay (1998) I would question the extent to which collective class consciousness ever existed, and that today as in the past, class plays out at the individual level, it is just understood less clearly than before. In the words of the participants, class or markers for class are still conveyed in such terms as what you have, what you do not have, what you do and do not have access to, and your choice upon participation within the structures of society, such as the structures of (H)E.

This research also finds evidence to suggest that ability and talk of 'in/ability', 'inferiority' and a sense of 'lack' are prominent features of the dialogue reviewed. Many of the extracts point to connections between ability and allocation of resources and time within education. Moreover many of the extracts suggest connections are being made, albeit unconsciously, between class, intelligence, and ability both by the participants and the education system, and that this is strengthening today because of the necessity both to keep up standards in schools and meet targets, and the increasing need to leave school with qualifications if any level of social mobility is to be possible.

The particular themes investigated here, and to be further investigated within chapter 7, are constructed around the participants' perceptions of their identities and the processes involved in the creation of such identities. Connections between class, intelligence and ability, and 'embodiment of innate in/ability and/or inferiorization' which may result in a sense of 'lack' were recurrent throughout the transcripts and presented as some of the strongest themes. As demonstrated these themes also resonate strongly with much of the literature reviewed. Auto/biographical analysis was used with the distinct intention of producing 'rich life accounts' from the words of the participants and because of the nature of this type of research, many themes emerged. However, what emerged from these 'rich life accounts' was an undeniable sense of 'lack'. This sense of 'lack' was embodied and

experienced by the women in the study; it was often reinforced in the home and educational environment and could be explained as a 'felt injury' of class (Reay, 2005: 916).

Much of the analysis here has focussed upon rational, pragmatic and emotional (Hutchings, 2003) aspects which shape the way that working-class women engage with the structures of (H)E. Each of these aspects is important in the lives of these women; however most prominent within all three groups is the emotional aspect of (H)E engagement. Even when making pragmatic or rational decisions upon (H)E engagement emotional aspects strongly influence these choices. For example participants discuss the difficulties of negotiating (H)E and juggling this with family commitments. This rational or pragmatic aspect is discussed alongside the emotional response of family member to their engagement with (H)E. Participants often discuss the perception that family and friends will have of them if they go to university and a sense that engagement with (H)E may alienate participants from those they are close to.

When participants discuss funding, they make reference to going to university near home to rationally and pragmatically save costs; however they also discuss their emotional fears of moving too far away from home. Participants also rationally reason that entrance to pre-92 universities is easier and so because many of them have lower or vocational qualifications it is sensible or pragmatic for them to choose this type of university. More powerfully though, participants make much stronger references to an emotional sense of - 'not fitting in' - within pre-92 universities.

This research is by no means:

> …suggesting that working class students have more emotions than their middle-class counterparts. Rather, there is a class difference in how emotions are expressed (Reay, David and Ball, 2005: 100)

And this class difference is tied to different experiences of the education system, different self perceptions of capacity and ability, different levels of risk, and different levels of cultural, economic and social resources between working and middle-class groups and individuals.

In the next and final analysis chapter I will demonstrate that a sense of 'in/ability and/or inferiorization' remains for many of the women in the study who continue to display a sense

of 'lack'. This is despite many of the participants attaining high educational qualifications. In doing this I will concentrate the last analysis chapter back upon the 9 women who were the focus of chapter 5 of this research.

From group one I will further analyze Valerie who is now considering PhD study, and Clare who completed her PGCE in secondary education some years ago and has given consideration to undertaking a Masters, and Ruth who has not undertaken (H)E study.

In group two, I will focus upon Cathy who has recently completed her Masters, Susan who completed a PGCE in secondary education and has been teaching for many years now, and Anne who is completing her Diploma in Social Work in (H)E.

From group three neither Charlotte, Faye, or Rachel have gone onto university study, though all of them discuss considering this option, I will analyze their various post-16 decisions so far.

Chapter 7 will continue by paying particular attention to: the continuation of damaged learner identities connected to notions of 'innate in/ability and/or inferiorization' and a continuing sense of 'lack' within (H)E, FE and the occupational sector. A focus for this chapter will be upon the discourse of 'deficit' that continues to inform policy, theory and practice within (H)E and is particularly evident within widening participation literature. Chapter 7 will question the 'them and us' divide that can be a result of such discourse and explore how this may contribute to post-16 patterns of educational engagement. The chapter will bring into question (H)E processes, value systems and ethos which continue to operate largely in the favour of a traditional, post school, A level, full-time student body. Analysis of the impact this has upon those groups that do not fit this model will be considered, as will suggestions for change within the institution which will focus upon institutional deficit rather than the often cited individual deficit of working-class groups.

Chapter 7

Higher education and discourses of deficiency

Introduction

The previous chapter explored in detail the substantive issue of the 'embodiment of innate in/ability and/or inferiorization'. A sense of 'lack' was articulated as part of the cycle of this process for the participants of this research. The literature regarding connections between class and intelligence or ability was revisited in chapter 6 to demonstrate that the British education system continues to be influenced by such discourse, particularly in the 'burgeoning A-C economy' (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000 and 2001). The words of the participants in chapter 6 evoked 'absorption' (consciously and unconsciously) of a sense of 'lack' in terms of perceived 'in/ability and/or inferiorization'. Class was articulated as a prominent force within this embodiment process and as such was re-instated within this thesis as a primary structuring aspect to the ways in which 'working-class women engage with the structures of (higher) education'.

This chapter will continue with an examination of the discourse of deficiency within (H)E widening participation literature which informs institutional practices and which may contribute toward a continued sense of 'lack'. The words of the participants in the previous chapter have demonstrated their own construction of themselves often as insufficient, or of having an absence of some particular quality which would make them equally able to participate in (H)E. This sense of 'lack' has been demonstrated to arise, for some working-class women, from a historical 'classed habitus' which works with the legacy that working-class groups have received differentiated education in the past, and for some working-class women that we are to 'inherit our mother's lives' (Plummer, 2000: 117). Notions of 'lack' have also been demonstrated to have arisen from the personal experiences of participants being told that they 'lack' from some who have educated them. Lack also arises from less explicit experiences, and from implicit messages conveyed from 'taken for granted common sense assumptions' that particular groups perform less well in terms of educational attainment as reviewed in the literature and demonstrated in the research of Gillborn and Youdell (2000, 2001) Gaine and George (1999) Steedman (1982 and 1986) and Plummer (2000). This can lead to unconscious, but nevertheless differential expectations, aspirations,

and treatment within education for certain groups and by certain groups. The concept of deficiency that some widening participation literature adopts may well feed into this rhetoric of 'lack'. I will examine whether this could be demonstrated to be a contributory factor in under-participation of certain groups in (H)E. Whilst the greater emphasis is upon individuals to change, rather than institutional structures, current levels of participation of under-represented groups is likely to endure. The structures of (H)E largely continue to operate in a way which more suitably accommodates the interests of a traditional, post-school, A level, full-time student body, rather than operate inclusive practice which seeks out and is able to sustain an equitable, more diverse class structured student body.

Within the content of this chapter I will begin to address the fourth aim of this research:

> To examine ways in which working-class women may be enabled to make informed choices upon whether or not, when, where and how to enter the institutions of (higher) education in greater numbers….

A brief review of current research in this area will facilitate this aim by enabling this research to demonstrate that structural change is slow to take place, and individual change remains the focus. This will be followed by analysis of 9 of the participants[49] to demonstrate how the emphasis on personal change can lead to confusing and sometimes alienating expectations and experiences of (H)E. An emphasis on individual deficiency can also feed into an already fragile sense of a learner identity for many working-class potential participants and does not help to encourage equitable participation in (H)E. As with many of the women in the study, working-class students are acutely aware of their difference to the existing student body in (H)E and deficit discourse feeds into this sense and serves to firmly 'position them as 'others' in contrast to dominant assumptions of student learners…' (Archer, 2003: 15). This chapter will also pay attention to the different ways that participants experience (H)E and their various reactions to unfamiliar environments to demonstrate that:

> When habitus encounters a field with which it is not familiar…the resulting disjunctures can generate change and transformation but also disquiet, ambivalence, insecurity and uncertainty (Reay, David and Ball, 2005: 28).

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[49] The 9 participants will be those participants discussed in greater detail in chapter 5.

(H)E and the concept of deficit

> Students from non-traditional backgrounds are often portrayed to be 'in deficit', and therefore in need of additional (and separate) provision to rectify perceived weaknesses (HEFCE, 2006: 119).

The above statement from a report commissioned by HEFCE articulates a continued pre-occupation, within widening participation literature and the (H)E sector, with the perception that particular groups are deficient in some way. This is in line with much of the literature reviewed so far and with equality of opportunity rhetoric and liberal/neo-liberal theories of educational participation which emphasize individual explanations for differential participation.

In 'The future of higher education' (DFES, 2003) there is repeated discussion of raising aspirations, and of extra funding being made available to retain non-traditional students, and increasing support for vulnerable groups. This is part of the language of deficit where assumptions are made that non-traditional students and under-represented potential participants have lower aspirations, are more likely to 'drop out', and need separate types of support. In chapter 5 I stated that this research finds insufficient evidence to support a lack of aspirations. The HEFCE (2006) report reviews a body of literature, amongst which, evidence is found to suggest that once non-traditional students enter (H)E they do very well. This report also suggests that support should be made available to all groups in (H)E as many traditional students would benefit from this also – rather than focusing upon separate support and constructing non-traditional students as separate, different and 'vulnerable'.

The DFES (2003: 72) document above also discusses change in the institutions but stops short of prescriptive measures to ensure universal strategies of fair access:

> …it is not for the government to prescribe admissions systems, for which universities themselves are responsible.

Institutions are given the freedom to make admissions clear, accessible and fair but there is ambiguity and no clear guidance on how this might be achieved. Under the discussion in the document of 'Other Routes and Second Chances' section 6.13 (ibid: 71) provision for under-represented groups is constructed as separate and different. The language of 'second chances' is also confusing as many working-class groups might argue that they never secured a proper 'first chance'.

Following on from this document 'Widening participation in higher education' (DFES, 2003a) utilizes similar language in terms of 'raising standards' and 'improving levels of attainment' (ibid: 2). The identified barriers to participation in this document are 'attainment, aspiration and application' (ibid: 5). This language tends toward a discourse of individual blame and deficiency and is in contrast to other research such as Gilchrist, Phillips and Ross (2003) which emphasizes that participation and non participation in (H)E is far more complex than much widening participation reports allow for. The DFES (2003a) document pays less attention to factors such as identity, and tends toward simplistic notions of increasing the availability of information to increase participation of under-represented groups. Hutchings (2003) has shown that such issues are much more complex and need to take account of emotional as well as pragmatic and rational aspects; for example in the way that information is given and received.

Structural deficit is not widely acknowledged by The DFES (2003a) document; for example it describes admissions as 'generally fair' (ibid: 5). The document stresses that 'A levels are the chief indicator for assessing merit but universities are increasingly using a range of other ways to help them make admissions decisions' (ibid: 2) though these increasing 'other ways' are not specified. Universities continue to favour A level results, and other entrance criteria continue to hold less value, particularly with pre-92 universities. It is far more difficult to negotiate application procedures with vocational equivalents as some universities accept some qualifications whereas others do not – A level results are nationally recognized. Also, working out points and comparable qualifications with vocational credits for the UCAS tariff system is a complex and confusing process which can be off putting to some prospective students.

This process continues to advantage those groups who do better in terms of A level attainment. As stated previously universities continue to operate largely with a system of admissions and (H)E courses, which continues to serve the needs of traditional, post-school, A level, full-time students. Entrance procedures, modes of study, and parity of vocational and academic courses has not significantly changed in line with the diverse student body that widening participation strategies would seek to attract and sustain. This chapter challenges the notion of the working-class student as deficient and re-situates institutions as having deficiencies in their failure to fully meet the challenges that a new and diverse student body represented by equitable participation would attract.

The HEFCE (2006) report reviewed widening participation research and examined barriers to participation for under-represented groups. Current research stresses 3 types of barriers to participation: 'situational' - for example costs, and time; 'institutional' - such as admission procedures/criteria; and 'dispositional' - which may encompass motivation, attitude, and prior educational experience (HEFCE, 2006: 5). This is in line with the work reviewed in chapter 3 and the research of this thesis which finds evidence of situational, institutional and dispositional barriers. The HEFCE (2006) report found that 'key social determinants' which might predict participation are: 'time, place, gender, family and initial schooling' (ibid: 5). The report also states that inequality in post-compulsory participation patterns have endured for the past 50 years, despite the fact that recent government policy has sought to increase overall HE participation to 50% in the 18-30 age group by 2010. The emphasis on participation is 'widening' rather than 'increasing' and target groups are 'low-income families' and 'low participation areas'. Despite changes[50] to measure widening-participation, little progress has been made toward targets.

The HEFCE report clarifies that HE participation is not based upon 'open access' and that in the most part positions are allocated on prior qualifications, it states that:

> Therefore, we currently need to consider how these prior qualifications are generated and how other entry requirements are met. If these prior qualifications are distributed unfairly then this both explains the patterns of participation in HE and also suggests that using prior qualifications in this way is unfair (HEFCE, 2006: 9).

Findings from this report made the front pages of 'The Times Higher Education Supplement', 'Experts: access policy futile' (Sanders, 2006: 1). In the same supplement Gorard (2006: 12) one of the key authors of the report went on to say:

> The widening participation project therefore faces a dilemma: are these prior qualifications largely merited in terms of the talent of those who achieve them? If so, the ensuing stratification of higher education is, presumably, also merited, and all of the widening participation initiatives are mostly irrelevant. If, on the other hand, qualifications are to a large extent a proxy measure of ethnicity, class, sex and so on, then we should not use them to determine who goes to university.

This is a controversial idea and is an alternative way of assessing the 'fairness' or 'justness' of educational theory, policy and practice. Alternative models of social justice were discussed in chapter 4. The model of social justice evoked by the last sentence above is more in line with 'equality of condition' (Lynch, 1995 and 1995a) which emphasizes the

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[50] Initially HE participation was to encompass all those on courses of a year or more leading to HE accreditation, the measure has changed to include those numbers of people still in HE after 6 months.

value to society of developing everybody's potential and eliminating unequal resources in the process. This is in sharp contrast to theories associated with liberal/neo-liberal discourse which emphasizes competition for resources and individual deficiency. The previous statement asks difficult questions of (H)E and education in general. It opens up the debate in the British education system and asks just how 'fair' or 'just' is a system based upon equality of opportunity if those opportunities might be skewed in the favour of certain groups. Just as in the same way that theorists such as Saunders (1995, 1996) suggest that the British education system might be meritocratic, and might be 'fair' and 'just'; the HEFCE Report turns this thinking on its head and suggests it might not be.

Section 9 of the HEFCE (2006: 114-124) report explores in some detail the 'deficit model' that is all too often associated with working-class under-participation in (H)E. The report criticizes the existence of 'separate support' for certain students, and illustrates that staff may blame students for possible problems such as withdrawal, instead of examining their own and institutional shortcomings. Often students from under-represented target groups are homogenized; simplistic interpretations of these groups ignore diverse lifestyles and diverse needs. Widening participation terminology and practice tends to foster a 'them and us divide' (ibid: 119) because students are described in terms of traditional and non-traditional students. Widening participation terms such as this, carry particular connotations of superior and inferior prior qualification attainment. The report also goes on to discuss the ambiguity surrounding much widening participation discourse and its meaning. For example widening access is often confused to mean more students rather than wider equity. It finds that there is no consensus upon whom the responsibility for widening participation falls – is it the responsibility of individual institutions, prior educational institutions or national policy?

Suggestions arising from the report to encourage more equitable participation are varied. However, in contrast to much widening participation literature, the report places greater stress upon the nature of HE institutions, rather than upon individual deficiency. The report states that existing, culture, attitudes, values and practices within HE need to be challenged so that they reflect and successfully attract a wider student body and are more likely to achieve equitable participation. HEFCE (2006) brings into focus the idea that widening participation terminology and practice can have a result of reproducing some of the inequality and class bias it is supposed to challenge.

The report suggests that there are many gaps in existing research and much more research needs to be done both of participants and non-participants. Research has not given a clear picture of 'who actually gets what in HE', 'what works', and is 'cost-efficient' in terms of widening participation initiatives, and a lack of research on non traditional participants and on 'non-participants', as well as no precise information on when 'the 'gap' in educational equity appears' are all problematic for research to date (adapted from 119 of the report).

Areas which the report identifies as in need of exploration and which emphasize student experiences and institutional change are:

- Ways in which institutions may challenge staff attitudes, values and practices.
- The experience of students from different educational backgrounds in relation to assessment.
- How efforts to bring about provisions for support are affected by the institutional culture and attitude.
- Curriculum development practices that have the potential to benefit a range of students.
- Practices in higher education that enable students to both demonstrate and learn from their previous experiences.
- The different approaches to learning taken by students from different backgrounds.

(Adapted from: 118 of the report).

More specifically the report states that:

The terminology being used to refer to students from non-traditional backgrounds fuels the dominance of the 'deficit' model (HEFCE, 2006: 119).

Suggestions for change are:

- Non-traditional entrance qualifications should become viewed as equitable to traditional qualifications by universities.
- Non-traditional modes of study and courses should become accepted both in post and pre-92 universities.
- HE might become less selective in a similar mode to established institutions such as the OU.
- Greater value placed on informal learning and questioning of the compulsory element to post-16 education.

(Adapted from section 9 of the report).

The report specifically questions the reliance upon traditional qualifications for entrance to university as these are so closely linked to socio-economic status and it asks an important question which will form the focus of the rest of this chapter:

> The work of this review brings into sharp focus a key question about the nature and purpose of higher education. In widening participation to currently under-represented groups are we seeking to offer a pre-existing experience of HE more widely, or are we expecting to change the nature of HE itself to accommodate the new kinds of students? (ibid: 121).

The literature reviewed in this thesis suggests the first of these purposes is uppermost. Chapter 2 examined the middle-class bias of (H)E and how the 'habitus' of the working-class woman less easily negotiated these structures. In this chapter I drew on the work of Parr (1997) to demonstrate the difficulties that the working-class woman faced first on entering such a biased institution, and then referred to Lynch and O'Neill (1994) who demonstrated that working-class women had to change features of their classed self to succeed in (H)E. Academic working-class researchers such as Hey, Skeggs and Reay have attested to personal experiences of modifying their classed self to fit the (H)E environment.

In chapter 3 I utilized the work of Skeggs (1997) to demonstrate how working-class women saw their working-class status as lacking value, and how they are 'massified', 'othered', and 'pathologized' in much academic literature. The review here suggests that the experience of (H)E is often similar. Skeggs goes on to state that many of these women 'dis-identify' with their class background in their quest to better themselves through education and negotiate an alienating experience of fear of failure, desire to be accepted and to 'pass'. Reay's (2002) research backs up findings of the perceived 'transformative powers' of education whilst acknowledging that the expected changes are not always as 'transformative' or as desired as expected. Maguire (2005) stresses that despite education; working-class women continue to be aware of their 'classed' place in society.

Nowhere in the literature have I come across research accounts of broad acceptance and celebration of class differences, or of wide institutional change 'to accommodate the new kinds of students' that widening participation would attract in terms of class diversity.

Instead there remains an emphasis upon change and improvement to the working-class individual in acquiring a new and 'improved' middle-class self through participation in (H)E:

> Discourses of individualization work to position the uncredentialled as unfinished, as incomplete in some way… (Reay, David and Ball, 2005: 94).

The perception that being working-class is somehow deficient remains as an underlying current to educational theory, policy and practice. To date research on institutional change, as suggested by the HEFCE (2006) report is lacking and attempts to make (H)E more equitable in terms of class are largely constructed as being attainable through changes in classed individuals.

This chapter will continue with an exploration of the post-compulsory educational experiences of the 9 participants who make up the greater focus of this research and who were identified and introduced in chapter 5 of this research.

Post-compulsory educational experiences

Group one: 1944 Education Act and tri-partite system of education

Valerie completed her BA in literature studies when she was in her forties in a post-92 university. She then went on to study for her Masters degree in a pre-92 university. She says of the Masters course:

> I was very critical of the second university I went to. A very badly run course compared to (previous institution). It was very pompous and I didn't want to be part of that. In seminars I didn't feel comfortable. Once we were discussing a novel and one of the group suddenly started talking, I started to talk but she talked over me and started to talk in French. I kind of immediately felt inadequate and annoyed that somebody else would talk over me and talk in French even though it was a translated version. I was up against different people to what I had been used to. Also most of the seminars were run by men and they were very overpowering, very strong voices. They kind of came in and were almost intimidating by stature alone. But you know I managed to make friends there and I held my own (Valerie, first interview July 2004).

Though Valerie discusses a period of adaptation to her first university, she talks in the main of this experience positively, 'they were more understanding'. Of the year on her Masters programme Valerie recalls mostly negative experiences and often reverts to language such as 'holding her own', and 'keeping up' and explains the struggles that she underwent to do this. This echoes Bourdieu's (1977) assertions that those who possess middle-class 'habitus'

more easily adapt to the structural expectations of education. Valerie does not refer to her MA study as a valued experience, but as an experience of struggle where she fought to maintain her previous classed self and often subsumed this to the needs of the institution and the different people that she was not used to. The above and similar extracts offer an insight into the very real 'them and us' experience that Valerie discusses and which she holds up as one reason why she would not take part in the graduation ceremonies after both her degrees. Instead Valerie was more comfortable with family and friends around her in an informal celebration of her hard fought for educational achievements. Valerie is currently trying to sort through the application process for her PhD and is coming up against many barriers. Though she has been accepted in principle, she says that the professors that she needs to talk to are rarely available and make no secret of the fact that her questions are an intrusion. She continues to discuss the intimidation that she feels now when faced with university procedures, despite this being her third experience with (H)E.

Ruth has not participated in (H)E but has completed a level 3 writing course. One of her first tasks was to write a report and she says 'I didn't really know what that meant' but rather than ask Ruth took a guess. In my professional and academic experience I have found that it is common for tutors to assume more prior knowledge than many students have. Often students (particularly those who have returned to education through 'non-traditional' routes) are too intimidated by the environment to ask questions. Ruth has done very well on her writing course, attaining a good grade, and has completed other courses since, but when asked whether she would like to take it further or perhaps think about (H)E she is very reticent and does not feel that she would be capable of (H)E study. As explored in chapter 6 Ruth is very shy about her achievements and is reluctant to discuss them with colleagues or friends. When prompted she denigrates her achievements and refers to a distinct lack of confidence in her abilities. When I remind her that she has achieved level 3 attainments in her work and that these are equivalent to A level standards required for (H)E study, she tells me that 'she doesn't think they are really' and this demonstrates Ruth's awareness that some qualifications are more widely accepted as better than others. Ruth is quite clear that the only reason she would manage to attain such qualifications is because they are not as hard as A levels and she continues to articulate a distinct belief that she 'lacks' something required for real (H)E study. In theory there is equivalence between particular qualifications, but this theory is underpinned by perceptions of better and worse qualifications such as those articulated by Ruth (and other participants).

In Ruth's case she demonstrates a sense that there is a particular level at which she can achieve or attain, and this is in keeping with the interview extracts from participants within all the three groups under study. Ruth is from group one and was educated within the tri-partite era; group two and three participants display similar notions of inferiority in terms of the qualifications they hold or are capable of holding, the careers that they can aspire to and the universities that would accommodate them. Problematic notions of equivalency in terms of qualifications, vocational and academic pathways, and entrance to post and pre-92 universities are part of the process of 'embodiment of innate in/ability and or/inferiorization' which may lead to a continuing sense of 'lack'. As with Bourdieu (1986) Ruth is referring to classificatory systems located through her experiences and self imposing boundaries; or displaying '…disquiet, ambivalence, insecurity and uncertainty' (Reay, David and Ball, 2005: 28) as her 'habitus' comes into contact with a 'field' she has little experience or understanding of.

Clare's entry to post-compulsory education has been discussed in chapter 5 and 6. She took an access course and then went on to complete a degree in History at a post-92 university, and then her PGCE after this. Clare did not think 'she was good enough to go to university' for a long time. She says that her tutor on the access course, who was working-class, encouraged her to apply to a pre-92 university. Clare is quite clear that his involvement in her study and his encouragement was one of the reasons that she carried her studies through to (H)E. Upon the encouragement from this tutor who explicitly suggested that Clare apply to a pre-92 university, Clare applied both to a pre and post-92 university. The pre-92 university approached her and discussed that she might have a chance of an offer of a place the following year depending on the qualifications she received and entrance procedures. The post-92 university offered Clare the chance to take an equivalency exam to overcome her maths shortfall and to write a report so that they could identify whether her writing style demonstrated the potential to cope with the demands of (H)E study. Drawing on her previous educational experience and enlisting the assistance of a friend who had recently returned to (H)E study, Clare drew up a report which was accepted by the university (along with her maths equivalency test) as evidence that Clare was able to cope with (H)E study.

Clare accepted the post-92 offer, rather than following up the more remote possibility offered to her by the pre-92 university. She says first that this was because of the timing, but then later she says that she thinks she made the right choice anyway as she would 'not have

coped at the elite university as the people and the environment would have been so different'. This echoes the findings of Archer (2003) who discusses the potential for individuals to be 'othered' by the discourses prevalent within (H)E. Clare is also not sure that she would have gained the academic entrance criteria that the pre-92 university would have required. Clare articulates a notion of her acceptance at university as a 'surprise'. As with James (1996: 193) Clare and participants from group two often discuss their entrance to university as 'the result of a "fluke" or a mistake of some kind' and that university is 'not really for "people like her"'. There are rational and pragmatic aspects to Clare's final decision to attend a post-92 university such as the timing and a realistic assessment of her academic shortfall. However there are more powerful emotional reasons behind her choice, for example a feeling that she is not 'able' enough or that she would not fit in either with the people or the environment. Clare's interviews demonstrate that:

> There is a process of class-matching which goes on between student and university; a synchronisaton of familial and institutional habitus (Reay, David and Ball, 2005: 92).

The group three participants under analysis further in this chapter have not attended university, but there is a deep sense in the interviews of all the processes described here. The women in group three have set themselves limits on their academic and occupational potential and often put barriers up even at the mention of carrying on with their studies or considering university as an option for them. These barriers come across partially as a result of a kind of 'self policing' which is evident within each of the 3 groups analyzed within this thesis.

Even though Clare attended a post-92 university which she describes as 'a better choice for her because of her class background', Clare still describes feelings of 'intimidation' at university and of the middle class bias of (H)E or as she puts it 'the whole of education'. Clare has continued to feel this sense of difference in the occupational sector, working as a teacher, where she says she tends to get two responses. On occasions she is assumed to be middle-class, she attests to an interview where some of the first questions centered around her class status.

In this particular interview the interviewee assumed Clare was from a particular background:

> I was talking a bit about people who had worked in basic skills and I said about some of the people I had worked with and that a lot of the teaching I did was with young girls that are pregnant and that a lot of people working in basic skills were middle-class and didn't understand the background differences, and this interviewer said 'well of course I think we're all middle-class' and I said 'well I'm afraid I'm not, I'm not from that background' (Clare, first interview September 2004).

In this part of our interview Clare is quite indignant about this assumption and explains that she was attempting to demonstrate the positive experience that she could bring to the job; that the young people might respond to her because she had a shared class background. Clare is attempting to utilize her class here as an 'authentic touchstone' (Maguire, 2005: 14) but this is being largely denied to her in the educational assumption that middle-class equals the 'norm' in education and working-class – the 'deficit' which is to be overcome.

On other occasions Clare describes that both in her experiences of (H)E as a student, and her experiences as a teacher, she feels her classed self has more often been seen in negative rather than positive terms:

> Education is so middle class, I found that when I did my PGCE, cause I did a lot of supply teaching and I used to go to all different schools and in the staff room they virtually ignored you (Clare, first interview September 2004).

Clare's perception of this exclusive behaviour is that her class background alienates her from her more middle-class colleagues. It may well be that there are other reasons why she is ignored in the staff room, such as the fact that she is a temporary teacher. However the fact that Clare attributes this to her class is evidence of her strong attachment to a notion that she is different and perceived as different within education despite having the credentials to be there. As with Reay (2002) Clare achieved the right to enter a predominantly middle-class profession yet education has not 'transformed' her class perception of herself, or in Clare's view, the classed perception that others have of her. Clare's transcript makes many emotional references to her continued sense of 'lack' and to feelings of being perceived as deficient.

Group two: Introduction of comprehensive schools

Cathy's fear of (H)E was discussed briefly in chapter 6 where reference was made to her choice to begin (H)E with the OU as she would have found regularly attending a university environment too intimidating. In some notes sent to me between interviews Cathy discusses her thoughts on being working-class in (H)E:

> Since moving among the middle classes I've noticed that I really consciously play down my accent…speaking with a broad accent equates to being stupid and ignorant (personal correspondence, October 2004).

Hey (1997 and 2003) has discussed the importance of accent and of the difficulties that are encountered by many working-class women within (H)E. Cathy is displaying knowledge that her accent, and in later extracts in our interviews her classed persona, identify her as working-class and that this needs modification to 'pass' or 'survive' in this environment.

Cathy began studying at a post-92 university a couple of years after beginning the OU. She deliberately chose a post-92 university so that she would fit in better and one close to her home so that she did not have too many changes to negotiate at once, but still she says she did not feel comfortable in university and that she gravitated toward other working-class students. Cathy states that she still thinks mostly middle-class people go to university today even 'old polytechnics' because they are 'still quite middle-class' and that the same is true of the OU:

> Which wasn't initially set up for middle-class people, the OU was initially set up for people like me but it does attract a high proportion of middle-class people to it. I would never have gone to the (pre-92 local university) because it attracts a high proportion of upper middle-class people, I wouldn't have fitted in very well, it would've been hell, it's important for me to feel comfortable in an environment (Cathy, Second interview August 2005).

Cathy is expressing her view that all of (H)E, despite attempts to widen participation, is eventually utilized by middle-class groups to further their interests, rather than by under-represented groups for whom such provision was designed. This would back up claims from Ball (2003) who finds evidence that the middle-class colonize all aspects of educational provision. Also in this extract there is a clear reference to the 'them and us' divide that the HEFCE (2006) report identifies in Cathy's references to 'people like me' and 'not fitting in'. Cathy demonstrates her assumption that she would feel less comfortable in a pre-92 university environment and that a prime criterion for her in choosing a university is to fit in.

This chapter is seeking to demonstrate that for wider engagement in (H)E to become a reality for working-class women then widespread institutional change is necessary. An aspect of this is that working-class students need to be able to have a perception that the ethos and value system of (H)E institutions would accept and value the classed cultural aspect that they would bring to the environment

To clarify that Cathy chose the post-92 university primarily for reasons associated to her class background, I ask her directly 'what were her reasons for choosing the university that she did' and she replies:

> the demographics and it was more friendly to my point of view, it really would never have occurred to me to go to (local pre-92 university) (Cathy, second interview August 2005).

This last statement clearly demonstrates that Cathy perceived the university that she chose as having a distinctly different ethos to pre-92 universities. Much of Cathy's interview data focuses upon her feelings and perceptions of her class and the way that these have structured her (H)E choices and this appears linked to her class 'habitus'. Reay, David and Ball (2005) explore the multi-dimensional transformations that working-class students undertake in engaging with university. They discuss how working-class students not only have to negotiate the transition between different stages of education as do their middle-class counterparts, but also that they have to negotiate the threat to their class identity, and mediate the imposition of a requirement to change and alter the classed self – unlike their middle-class peers. Furthermore they question the notion of individualized transformations of life trajectories often obtained through education. As their research finds, the participants of this research more often display 'solidarist' rather than 'individualist' tendencies in their negotiation of the 'risks' (Beck, 1992) involved in university participation. More often working-class students seek to participate in post-92 universities where they perceive they will be more accepted and surrounded by others they perceive as more like them.

Susan is unusual in that she attended pre-92 institutions both in her undergraduate and postgraduate studies. Susan's sense of not fitting in within these environments because of her class has been demonstrated in chapters 5 and 6. Susan, like Cathy, gravitated toward other working-class students within (H)E. She also discussed her awareness of her accent and how it made her stand out, and that staff and students 'took the mickey' out of her accent. She discusses how lectures were structured at 'ridiculous times' across the week

which made attendance very difficult. Susan says that she 'hated' her time at university but that she stayed 'because I wanted a career'. She describes how the language was alienating, and the traveling difficult, as was attending such spread out lessons, and the attitudes of some staff was not always very positive in terms of her class and gender difference[51]. Susan's choices upon her engagement with (H)E were 'risky' in terms of the challenge to her classed identity and her ability to negotiate - particularly pre-92 - (H)E structures with her self-esteem and sense of classed self intact. Susan is now quite defiant about her classed background and utilizes her own classed struggles within her professional status as a mentor to 'gifted and talented' working-class children to help them realize they can attain educational success.

Archer (2003a: 128) discusses the perception from her research respondents that:

> widening participation for working-class groups generally refers to a restricted form of access to lower status institutions.

Out of the 16 participants of this research, 15 participants articulate a very deep knowledge that certain universities would never be for them which is in keeping with the research carried out by James (1996). For Susan she actively chose a pre-92 university and she discusses knowledge that this would be an advantage to her in terms of occupational prospects when she graduated. However her experience of the institution was largely negative and much of this she describes as being attributed to her class background as well as to her gender. The way that the university structured the courses that she studied, and some of the treatment she experienced, display that the practices, procedures and ethos of the particular pre-92 universities she attended continue to work with the interests of a traditional, post-school, A level, full-time student body in mind.

Anne has struggled through university because of the sense that she is not as able as some of the others:

> I was very quiet and I looked round the classroom and I thought, there's all these really clever people around me. I did manage to get there and to get all my work in and pass. I'd like to be more confident in a classroom, in seminars, in lectures maybe. To know what I'm talking about is actually relevant (Anne, first interview October 2004).

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[51] Susan was taking a physics degree which she describes as overwhelmingly masculine as well as middle-class.

Anne says that 'being working-class makes it harder to succeed in (H)E':

> Because of different values, getting into higher education is harder, and once you're in being able to stay and come out with the qualifications you need. There's also a lack of understanding of different needs, and of the different pressures in life (Anne, second interview January 2006).

Anne has found the practical side of completing her course alongside raising a family very difficult. She says that individual tutors have offered her 'invaluable help' but that the course could have been structured better to fit around her needs. Anne has not yet finished her Diploma in Social work, and because of family responsibilities may find it difficult to do so. In 'The future of higher education' (DFES, 2003: 74) 'drop out rates' are discussed. Widening participation literature is criticized for its negative use of language which collapses into 'deficit' discourse, and the term 'drop-out' could be criticized in the same way. The document does in fact suggest that the stigma of having 'dropped out' should be removed by making it easier for people to use credit transfer and take breaks from studying. Such a change in university procedures would certainly improve Anne's chances of completing, yet when I discuss this with her she is unaware of any options available with her course or institution to do this. I ask Anne 'what sort of help has been available and what important features have helped her to get this far'? Anne discusses a particular tutor who has given her lots of extra help, but as well as this the tutor has given her regular encouragement and stressed to her that she is an able student and that she can succeed. She says that she really admires this particular lecturer:

> She is very good, I think for getting as far as she has. She must have started at one stage where I am and just worked her way up (Anne, second interview January 2006).

I ask Anne 'do you have the feeling that she is from the same class background as you'? She replies:

> Yes, she is because she told me she is. I might admire her because of this, she has said to me a couple of times 'you can do this Anne' and 'I see you as very similar to me' she has said that a few times (Anne, second interview January 2006).

I continue by asking 'do people like that help you carry on'? Anne responds:

> Yes definitely, it does, people like that help because you think well when you come across a block or a stumble and you think, 'well I can't get over this' but then you think 'there are ways of dealing with things'. It makes you more positive and you think well other people must've gone through this. I think most lecturers are from a middle-class background, but this lecturer is from a background like me, that has helped (Anne, second interview January 2006).

Anne makes it clear that having a constant source of support has helped her to get as far as she has in (H)E. Anne also discusses that her tutor and her course have been reasonably understanding at times of the different pressures she is under in trying to maintain her attendance at university, and get assignments in on time. Anne's transcripts suggest that the university she attends has been more accommodating in terms of her life demands and that, at least the one tutor discussed has awareness that students who do not come to university through traditional access routes may need particular kinds of support. The HEFCE (2006) report suggests that rather than offering this support as separate and specifically focused toward non-traditional or 'vulnerable' students, thus highlighting the 'them and us' divide and constructing certain groups as in deficit, that extra pastoral support should be more widely available to all students. 'Drop out' rates and issues of retention are a concern of all universities and have affects across the class range, which would suggest that such help might benefit whole student populations.

In group two some of the main themes to emerge were fear of pre-92 universities and difficulty negotiating the structures of higher education in general. These themes are present here and in the participant's words explored in chapter 5 and 6. All participants in this group discuss discomfort in the environments that they are in and rarely, if at all, discuss moments of comfort or of positive 'class affirming' experiences within the environment. The HEFCE (2006) report suggests utilizing past experiences to help support the learning experience of (H)E; the participants within this group do not discuss instances of this. The experiences outlined here are more in line with the similar experiences of Brine (2006) who discusses the erasure of her post university self. In all three cases outlined here there is evidence of gravitating toward those as you see most like yourself, as well as toward institutions that are viewed as requiring less individual change than another. Each participant talks of the positive aspects of being with people perceived as 'like' them, and to the impact of tutors and lecturers that are of similar background. Much discourse within and about (H)E focuses upon:

> Working-class participation in higher education as a way of achieving 'change'; that is, for working-class participants to change themselves and the national and/or local population by becoming more educated, skilled, affluent, socially mobile, 'civilized' and (implicitly) middle-class (Archer and Leathwood, 2003: 176).

Archer and Leathwood highlight that in their research there is both resistance and embracement of this expectancy to change. The research here finds similar outcomes from the participants, with both those who have and who have not yet engaged with the structures

of (H)E. Archer and Leathwood also identify desires from their participants to remain with their 'authentic' working-class self, rather than take on what is sometimes perceived of by participants as the 'pretensions' of middle-classness. This research finds evidence to back up working-class desires to change or transform through education, though frequently there is a defiance and resistance to this. The change that is often desired is to learn, or to be able to have more choice, or to be able to pursue a career, or have the opportunity to have a more affluent lifestyle. There is awareness that the structures of (H)E can construct the working-class self as in deficit, or in need of 'civilizing', and that low aspirations and expectations are cited as reasons for lower participation of working-class groups. This can be demonstrated as having the effect of feeding into the 'classed learner identity' of working-class women and contributing to feelings of 'in/ability and/or inferiority' which may lead to a sense of 'lack'. Such discourse can be demonstrated as a contributory factor to differential engagement with the structures of (H)E for working-class women who do not question the unchallenged structures of an (H)E system which they often view as intimidating and to be feared.

Within all three groups a process of 'misrecognition' (Bourdieu, 1979) can be demonstrated. At times (H)E is approached as if class has no influence upon engagement. Both the individuals and the structures 'misrecognize' the continuing impact of class upon whether and how engagement takes place. This is particularly evident in the words of group three who have a more tenuous grasp of the nuances of class. This group often openly denies that class has an impact on their educational or occupational decisions. Their relationships with the structures of (H)E are extremely complex and as with the other groups there are instances of using education to bring about change, resisting and rejecting education, or something between the two. In group three there is little awareness of the continuing effect of class both in terms of the ways that individuals engage with the structures of (H)E, and in turn the many ways that the structures of (H)E impact upon the individual.
Bourdieu (1979: 321) discusses the lengths that different groups will go to, to 'imitate' or ''look like'' something they are not'. Within all three groups there are instances of 'imitation' as well as resistance within the very complex relationships that they have with the structures of (H)E and with the hopes and fears that they invest in the process. Within all three groups there is evidence of the structures of (H)E maintaining barriers to cultural acquisition and to limiting attempts to 'pass' or 'get by' with the maintenance of 'them and us' divides.

Group three: 1988 Education Act and marketization of education

Neither Rachel, Charlotte or Faye have gone to university, though all of them have articulated desires to do so and would be ideal targets for widening participation initiatives. Each of the girls has completed courses that could be targeted by universities for (H)E recruitment. Each of the girls has achieved qualifications that would place them on the borders of (H)E in terms of expected entrance criteria. Those from the group who have made any attempts to apply to university have applied to post-92 universities. I have discussed this with participants and they have all resoundingly stated that they would not apply to pre-92 universities or as they have described them as 'posh' universities. There is a distinction to be made between - recruitment to and selection for - within university application. The pre-92 universities often continue to be perceived as selecting participants and the post-92 as recruiting, within an era of widening participation. This perception of selection for university is picked up by the participants within each group. All three groups overwhelmingly make 'safer' applications, or consider application, to the post-92 universities in the knowledge that they are more likely to 'fit in' here which links into their sense of 'lack' and setting of boundaries to what they can know and achieve. All three groups also overwhelmingly perceive that they are more likely to be accepted by post-92 universities and this may link into their 'embodiment of innate inability and/or inferiorization' as discussed in previous chapters.

The HEFCE (2006) report suggests a more open form of access to (H)E might be more equitable as in effect prior qualifications act as a marker of socio-economic status. It also suggests that vocational qualifications should be viewed with parity to academic qualifications. Rachel, Charlotte and Faye all have complex home lives and would be viewed as coming from challenging socio-economic conditions. This may mean that they have fewer resources (Skeggs, 1997) through which to 'reflexively' re-model their most likely educational trajectories. Again, rather than Gidden's (1991) and Beck's (1992) 'risk minimizing reflexive individual', these 3 participants are situated in their 'life world' as in Bourdieu's alternative 'reflexive individual' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) which is shaped by the structures of their environment. The classed 'habitus' of these girls, which demonstrates a shared and similar set of experiences, can render them less equitably placed to negotiate and access the structures of institutions which mirror the dominant middle-class culture which remains inherent in (H)E structures.

Rachel has not yet attained the A-C grades she would need to go to university and to do so would mean returning to college to retake exams whilst holding down a full-time job. She has two Cs in her level 3 vocational course which might be just enough to gain entry to (H)E if she retook her GCSE grades. Rachel has comprehensive experience within placements gained on her vocational course; she has carried out observations of children in the early years; and gained a range of experience in designing and implementing curriculum plans for the foundation stage, as well as gaining experience in nurseries, home settings and schools. Yet because she is a grade off her GCSE passes and does not possess the more valuable A levels she will find the process of university application difficult. Rachel's socio-economic circumstances have not placed her in the most advantageous position to gain such grades, compared to her middle-class peers. She had little or no parental help with school work, she had no dedicated space in which to study, she had little help with option choices at school, family finances did not stretch to educational resources or extra tutoring, she has no lived experience of the benefit of (H)E or of others' experience of the procedure of applying to or attending university as no one in her family has attended university. Rachel also attended a low performing school in terms of A-C grades. Is it any wonder that Rachel is not pursuing her tentative ambitions of teaching that she articulates in the interview?

Even if Rachel manages to achieve the GCSE passes that she requires she is aware that her options for university are likely to be limited. These limits arise from the unequal entry criteria she possesses and unequal 'risks' to participation. Vocational qualifications continue to be viewed with unequal parity by many institutions. Rachel faces geographical constraints upon university because of financial costs, and finding a university course that is accommodating enough to allow her to continue to work part-time will be a prime consideration. Rachel has also articulated a strong desire to feel comfortable with university, and so if she decides at a later date to pursue this ambition, she will more likely apply to a post-92 university.

For Rachel, any eventual decision upon which university to attend if she overcomes the barriers she now faces will most likely be:

> …a process of finding out what you cannot have, what is not open for negotiation and then looking at the few options left, or a process of self-exclusion (Reay, David and Ball, 2005: 85).

The HEFCE (2006) report controversially suggests 'open enrolment' to (H)E similar to OU practices. This would be met with criticism from many corners yet 3 previous participants from group one and group two have negotiated the structures of (H)E through 'open enrolment' with the OU. These participants have degrees, post-graduate degrees and now work competently in the education sector. Equivalency exams are no longer permissible in the courses that Rachel would consider. Rachel's school experience and experience of taking her GCSEs is likely to put her off retaking her two GCSEs to gain the grades that elude her and hamper her application to university in the foreseeable future. She has been to look at a university recently to see what it was like. She did not go on a planned open day as she had no idea about when they took place, but she says:

> Yeah, my boyfriend and I looked at a university recently, and we were going to see if we could go and see about the OU, so we went up and had a look, we just went in and had a look around, it's kind of big and scary (Rachel, second interview July 2005).

Rachel's' words strongly suggest that she is intimidated by university, a place which is perceived as far outside her frame of reference. Rachel had no knowledge of widening participation or Aimhigher initiatives. She did not go to a structured open day and came away from her visit to university with her fears confirmed regarding how 'big and scary' university is and that she would find it very hard to cope in such an environment. As with Reay, David and Ball (2005) working-class students rarely make equal use of 'official' knowledge surrounding university participation such as prospectuses, visits, league table and websites. Importantly working-class students less often have access to an experiential view of what university will be like. This sort of information is often acquired through family and friends who have experience of university and access to 'hot' or 'grapevine' knowledge (Ball and Vincent, 1998).

Charlotte's story is strikingly similar to Rachel's. She has good vocational grades and misses just one grade on her GCSEs to apply to university. Like Rachel, she also has extensive experience of the early years sector through her training programme and she now has a year's experience of working full-time in a nursery where she has taken on some managerial roles as well as having prominent responsibility for 'key children' and their families in the nursery setting. Again, like Rachel, Charlotte's socio-economic circumstances were difficult when she was growing up and despite the difficulties and the fact that she attended a low performing school, Charlotte left with more than 5 good A-C grades, but only gained a D in her maths. She would be eminently more qualified to

undertake an early year's childhood studies degree than some post-school, traditional A level students, who have little or no experience of the sector they are training for. However, because Charlotte lacks one grade in terms of her GCSEs, and also lacks the academic prestige of A levels she is unable to pursue (H)E as an option at this stage. Charlotte could return to retake her GCSE, but like Rachel, hated the subject so much and discusses the alienating way in which it was taught to her, so that she cannot face the prospect of retaking it, and certainly not returning on her own with no support from friends or family.

Charlotte has expressed on many occasions that she doubts she has the capacity to gain this one GCSE grade, and indeed the capacity to enter and complete a course of (H)E study. Charlotte has also made many references to the differences that she perceives to exist between who she is and the kinds of people who go to university, and honestly discusses that she would feel 'out of place' in a university. Thus Charlotte displays, as do the other participants a complex mixture of rational and pragmatic aspects to her choices upon (H)E engagement, but most profoundly, emotional reasons are given for her continued sense that university is not a realistically viable option for her at this point. These emotional responses present as part of a deeply embedded and embodied notion of her self as 'less able', 'different and somehow lacking' and the view that she would be severely 'out of place' within university.

Faye's struggles with applications for university have been well documented in chapter 5 and 6. Faye is again in similar circumstances to Rachel and Charlotte. She has the vocational experience and qualifications to begin to pursue university but lacks the maths grade which she has now attempted twice to pass. Faye is very definite that she 'does not want to struggle like her mum' and wants a career, which goes against notions that working-class students lack aspirations or ambitions often cited in widening participation literature. The last conversation that I had with Faye was to tell me that because of conflicting advice she has received, and the over subscription on the maths GCSE courses, she has missed this year's deadline at her local college to attempt once again to achieve her maths GCSE. She was very despondent about this and I hope that her enthusiasm to pursue university can sustain another knock.

In chapter 6 I described how Faye had been told that an access course was not necessary to gain a university place, and this was after discussion with an admissions tutor who informed

her of 'how hard' the access course was, and that if she struggled with her maths she would struggle with this course. I have advised her that access courses are there to help people attain the qualifications and experience that they need to enter (H)E, but she has now missed the deadline for this year, and also seems to think that she will be unable to manage the course now because of this tutor's comments. One of the main stumbling blocks to Faye applying to do the access course this year (as discussed in chapter 6) was the fact that she had no access to the potential timetable of the course until a month or so before it began. Faye holds down a full-time job at present and if she was able to study on the access course around her work, she would have seriously considered this option. This is a stumbling block for many students who know all too well that financing (H)E will mean that they need savings to do this with, even with financial help. The work of Gilchrist, Phillips and Ross (2003) highlights that debt and the fear of debt is a factor when considering HE. Many prospective students with jobs are unable to attend inflexible courses and continue to work. A further recommendation of the HEFCE (2006) report is that universities build more flexibility into their courses in terms of modes of attendance, credit transfer, and options to leave and return to study that do not carry the stigma of 'dropping out'.

In Faye's case the timetable on the access course that she was considering is potentially structured over all five days of the week which would make it very hard for her to accommodate employment. In our last conversation Faye said 'I just don't know what to do anymore, I feel hopeless'. I have suggested that Faye looks further a field to find a suitable course which meets her needs, but as Faye discusses, this would mean extra financial costs in terms of travel and time off work. Also when I suggested this it was evident that for now, moving beyond what is familiar to Faye is a difficult choice in terms of 'fear' and her continued sense of 'lack' as articulated in chapters 5 and 6. Much of Faye's interviews point to her struggles to overcome her feelings of fear of (H)E and her sense of 'lack', as well as the very real barriers to (H)E participation that she is facing in terms of gaining entry, and these are all risk factors identified by various authors working in (H)E research. Archer (2003: 16) discusses the inequality in terms of risk that working and middle-class entrants to university face:

> Consequently, it could be suggested that within the arena of higher education choices, participation is an inherently more risky, costly and uncertain 'choice' for working-class groups than for middle-class groups.

Many of the suggestions of the HEFCE (2006) report would help Rachel, Charlotte and Faye to negotiate the structures of (H)E. Though relaxing entry criteria for certain groups is open to criticisms, it can also be seen to produce very successful results as in the case of mature students, or students with extensive vocational experience. In Rachel, Charlotte and Faye's case socio-economic circumstances and structural inflexibility, rather than a lack of aspirations, hard work or ability (as testified by their academic and vocational success in difficult social circumstances) are at the core of their difficulty in negotiating the structures of (H)E. Alongside this are their rational, pragmatic, and most prominently – emotional - responses to the prospects of engaging in (H)E which is an unfamiliar 'field' for them. Such unfamiliar territory is negotiated through their personal and familial 'habitus' which is often in stark contrast to the institutional 'habitus' of many universities. Their 'embodiment of innate inability and/or inferiority' which often leads to them perceiving that they 'lack' some quality necessary for (H)E engagement, coupled with predominant discourses of working-class deficiency within the literature which is supposed to encourage their wider engagement - all serves to maintain the unequal class balance within the field of (H)E.

Concluding comments

There are many ways that (H)E could change to reflect the composition of the society that it serves, and to reduce its relentless capacity to reproduce social class advantage. Some suggestions have been discussed within this chapter.

In all three groups, when university is discussed there is a sense of intimidation and fear of the environment from participants which can be traced to their sense of 'lack' which may be a result of the 'embodiment of innate in/ability and or/inferiorization' that has been explored in this theses. Processes of 'misrecognition' are identified whereby the structures of (H)E can 'misrecognize' social difference as educational difference – particularly within liberal/neo-liberal discourses of equality of opportunity and claims to meritocracy. Participants continue to 'misrecognize' these processes; often approaching education as a way of achieving change. Whether that change is in the form of change to the self, career, or knowledge advancement, or some combination of this, participants have a varying perception that they can enter/survive/exit (H)E as if class has little impact. If they do not achieve their educational, occupational or personal goals then many of the participants have unconsciously accepted liberal/neo-liberal discourses of individual failure as the cause of

educational inequality so that they turn to self blame for their inability to 'remake the self' in 'new times individualization'. This is part of the process of the 'embodiment of innate in/ability and/or inferiorization' which can lead to a sense of 'lack' and interacts with 'classed and gendered constructions of learner identities'.

Moving beyond the main focus of this chapter, which is the continued emphasis upon the 'deficit' model of non-traditional participation in (H)E that is inherent in widening participation discourse. What can be done within the (H)E environment to encourage greater engagement with the structures of (H)E for working-class women without harming the working-class self? Utilizing the literature referred to in this thesis; the suggestions of the HEFCE (2006) report, and crucially the experiences and words of the participants of this research – this thesis puts forward an approach to change which emanates from a model of 'institutional deficit'. Within this approach it is acknowledged that changes are being adopted, as is evidenced by widening participation initiatives and an increased student body, but that these changes seek to focus upon equality of opportunity and access, rather than fundamental institutional change. If the nature of the student body is to change, both in terms of quantity and also of equity then institutional change needs to be given greater emphasis in theory, policy and practice.

The concluding chapter 8 of this thesis will present an overview of the main areas discussed. This chapter will move on to discuss some of the criticisms of Aimhigher initiatives and offer a counter critique. Suggestions for more equitable engagement in (H)E for working-class women will be proposed. Alongside this I will analyze particular initiatives such as: the Families and Higher Education Decision-making Cycle (FAHED Cycle) which will be considered and discussed as an example of an 'evolving' model of change which could be extended and rolled out to earlier key stages to be more effective. I will conclude with an analysis of the gaps in this research, and with suggestions for further research within this area of study that this thesis has highlighted

Chapter 8

Contributions to current understandings of 'how and why working-class women engage with the structures of (higher) education'

Introduction

This concluding chapter will begin with an overview of this thesis, exploring the main arguments presented and the competing arguments within current literature. I will revisit the methodology employed and consider my approach to data analysis. I will then move on to consider how this study contributes to our current understanding of 'how and why working-class women engage with the structures of (higher) education', and follow this with an exploration of suggestions for increasing engagement within higher education for this currently under-represented group. The HEFCE (2006) report identifies gaps in the research; this final chapter will consider how this study has contributed to those gaps and offer thoughts upon future research.

Overview of thesis

This research is a reflective account of the lives of the participants and encompasses reflection upon the researcher's own biography which is relevant to the content of the study. I have stated that I am part of the research and in chapter 2 exploration of the negative and positive aspect of subjective positioning was set forth.

This thesis was set out in an historical way, utilizing three time periods or 'waves' derived from the work of Brown (1990). The time periods under study begin with the 1944 Education Act and the post-war period; through the 'comprehensive era'; and moving forward from the 1988 Education Act to the current British education system characterized by markets and 'choice'. Participants were divided up within these time periods to offer a comparison of their experiences with (H)E and to explore the differences and similarities within each 'wave'.

Current educational theory, policy and practice is underpinned by discourses of meritocracy, equality of opportunity, choice and competition. This thesis argued against the 'justness' or

'fairness' which is assumed within such a framework and stated that rather than liberal/neo-liberal claims that class has less of an impact upon educational attainment, this research finds that inequalities in terms of unequal life chances associated to social class are more deeply embedded and entrenched within the present educational 'wave'. An overview of principles of social justice was explored to question the current 'consensus' upon the most prominent forms of social justice within the British education system which seeks to open up access and opportunity without tackling the underlying issues which lead to social inequality. The contingency and ambiguity with which social justice is defined has been acknowledged to demonstrate that the concept is problematic and eludes real consensus upon its meaning and function in society. In chapter 4 I identified 2 important questions within education which Griffiths (2003: 10) asks:

1. How should we best live with the lovely diversity of human beings?
2. How can education best benefit all individuals and also the society in which they live?

This research does not make claims to be able to answer such fundamental questions which have been pondered by some of the world's greatest philosophers; instead this research uses these philosophical questions as the 'touchstone' to the research.

The methodology which informed this research was set out in chapter 4 and was deeply influenced by 'humanistic' (Plummer, 2001) concerns and a desire to move away from 'false dualisms' (Pring, 2004) and toward a pragmatic methodology which is reflective, reflexive, and rigorous, yet which acknowledges that knowledge is situated, contingent and open to many interpretations. I utilized qualitative auto/biographical methodology and semi-structured life history (Miller, 2000) interview methods in the epistemological understanding that they would elicit the deep experiential data this research required to answer the 'how and why' of my research title. Bourdieu's pre-occupation with the 'space between' the objective subjective divide informed the approach to this research as did his cyclical, reflective and reflexive approach to research whereby the researcher is subject to scrutiny as are the participants of the research and the data they co-produce (Grenfell and James, 1998).

The data analysis employed here recognizes the many interpretations that may be made of the data. The interpretations of the research by the researcher are affected by history and to overcome the inherent bias of biographies within research particular steps were undertaken

to ensure greater validity. First, bias was acknowledged and reflected upon. Second, the researcher's position in the research was examined for its effects. Third, the processes by which interpretation and meaning are gained were documented. I argued that a stance of 'passionate detachment' (Harraway, 1988) was a prominent approach to the research and that research is always both inductive and deductive. This research employed elements of a 'grounded theory' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) approach which acknowledges the theoretical leaning of this research to be toward inductive theorization where research travels 'from data to ideas' (Hammersley, 1992: 48). My use of a 'grounded theory' approach was of an interpretivist nature and I argued that rather than being a distinct approach the methods of analyzing data which grounded theory emphasizes, are instead the hallmark of a reflexive , questioning and alert approach to the analysis of research. I developed a system of coding to identify the more prominent themes of the research which were identified as such because of their clear presence within the research and within each of the participants' accounts.

There was a deductive element to analysis because the prominent themes to emerge had also previously emerged within my own experiences of the British (H)E system. The researcher has a 'strong affinity' with the prominent themes. Therefore, though analysis was not a hypothesis led approach where I was seeking to prove or disprove theory, within analysis I did employ an element of searching through the data for expected themes. However, had these themes not presented themselves so clearly they would not have become the focus. This research utilized a cyclical approach to identify themes and, as specified, the overriding underpinning to this research is social justice (as with Fine and Weiss, 2005). My interpretation of the clearest themes to present in the data informed this theses as did my value system which is in line with that advocated by Griffiths (1998: 94) who states that research should be concerned with both 'social justice in educational research' and ' from educational research'. As discussed in chapter 4 Griffiths describes and suggests principles for educational research and these principles informed the methodology, methods, data analysis and presentation of the findings of this research.

The interviews conducted in this research covered wide and varied topics, too numerous to recount within one thesis. The particular themes investigated are constructed around the participants' perceptions of their identities and the processes involved in the creation of such identities. This is in line with a research approach which focuses upon issues of social justice, and responds to my original research aims.

The first aim of this research was:

> To use auto/biographical analysis of working-class women's experiences to produce a rich life account in the words of the researched.

What emerged from these 'rich life accounts' was an undeniable sense of 'lack' emanating from an 'embodiment process of perceived innate in/ability and/or inferiorization'. This sense of 'lack' was described by the women in the study; and it was often reinforced in the home and educational environment and could be explained as a 'felt injury' of class (Reay, 2005: 916). The women's multiple references to 'lack' began to come through as a central theme which informed the second aim of this research which is:

> To explore how and why working-class women engage – and why they do not – in higher education.

A perception of 'lack, in/ability and/or inferiority' often impacted upon how working-class women negotiated entering the structures of (H)E, and influenced behaviour within the environments. This sense of 'difference', 'otherness' and 'deficiency' also emerged as a way of gaining an understanding of the third aim of this research:

> To uncover a range of possibilities as to why so few working-class women engage in higher education within an era of widening participation.

Rational and pragmatic aspects to engagement were identified, but emotional responses to engagement and to a lack of engagement were identified as the strongest and most powerful themes to emerge from this data and this echoes the work of Hutchings (2003). The final aim of this research[52] is:

> To examine ways in which working-class women may be enabled to make informed choices upon whether or not, when, where and how, to enter the institutions of higher education in greater numbers, through an examination of early childhood education and onwards.

The following analysis will add to this final aim by giving an overview of the analytical chapters of this thesis, before proceeding to explore suggestions from the study to increase the choice for engagement in (H)E for working-class women.

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[52] This aim is the only aim to be modified from the original research proposal and this has been discussed in chapter 1.

How this research contributes to our understandings of 'how and why working-class women engage with the structures of (higher) education'

This research has presented 3 analysis chapters. I will revisit each of those chapters to assess the ways in which this research has contributed to current understandings of class, gender and education.

Classed and gendered constructions of learner identities

In chapter 5 I introduced 9 women in the study who were selected because of their 'fit' within the 'waves' or three time periods used for analysis in this research. The focus was upon the ways that working-class women construct themselves and are constructed as learners. The analysis of the secondary literature shows that there is a perception that class now has a weakened effect upon life trajectories. Reflexive individualization discourse (Beck, 1992; Beck, Giddens and Lash 1994; Giddens, 1991) assumes that individuals are now more able to change their biographies through rational choices and decision making. This chapter challenged this assumption. Instead, the words of the participants demonstrated that they encountered many difficulties in negotiating non-traditional pathways.

Many of the women rejected the requirement to become an 'aspiring individual' which is more in line with Giddens (1991) 'ontological insecurity'. Those that attempted to remake their biographies, in all time periods, encompassed many hurdles in the process as evidenced by processes of 'anticipatory socialization' (Bates, 1984) 'filtering' (Bates, 1990) rational and class 'suitable' expectations (Buswell, 1992) and 'cooling out' (Colley et.al., 2003). This does not fit with 'new times individualization' discourse (Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody, 2001) and is more in line with Bourdieu's (1986) 'choice of the necessary' which is informed by class 'habitus' and its interaction with familiar and unfamiliar 'fields'.

Skegg's (1997) identification of unequal resources was also identified as a barrier for working-class women in remaking the self. This chapter identified a 'classed crisis of femininity' which went against current discourse which suggests that working-class girls have more opportunities with which to re-invent themselves than working-class boys. This research agrees that a 'classed crisis of masculinity' is in effect, but that it should not be set up to compete against the 'classed crisis of femininity' identified. The words of the

participants demonstrate many and varied difficulties that working-class women, in all time periods came across, in attempts to 'remake' themselves in a society that largely ignores the existence of class difference.

This research argues that 'new times individualization' is damaging to both working-class boys and girls, men and women, and that to set one gender against the other is not useful when:

> The biggest self invention of all lies in the possibility of the working class remaking itself as middle class (Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody, 2001: 21).

The many extracts referred to in the analysis chapters testifies to the ongoing problems that working-class groups and individuals undergo in the demands to become something different, or 'better' than the 'deficient' self they are perceived to possess.

Embodiment of innate in/ability and/or inferiorization

Chapter 6 looked across all 16 participants. The literature reviewed in this area suggested three major competing notions of the British education system within the three time periods under review.

In the first time period hereditarian theories which came to inform post-war selection argued to lesser and greater extents that genetic differences could be found within and between groups in terms of academic intelligence. Many such theorists claimed that class and ethnic groups had differential academic capacities which were genetic in nature. Others believed that though intelligence was largely genetic or determined at birth, there was an 'untapped pool of talent' within the working-classes. These belief systems underpinned the tri-partite era of selection.

The second time period saw the belief in hereditarian theories or in genetic endowment questioned. Increasingly it became largely discounted within the 'comprehensive era' by educational theorists such as Simon (1971) who stated that environment and not genetic endowment was to be found at the heart of differential academic achievement. There were attempts to end selection through schools which purported to offer similar experiences of schooling regardless of class, ethnicity and gender. The comprehensivization of education was only ever partially achieved and began to be dismantled from the late 1970s onwards.

The third time period is characterized by liberal/neo-liberal underpinnings which inform current theory, policy and practice and emanates particularly from the 1988 Education Act onwards. Within this rhetoric it is argued that the British education system is meritocratic and 'unequal but fair' (Saunders, 1996) in that it offers equal opportunity to become unequal. In theory the system in place today should award educational and occupational success based solely on merit and effort; class, gender and ethnicity should have no impact on outcome. The widely held belief and value system underpinning the education system today is that class has a much weakened effect upon educational and occupational life chances within the British education system. Within this discourse differential achievement is said not to be based upon, nor is it affected by genetic or hereditarian theories of the past. The education system is said to be neutral and is largely accepted as assessing individuals on merit and effort alone regardless of any social factors.

This research finds evidence of differential expectations and aspirations upon groups and individuals; and from groups and individuals which is distinctly related to class (and gender) in all 3 groups and in all 3 time periods.

In group one, as was to be expected from the prominent gender divided social understandings of the time, education was distinctly gender differentiated with most participants being groomed for their future role as housewives. Education remained largely class divided and this was reflected in the participants' words with no participants attending grammar school or considering (H)E or in the most part FE, as an option in their compulsory school decisions for post-compulsory pathways. The women in group one received an education which was explicitly differentiated because of their class (and gender). All the women in this group displayed notions of themselves as either 'less able and/or inferior' and articulate a profound sense of 'lack' which is related to both their class and gender.

In group two the women in the study continued to receive a gender differentiated education, though there was some evidence of acceptance of girls moving into areas formerly designated as a masculine domain. Though these women were educated in the comprehensive era which was to reflect society and therefore offer a mixed social balance within schools, all the women attended predominantly working-class secondary schools within the less affluent areas they lived in. Only 1 of the participants in this group went on to further education upon leaving school. All of the women in this group recall having their

ambitions 'appropriately' shaped by school and teachers; even though most recall that this was done in a 'kind' manner. All of the participants are quite clear that there was no discussion of 6th form, A levels or (H)E with them by their schools, teachers or families. None of these women expected to go onto (H)E study or considered this as an option for themselves. As for group one, all the women in this study display notions of themselves as 'lacking, deficient, inferior, or as less able'. Three of the women in this study were designated as distinctly 'less able' by those that educated them.

In group three the 6 participants all discuss that they had lots of options to pursue subjects regardless of whether they were 'typically' masculine or feminine choices. However all the girls were channeled or 'filtered' onto child care courses. This demonstrates that despite notions that gender has no effect on outcome, in the case of this research it still appears to be in operation. On several occasions I asked the different girls in this group whether they considered going to 6th form, the most usual reply was that this was not discussed with them. When I asked several of these participants which girls went to 6th form, they replied that it was 'the posh ones' 'the ones from better families' or 'the ones whose parents had more money'. This suggests that though there appears to be gender differentiation still in effect in this group, this is possibly differentiated based on gender and class with working-class girls being offered vocational training in post-compulsory choices, and middle-class girls having academic education extended to them, and being more likely to go on to 6th form. Within this group there is a 'worrying' regularity to the reports that they discuss of being labeled as less able by the education system. 5 of the 6 girls regularly discuss instances of this in the transcripts. This is in line with the findings of Gillborn and Youdell (2000, 2001) Gaine and George (1999) Plummer (2000) and Steedman (1982) amongst others who suggest that unconscious assumptions are being made about the potential of certain groups to achieve less well than others.

All of the participants in this group expected to go onto further study and this is in line with the post-compulsory changes which reflect changes in the occupational sector at this time. All of the women in this study articulate desire, at some stage in the interviews, that they would have liked to have gone to university, all of them express aspirations to become teachers or nurses. All but one participant, who is designated as 'gifted and talented', are 'cooled out', or 'filtered' or discuss instances of 'anticipatory socialization' so that these five girls find themselves on child care courses. This is in line with the work of Kilminster

(1995) who stresses that working-class women are channeled into such vocational areas, and to Colley et.al. (2003) who develop the concept of 'vocational habitus' which can be seen in operation in the research of this thesis.

Most of the women in this group articulate well intentioned but unfocussed advice from parents and this echoes the work of Hutchings (2003: 101) who discusses '…a working class discourse of 'child as expert''. As with the first two groups, all the participants in this group display notions of themselves as 'lacking' which is in line with the focus of this chapter. This research suggests that this notion of 'lack' is increasing in the group three or 'third wave' and that this is linked to the changing structures of education which are now constructed as a market. As with Gilborn and Youdell (2001) the 'burgeoning A-C economy' demands consistently high standards, and results. Those that are deemed by the education system as to be less likely to attain such results are allocated fewer resources in terms of time, and also in terms of relegation to lower performing schools as demonstrated by the Sutton Trust report (2005) which found that the top 200 state schools were 'effectively closed off to the less well off'. Certain groups are also constructed as lower achievers and there are distinct links to class in this diagnosis as discussed in the literature review and demonstrated in the analysis chapters. Whereas in group one and two there were explicit class differences in operation which resulted in different experiences of and outcomes from the British education system; this research finds that in group three these class mechanisms have become less explicit but nevertheless have the same capacity to generate class inequalities.

{Within the tri-partite system of education overt connections between intelligence, ability and class were made. It was largely accepted that different children needed different education which was determined by the 11+ test. This was theorized as having connections to class and gender, and policy and practice often mirrored this.

Gillborn and Youdell (2000 and 2001) find evidence that genetic connections between class, ability and brightness are being made by theory, policy and practice today, just as they were previously regarding intelligence. This research concurs with their findings and this is demonstrated in chapter 6 through the words of the participants. Brine's (1999) concept of 'undereducation' usefully examines the process whereby working-class children become 'undereducated' adults, rather then limiting exploration to the outcome. If the outcome of

undereducation is to be challenged then a deeper understanding of the process is necessary. This thesis demonstrates that the connections that (H)E makes between class, ability and brightness may contribute to the sense of lack that can be demonstrated to be a result of 'the embodiment of innate in/ability and/or inferiorization'.

This research has examined many of the recent reports upon HE and widening participation. It has been discussed that much of the language of these documents can construct under-represented groups as somehow 'lacking' the necessary qualities to participate in HE. Within widening participation policy documents there are many references to 'low aspirations', 'low expectations', and inadequate entry qualifications. Within this discourse, implications are being made that a form of cultural deficit is in operation and this mirrors the earlier and more overt notions that intelligence and class might be connected. Policy upon HE and widening participation pays much less attention to the 'lack' of change within the structures of HE needed to accommodate a wider and more equitable student body. In essence policy tends toward an acceptance of meritocracy as a 'fair' model of social justice and sets up the British education system as a competition for resources, which is viewed to be 'fair' and 'just' because of its claims to offer equal access based on merit and ability. As Gillborn and Youdell (2000 and 2001) ability is a word in every day use within the education system today but it is a word upon which there is little examination or consensus upon its definition or meaning. The far reaching consequences and effects of its ubiquitous presence in the everyday language of educational theory, policy and practice can be seen in the often quoted construction of 'lack' within the participants of this research. Indeed policy constructed deficit can be viewed as one of the barriers to a more class equitable system of (H)E.}

(H)E and the concept of deficit

Many reasons are identified in this thesis for the under-representation of certain groups in (H)E. Chapter 7 focuses on the HEFCE Report (2006) because it is a recent research document, and it is a comprehensive review of existing research in this area, it also focuses upon the concept of 'deficit' that it identifies as inherent within widening participation literature. I focused in on this concept because it links to the wider concept of – 'lack' - which this research demonstrates to be an effect of processes of the 'embodiment of innate in/ability and/or inferiorization'.

Current theory highlights the remit of government policy to widen participation in (H)E. The HEFCE (2006) report makes clear certain ambiguities within this remit that are not often widely acknowledged. Analysis of the report identifies many unanswered questions such as:

- What is the prominent understanding of widening participation?
- Is the emphasis upon increasing the student body, making it more equitable or something between the two?
- Whose responsibility is it to ensure that participation is widened and who it is widened to?
- What focus should widening participation take, should individual change, structural change, or a mixture between the two take place?
- Are universities seeking to offer a past experience of (H)E to a wider group, or a different and more diverse experience of (H)E?

(Adapted from HEFCE, 2006).

Empirical evidence on the data of (H)E participation clearly demonstrates that despite widening participation initiatives, and regardless of the prominent focus whether increase or equity, the outcome of widening participation is at present a mass but not equitable system of (H)E. The report identifies that there is no consensus upon whose responsibility widening participation is, neither is there any consensus upon how it should be done. The report also highlights that widening participation tends toward a discourse of individual deficit and that (H)E institutions remain largely unchanged and are slow and reluctant to instigate a wide ranging overhaul. The words of the participants in this research back up the claims of the report. This research has identified instances of discomfort in the (H)E environment, or fear of what the environment might be like for those who have not participated. There are many instances in the data of inflexible structures and a lack of support which make the (H)E experience difficult to access or difficult to complete for many students, including 'traditional students'. The 'them and us divide' that the report highlights is in strong evidence throughout the data.

Group one of this research, for all the reasons discussed, were much less likely to attend or have the chance to attend a masculine and elite system of (H)E. Group two received their education within a time of change both in terms of gender and social class, but these changes were in their infancy, and (H)E was still largely a male middle-class elite system and few attempts to change this had been made. Group three are being educated within a

time of extreme change within (H)E; where discourse states that (H)E participation should be extended and that this should be done equitably. However this research finds that the women from group three of the study are experiencing as many difficulties in accessing (H)E as those women in the study from the two earlier time periods under review. These difficulties continue to be partially associated with access, though access purports to be wider today.

Rational and pragmatic barriers to (H)E participation were identified such as: a lack of qualifications; less knowledge of the entrance procedures and a lack of information, attributing less value to (H)E, and economic reasons such as the need to work. The strongest barriers to (H)E engagement to arise from the data of this thesis were associated to 'emotional' aspects such as: being unfamiliar with university and its culture, and the fear of feeling out of place; feeling that you would be unable to cope with the academic demands of university study; and most predominantly feeling that you were 'less able', 'inferior', or 'lacking' in some way which meant that you lacked the qualities required for (H)E engagement. The predominance of emotional responses to (H)E engagement for working-class participants strongly echoes the work of Hutchings (2003) who also identifies such responses.

The women from group three continue to view university largely as the preserve of others, who are viewed as coming from different backgrounds to them. Group three accounts continue to be infused with references to not having what it takes to enter and complete (H)E study. The women in group three suffer as much from a sense of 'lack' as the women in groups one and two.

Participants from group three make assessments of their future prospects which are distinctly bound up with their levels of education and with boundaries which they self impose. They are acutely aware that their life chances are severely curtailed in today's occupational sector unless they are able to enter (H)E and gain higher qualifications. Inequalities in terms of class and life chances are increasing and more deeply embedded within group three as the move from an elite to a mass system of education means that the market is saturated with others who have higher qualifications than they do. As previously explored, it is now virtually impossible to be occupationally successful or to enter particular occupations without qualifications today. The women from group three understand that their

most likely route to social mobility is through the education sector today, yet though participation is increasing, under-participation for working-class groups continues. The reasons that this thesis has highlighted for this continued under-participation are:

- 'Classed and gendered learner identities' which are difficult to break out of.
- 'Embodiment of innate in/ability and/or inferiorization' which can lead to a sense of 'lack'.
- Rational, pragmatic and most prominently – emotional – responses to (H)E engagement.
- Continuation of discourses of individual deficit within (H)E theory, policy and practice which can lead to a 'them and us' divide and further entrench inequalities in participation.

This concluding chapter will continue with an analysis of what might be done to help under-represented groups to have a choice whether or not to engage with the structures of (H)E. The reasoning behind these suggestions emanates from this research and from the wide body of literature reviewed throughout. The emphasis here is about increasing *choice* as this research would be in agreement with the HEFCE (2006) report that the 'compulsory element to post-16 education' should be questioned for all groups. Lifelong learning should be about exactly that *'lifelong'* learning which emphasizes an approach to learning which is not systematic, staged and linked purely to accreditation, but is free flowing, versatile, cyclical, and values informal as well as formal learning.

Suggestions from the study to increase the choice for engagement in (H)E for working-class women

The following are suggestions for more equitable engagement in (H)E for working-class women and are as a result of the empirical data gathered here and of the culmination of 3 years of research undertaken. Some of these suggestions are already underway in practice within some widening participation and Aimhigher initiatives but as the HEFCE (2006) Report suggests: there is no joined up approach to implementation; no universal agreement upon the remit of widening participation or upon the effectiveness of Aimhigher initiatives; or upon whose job it is to take responsibility for ensuring outcomes within an agreed framework. Crucially, chapter 7 identified a key question from the report upon which there is no agreement:

> In widening participation to currently under-represented groups are we seeking to offer a pre-existing experience of (H)E more widely, or are we expecting to change the nature of HE itself to accommodate the new kinds of students? (HEFCE, 2006: 121).

This research suggests that to widen participation in a way that is equitable 'the nature of (H)E' must change, and institutions need to reflect in their values, attitudes and practices the society in which they currently operate, rather than continue practices that largely serve a student body characterized by traditional, post-school, A level, full-time students.

This research also suggests that the British education system as a whole needs to recognize the diversity of its population and that working-class culture needs to be given greater value, and working-class groups should be viewed as having the same potential as other groups. Stereotypical perceptions and 'common sense' presumptions around the likely performance of working-class groups is part of the process which contributes to the 'embodiment of innate in/ability and/or inferiorization'. This can contribute to a sense of 'lack' for some working-class women which may result in a tempering of aspirations and expectations for themselves. This may be influenced by differential expectations of them by the education system and society in general.

The education system as a whole needs to develop a culture of high expectations for all its participants, along with giving equal value to academic and vocational pathways. Education needs to be viewed more as valuable in its own right in producing well rounded individuals, rather than as a means by which to attain targets and maintain standards measured by

accreditation. This resonates with alternative models of social justice such as 'equality of outcome' and 'equality of condition', which are in sharp contrast to the most prominent model today of 'equality of opportunity'. The following suggestions for change encompass all these view points and will analyze particular widening participation and Aimhigher initiatives. The suggestions all encompass the view that institutional change needs to become a focus for educational theory, policy and practice. {Alongside this, the research finds that an emphasis upon emotional and psycho-social aspects of participation in (H)E needs to be given a greater focus in policy which aims to widen participation equitably. Suggestions for change are set out under 3 categories which emphasize the focus of the findings of this research: that emotional aspects of engagement and institutional change need to be taken into account alongside the very real rational and pragmatic barriers to participation that working-class women face.

Institutional deficit and suggestions for change

1. **Initiatives to widen participation**

- Under-represented groups from early years onwards could be more firmly targeted by (H)E institutions, and the benefits of (H)E explored in-depth with these groups. Particularly the pre-92 universities could be set the task of reaching out to schools in less-affluent areas, or to schools which are currently under performing.
- Visits to universities should become a part of the normal curriculum, and particularly to pre-92 universities to break down divisive barriers. This should occur long before decisions upon option choices in year 9 take place so that whether or not to engage in (H)E becomes part of a framework of rational, pragmatic and emotional choices for all groups. Families of the pupils could be included within this so that a wider understanding of the practices and benefits of (H)E are established. Many of the participants of this research identified a need for parental understanding of such processes.
- Universal and neutral guidance to (H)E should be given to all students, particularly at crucial times such as when choosing subjects in year 9, and in post-compulsory choices. All options should be made clear to all students and help and guidance should be more accessible and given at more regular intervals. Often participants discussed the confusion of the choices open to them and the conflicting and

sometimes incorrect advice they received. More often participants articulated a distinct lack of advice and information; or of receiving only vocationally focused advice which disregarded academic study and (H)E for whole groups of students within schools.

The previous points are worth further consideration in the light of particular initiatives which, as introduced in chapter 7, could be viewed as evolving models of change. An example of an initiative is the Families and Higher Education Decision-making (FAHED) cycle which works with families of under-represented groups and is supported and analyzed by the Researching Equity, Access and Participation Group (REAP).

Below is a diagram of the cycle as it is envisioned and actioned in practice (Diagram one).

Diagram one.
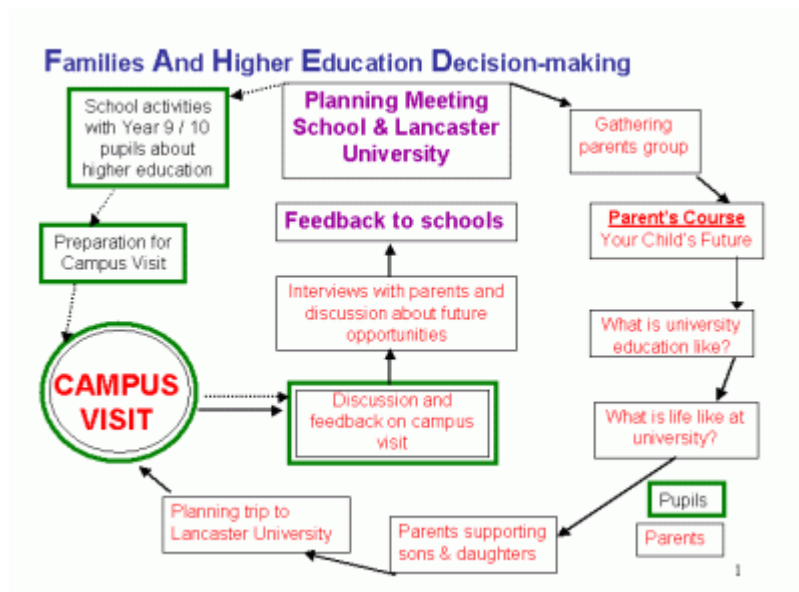
(Source: Community Access Programme Department of Educational Research).

The aim of FAHED is to introduce (H)E to young people and their families who are traditionally underrepresented. The cycle is introduced to these groups in year 9 and above and it has been funded by HEFCE. It works by introducing the idea of (H)E to young people and their families. The cycle has two strands: a 6 week course which is aimed at parents/carers, and a 4 week course for pupils. This particular initiative has been run in conjunction with Lancaster University and encompasses visits to this institution. The

emphasis within this cycle is that the young person and the family/carers need to be involved in decisions, and that possible participation needs to be encouraged through a co-ordinated effort. There is a further aim to roll this type of initiative out to other schools and universities. As the research of this thesis finds, initiatives such as this would be valued by young people and their families but this research would suggest rolling initiatives such as this out to earlier key stages so that the cycle of feeling that you 'lack' some magic ingredient (as expressed by the participants of this study) can be challenged at an earlier stage. This may have the effect of placing university within a rational, pragmatic and emotional realm of possibility not only for the individual but also for their families/carers so that they will receive the support that is so vital from home. Importantly this co-ordinated effort may also have the effect of highlighting that university is an option that should be open to a wider range of students and this may act as re-enforcement for teachers, schools and colleges to roll out this opportunity to a more diverse and equitable student body in a neutral way.

Many more institutions now run schemes to widen participation in university to low participation groups. For example Bristol University runs a tutoring scheme. University students become tutors to pupils in years 7 to 13. They work alongside teachers and help with study skills, coursework and in exam preparation. They target schools with low progression rates and a primary aim of the tutors is to work as role models for the tutees, to encourage their engagement with university. Training programmes for such schemes could demonstrate to tutors that as well as practical (or rational and pragmatic) barriers to (H)E, there are many emotional barriers which need to be explored with their tutees. Particularly important would be the inclusion of 'first generation university applicant' tutors on such schemes who would have empathy toward and first hand experience of such emotional barriers.

- Support to all students who may benefit from university study should be ongoing, and a 'joined up approach' adopted between the different tutors and departments in schools, colleges and universities. A constant source should be identified that students can trust. Many of the participants stated that they could not trust the advice and support they received and that it was patchy and confusing, this is in line with the work of Gilchrist, Phillips and Ross (2003).

2. **Parity, networking, innovative delivery of (H)E**

- Vocational and academic pathways and qualifications need to be given equal parity in schools, colleges, universities and the occupational sector. The complex procedure of university application may be simplified if academic and vocational qualifications could become nationally recognized and equally weighted for UCAS points in terms of like for like qualifications. As advocated by the '14-19 Curriculum and Qualifications Reform' (DFES, 2004) a 'unified framework of diplomas' may begin to achieve this aim.

- All students should have a range of options and pathways properly discussed with them irrespective of social class. Schools should be able to evidence this process as equitable. Evidence from the study suggests that working-class students are more often set on vocational pathways and also that these pathways are discussed more in terms of FE than as a route to (H)E. The participants of this research who had taken vocational pathways are very aware of the perception that their qualifications do not carry the same status as A levels, or that a degree in childcare would not be viewed with the same status as a degree in mathematics or physics for instance. This may feed into their sense of 'lack' and perception of not having a particular quality required for (H)E study

- Networking between schools, colleges, universities and industry should continue to be further encouraged and students should be given better access to information regarding this. Partnerships should be developed which enable vision of a clear pathway through education to occupational success. Often participants stated that they made no connection between their lives at school and the world of work afterwards. Many of the women in this study did not articulate any clear career plans linked to actual goals and targets. Usually career plans were ambiguous and untargeted.

- Universities could be smaller, or the larger universities could offer more flexible, smaller campuses. This might lead toward a more informal experience of education for students who would benefit from this. Participants often cited the 'large' or 'scary' aspect of universities as a major reason for not pursuing (H)E study.

3. Support systems, social justice, and ethos

- More specific training could be offered to foundation stage, primary and secondary, and post-compulsory carers and educators upon the effects of stereotyping and prejudging certain groups and individuals based on past performance. This should cover class discrimination as well as ethnicity and gender, and should demonstrate the possible effects of such practice. In doing this care should be taken that it does not become a 'common-sense' assumption within education that certain groups under perform as identified as a consequence of some social justice training in Gaine and George (1999).

- A system of mentoring could be adopted to overcome the difficulties that students who are the first in their family to attend university face. Participants and non-participants demonstrated that a lack of first hand knowledge of the experience of (H)E was often a barrier to engagement – rather than more simply a lack of information.

Bristol University is an example of a university currently running mentoring schemes to pupils who are usually in year 10 and 11. These pupils are identified by their teachers as having the potential for university study. They are often chosen because they are from families that have no previous experience of university. Schemes such as this are very useful, but primarily they rely upon teachers' assessments of pupils most likely to benefit. Many students such as Rachel, Charlotte and Faye in this study would not benefit from such schemes because their teachers did not perceive them as having university potential. Also as a lecturer at a college I can testify that there are many young and mature women that I teach who are struggling with (H)E decisions and who would greatly benefit from a mentor, but this initiative is not extended to this group. If both tutoring and mentoring were to become nationally available initiatives and widely publicized in all educational environments, then all under-represented groups could have access to this vital support as it was needed. These schemes could be usefully rolled out to earlier year groups and could be student/peer initiated as well as teacher initiated as they currently are.

- Once in (H)E, tutors who can offer practical and pastoral support should be a matter of course for any student that requires it upon access to (H)E. Drop out rates in universities for all groups are a concern. Many students, both 'traditional and non-

traditional', require additional support in the transfer to (H)E. Pastoral support may be able to deal with emotional issues as they arise once students are in (H)E.

- Staff in schools, colleges and universities, who are themselves from under-represented groups, could be given time and training to act as role models toward individuals, and as ambassadors for widening participation. This was identified by several participants as a key factor in their engagement with (H)E both in terms of access and completion. Often it was cited in the interviews that knowing teachers and lecturers who had come from working-class backgrounds, gave participants a sense of hope for their own educational achievement. Also these teachers and lecturers were discussed as more empathetic toward their needs, often offering greater encouragement because they understood the pressures that they were facing in terms of identity and emotional well-being.

- Currently, equality of opportunity, meritocracy, choice, and competition form the basis of the social justice system which underpins the whole of the British education system. In chapter 4 of this research, consideration was given to other forms of social justice. Though this thesis does not set forth a model for social justice, it does question the predominance of equality of opportunity which currently informs educational theory, policy and practice. Theory, policy and practice may benefit from acknowledging the flaws in this concept (and the associated values and beliefs which underpin it) and consider exploring aspects of other forms of social justice. This may open up discussion upon the assumed 'justness' or 'fairness' of the British education system and pave the way for debate upon the shape of education, and its capacity to deliver social justice.

- The HEFCE (2006) report identifies that institutions often stop short of analyzing their own practice and procedures and the contributions that they may make toward maintaining the class bias of (H)E. This research makes wide reference to the continued sense of alienation that some working-class groups and individuals feel toward and within (H)E. As with social justice, this research does not set forth a 'model' for institutional change, but it raises awareness of the necessity for an open and informed debate within this area. Recognition of institutional deficit may lead to theory, policy and practice which attempts to offer a more 'class equitable' experience of (H)E. This may go some way to beginning to break down class divisions in the British Education system, and to eroding perceptions of 'them and us' divides within and through (H)E. }

Reay, David and Ball (2005: 163) draw attention to the urgent need for higher education to recognize its hand in maintaining inequality in university participation:

> Elitism is built into the very fabric of higher education whether elite or mass. Broadening the base of the student body will have little impact. In fact we would argue that very little will change until the ethos and culture of higher education radically alters. Higher education is not the same experience for all, neither is it likely to offer the same rewards for all.

Many of the suggestions set forth are beginning to be put into place in some institutions, however as the HEFCE (2006) report has identified there is little consensus on the way forward in widening participation and many of these initiatives are widely criticized before their effects can be fully understood. Also, theory, policy and practice continues to underplay the impact of class upon participation, and more often emphasizes cultural and individual deficiency for unequal participation whilst making no real plans for institutional change or recognizing institutional deficit.}

Gaps in research

The HEFCE (2006) report points to many gaps in current research regarding class, under represented groups and (H)E participation, some of which I identified in chapter 5. A major gap identified by the report was a lack of research on 'non traditional participants' and on 'non-participants' (ibid, 119). This research would agree that research needs to be more targeted toward the 'lived' experiences of these groups and as such this thesis is a contribution to this under-researched area. The research here is of both non-traditional participants and non participants. I have sought to investigate the experiences of these groups and to present findings in their words as much as possible. The above suggestions for change have arisen not just from exploring the accounts of those already in or passed through (H)E, but through a deep analysis of the barriers to (H)E that non-participants discuss.

Suggestions for future research

Many researchers recognize that 'perfect research' does not exist (Griffiths, 1998). I have attempted to ensure that this research is rigorous, informed, and as free from bias as any research can claim to be, through acknowledgement of the bias that I bring to this research, and reflection upon such bias and the effect it may have upon interpretation of the data. One

such way to reduce the effects of bias within research is to examine research for gaps and flaws; this will be done through discussion of improvements to this research.

During my 3 years of PhD study I have been challenged regarding my emphasis upon class which has been described as lacking in relevance today and as having too narrow a focus. Throughout this thesis I have sought to demonstrate the continued and powerful relevance of class upon educational inequalities. Whilst I acknowledge that a narrow focus may lead to a researcher 'missing' other explanations for phenomena, it can also lead to a very detailed approach to research and this is more in tune with the methodological approach of this research which aims to explore and understand the nuances of a particular and focused area.

Whilst conducting this research I have taught widely within the area of social justice in a range of environments and settings, thus whilst this research here offers a focus upon class, I remain all too aware of the myriad modes of inequality which continue to hamper the 'justness' of the British education system. I am hopeful that this shared focus between class research and more generic teaching in the area of social justice has allowed me to take a balanced approach in analysis and interpretation of this data. I remain aware that many other groups continue to be under-represented in (H)E such as people with disabilities, particular minority ethnic groups, and as focused upon earlier in this thesis, working-class men.

I have attempted to justify my concentration in this thesis upon working-class women and I put forth two justifications for this gender and class bias here to re-iterate my awareness of this bias. One is that I am female and working-class; this gave me the advantage of access, empathy and shared history with this group. Two is that a narrow focus such as this has allowed for a very deep analysis of a given area. Had I attempted to cover the range of inequalities in operation in (H)E, even in a large research study, the justice that I could have done to any particular area would be questionable.

This research has led me to the conclusion that to understand engagement in (H)E it is necessary to understand the educational history of participants, thus a similar auto/biographical approach might be adopted for other areas of research in the future. Research suggests that working-class men are under-represented in (H)E for a variety of reasons, some of which may be similar to the findings of this research. This is an area that is in deep need of further research. Though I may have more difficulties with access to this

research cohort, and to developing the reciprocal and reflexive research attempted in this study it is an area that I would like to pursue. It would be of professional interest and a development of this study to investigate whether themes identified in this research also presented in research with working-class men, or if entirely different themes emerged. As with the recommendations of the HEFCE (2006) report I would suggest that both participants and non-participants would need to be accessed to gain a more valid picture of the myriad of reasons for under-representation within this group.

An area which came into particular focus whilst I conducted this research was the differences and similarities of the (H)E experience for middle and working-class groups of students. I was unable to pursue this because of time and the fact that this research has never been intended as a comparison of the experience of working and middle-class engagement with (H)E. However, whilst I was teaching and conducting this research I would regularly discuss this project with students so that I could remain open minded, and gain a wider perspective on the research. Also, as much of the teaching I conduct is connected to issues of social justice, differential class engagement in education and higher education was often a focus. As a result many anecdotal accounts of classed and different experiences of (H)E were discussed. This has resulted in my growing awareness of the many different experiences of middle-class groups in education.

Particularly common in dialogue with middle-class students is the complete absence of alternative trajectories to (H)E that they articulate as part of their school and family expectation framework. Many middle-class students have discussed their desire to be able to pursue other alternatives to (H)E and academia; as well as the stress that they are often under to perform in relation to parental expectation and financial commitment to their education. It might be argued that just as the working-class student may face expectations of under performance and be steered onto vocational pathways; the middle-class student may be under pressure to over perform and find it difficult to escape academic pathways and the compulsion of (H)E. This could be viewed as a negative aspect to widening participation for middle-class groups who are now more often compelled to continue into (H)E. This emphasis upon middle-class participation in (H)E may be alienating for those individuals who do not want to pursue this pathway and may also lead to a deep sense of a 'lack' or low self-esteem. Following a pathway designated by others, or one that you do not perhaps feel capable of can be psychologically harmful to any group or individual.

The discussion here is a direct result of conversations often recounted to me by many middle-class students in university who are afraid to disappoint ambitious parents but are struggling to cope with courses. Though this is anecdotal, because it has been raised regularly it would suggest there may be a need for research upon middle-class post-16 choices in an era of widening participation. New times individualization' requires 'suitably' aspiring individuals within and between the classes and this rhetoric of individual failure and success affects groups and individuals in different ways, but whilst traditional ways of being give way to new, diverse ways of being – all sectors of society are as likely to be subject to 'ontological insecurity' (Giddens, 1991) as they are to 'rational choice making' and secure 'risk assessment' (Beck, 1992).

A final area that I will highlight as in need of further research is the area of widening participation through Aimhigher initiatives. I have made reference to such initiatives within this thesis such as the FAHED Cycle. However Aimhigher and its impact is yet to be fully understood and it is often criticized for ineffectiveness and a lack of value for money. Briefly I will draw attention to a topic paper on Aimhigher (2006: 1) which asks amongst other questions:

> Has Aimhigher improved aspirations?
> Has Aimhigher improved attainment?
> Has Aimhigher increased participation?

Part of the rationale of Aimhigher is to encourage those groups and individuals who remain under-represented in (H)E to 'feel that it is an option for them' (ibid: 2). This is particularly relevant to this thesis as the main findings of a sense of 'lack, in/ability and or inferiority' articulated by the participants suggest that often they *do not feel (H)E is an option for them* and even if they do, it is a *limited option*. Limits apply to the type of university attended, type of course undertaken and the many boundaries that working-class groups set themselves which can even spill over into limits upon career choices once university is finished.

In terms of aspirations the topic paper finds:

> There is some evidence that young people are changing their minds, though it is too early to see if this can be linked directly to Aimhigher (ibid: 8).

When discussing improved attainment:

> …the qualitative evidence on direct attainment-raising activities is mixed, there is some evidence that these activities are effective under the right circumstances, and the qualitative evidence on aspiration-raising activities suggests that the success of Aimhigher in increasing aspirations should also lead to improved attainment (ibid: 14).

And finally in terms of participation:

> There is evidence that young people are changing their minds as they get older, preferring HE to other options;

> There is some evidence that these intentions are being converted into actual decisions; but the data cannot tell if these changes are down to Aimhigher activities alone (ibid: 18).

At present it may be some time before results can be properly analyzed as many of the cohorts under investigation have not yet completed university, and there is also 'clear evidence of young people changing their minds' (ibid: 18) about whether to go to university or not and this needs investigation. The document finishes by stating:

> the data cannot tell us for sure that Aimhigher is the **cause** of these changes of intentions. This remains a key gap in our evidence base (ibid: 18-19).

Because of the links to the findings of this thesis and because many of the suggestions for change set forth emanate around initiatives such as those within Aimhigher programmes; this would be a key area for further research following on from this investigation. This research would stress the vital importance of continuing with and extending Aimhigher programmes to younger and older groups, and to develop a national framework of good practice in relation to this. Furthermore this research has raised my own knowledge of the need for a change to the ethos of (H)E, and examination of widening participation literature and Aimhigher inititatives has helped me to come to this conclusion. Therefore Aimhigher initiatives might also become a tool which could be used to raise the awareness of other educators, and within institutions, that there is a need to adopt institutional change if the student body is to be widened more equitably.

Concluding comments

{At present theory, policy and practice tends to emphasize more greatly the rational and pragmatic barriers to more equitable participation in HE. Barriers such as: lacking information, worries over burdens of debt, unequal entry qualification, and questioning of the value of HE. These are all vitally important areas which need to be addressed further. However a greater emphasis upon these areas demonstrates that there is not a deep enough understanding of, or acknowledgement of, the very real emotional barriers to HE for working-class women. Emotional barriers may often prevent working-class women from working toward the necessary qualifications, or of considering university as 'something people like us do', so as to get to the stage of information seeking, or exploring the implications of debt, or the value of HE.

Theory, policy and practice needs to begin to tackle head on the perception of 'lack' displayed in this research which may be a result of 'the embodiment of innate in/ability and/or inferiorization'. Theory, policy and practice also needs to begin by examining its own hand in this construction of 'lack'. For example in its use of language which suggests cultural deficit, and its reluctance to instigate wide ranging change and acknowledge that the structures of the British Education system may have elements of deficit within.

This thesis explores in details the concept of meritocracy. Meritocracy is underpinned by equality of opportunity and the language of choice. As Brine (2005) puts it, there are just enough working-class successes to justify the rhetoric of meritocracy and equality of opportunity and our 'hand' in keeping this myth alive is not a comforting position to find ourselves in. But as Brine (2006) also reminds us these few successes should not be a justification for liberal/neo-liberal claims. Instead they should be:

> An argument against the persistent under-education of working-class children, the damage to their learning potential, their esteem, and their opportunities for material gain: for the majority their sense of self, their classed and gendered learner identities, their life and work ambitions remain unchallenged and unchanged (ibid: 444).

Education is not a neutral environment and many factors influence your experience in the system, such as gender, generation, ethnicity, sexuality, particular educational needs, and class. Education is not always a positive, valuable or equal process. This is demonstrated by participants who often describe emotional feelings of 'deficiency', 'innate inability', and a

sense of 'lack' or 'inferiority'. There is a requirement for significant change to begin to produce an education system which recognizes the value of different classed and gendered learner identities and seeks to maximize the potential of all groups in a socially 'just' and 'fair' way in and through education.

Social 'justness' is far from being achieved within a meritocratic system of education based upon equality of opportunity. This thesis does not propose a model for social justness and fairness in and through education. What it does is to draw attention to the ongoing capacity of the British education system to generate inequalities through its reluctance to instigate wide ranging institutional change. Change which might reflect the needs of a more diverse student body envisioned by widening participation in its most socially just sense.}

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Appendix 1

<u>Questionnaire for Adult Learners</u>

<u>Personal Details</u>

(Please remember that your name will not be used in any of the research or passed on to anyone else, including other teachers at the college. Please put your questionnaire in the envelope so that no one else can read it.)

Name

Address

Phone

Email

Date of Birth

    1. Sex
(Please tick box)

Male ☐ **Female** ☐

    2. Do you consider yourself disabled?
(Please tick box)

Yes ☐ **No** ☐

    3. What ethnicity do you identify yourself as?

    4. Do you consider yourself to be any of the following?
(Please tick box)

Working class ☐ **Middle class** ☐

Neither of these ☐

(This tends to be decided by things like what sort of house you grew up in, how much money your parents earned and the type of job that they did.)

Present Education

1. Are you enjoying the course?
(Please tick box)

Yes all the time ☐   **Yes generally** ☐

Sometimes ☐   **Never** ☐

2. Which aspects of the course do you most enjoy?

3. Which phrase best describes the reason that you chose this course?
I chose this course because:
(Please tick box)

My school told me it was the best sort of course for me ☐

It offered the qualifications I would need to go to university ☐

I was turned down for other courses ☐

My friends were doing this course ☐

I couldn't think of anything else I wanted to do ☐

After considering several options I decided this course most suited my needs ☐

Other (please specify) ☐

4. What are you going to do when the course finishes?
(Please tick box)

Get a job in the area of childcare ☐   **Get any job** ☐

Go to university ☐   **Other** (please specify) ☐

Educational History

1. What type of secondary did you go to?
(Please tick box or boxes)

Comprehensive ☐   **Grammar** ☐   **Secondary Modern** ☐ **Private**

☐   **Other**   ☐ (please specify)

2. My secondary school was chosen because:
(Please tick box)

It was my local school   ☐   **It was the school that best suited my needs**   ☐

3. Write a sentence that describes your parent's/carer's hopes for you at school.

4. Did your parents/carers attend parent's evenings and school meetings?
(Please tick box)

Always ☐   **Sometimes** ☐   **Never** ☐

5. Were there teachers in your school who encouraged you to do well?
(Please tick box)

Yes, most of my teachers did   ☐   **Yes, some of my teachers did**   ☐

No, none of my teachers did   ☐

6. Do you feel that your school encouraged you to do as well as you could?
(Please tick box)

Always ☐   **Sometimes** ☐   **Never** ☐

7. How would you describe the advice you received when you chose your exam options at school?

(Please tick box)

Very good ☐   **Good** ☐   **Adequate** ☐   **Inadequate** ☐

8. How would you describe the careers advice you received at school?

(Please tick box)

Very good ☐   **Good** ☐   **Adequate** ☐   **Inadequate** ☐

9. Was university ever discussed with you by your parents/carers?

(Please tick box)

Yes, it was always planned that I would go to university ☐

It was one of several things they thought I could do ☐

It was never discussed ☐

10. Was university discussed with you by your school?

(Please tick box)

Regularly ☐   **Sometimes** ☐   **Never** ☐

11. Has anyone in your family/anyone you know gone to university?

(Please specify who and how many)

12. What qualifications do you have (including the ones you are studying at the moment)?

Family History and Background

1. **When you were growing up what type of housing did you and your parents/carers live in:**
(Please tick a box or boxes)

Owned house/have a mortgage ☐   **Rented council or housing association** ☐

Private rented ☐   **Other** ☐ (Please specify)

2. **Where do you live now?**
(Please tick a box)

At home ☐   **On your own** ☐   **With a partner** ☐

Other ☐ (Please specify)

3. **What type of housing do you live in now?**
(Please tick a box)

Owned house/have a mortgage ☐   **Rented council or housing association**

☐

Private rented ☐   **Other** ☐ (Please specify)

4. **What type of jobs did/do your parents/carers do?**
(A) Mother or Female Carer:
(Please state most recent and any other jobs you can remember)

(B) Father or Male Carer:
(Please state most recent and any other jobs you can remember)

5. **If you work what job do you do?**

6. When you were growing up did you or your family regularly visit:
(Please tick a box or boxes)

Libraries ☐ **Theatre** ☐ **Museums** ☐

7. **Do you regularly visit any of the above now?** (Please specify)

Personal Circumstances/Characteristics

1. **Can you think of anything that happened in your childhood that has had a good or a bad effect on your confidence?**

2. **What do you think are your strongest qualities?**

(Please continue over page if required)

You may contact me by email (Helen@helenbovill.fsworld.co.uk) if you have any queries regarding this questionnaire.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. I will contact you only if you have specified that I may, and only if the details need clarification; or to discuss with you the possibility of further interview/s at a later date.

Purpose of this questionnaire.

The questionnaire that I am asking you to complete is part of a research project investigating how girls and women take part in college and university education after they leave school.

I am very interested in your education experiences and have asked whether or not you agree to me contacting you in the future. If you tick the box consenting to this, then I may contact you again to carry out further interview/s.

Any information you give me will be used very carefully, I will not use your real name, I will store the information very securely, and no one at the college will know what you have said. The only details they may want to see are page 2 where you say what you think of the course. If I pass these details to the college I will not let them have your name, and only give them the second page.

How to complete the questionnaire:

1. **Read the next page which explains that the details you give me will be kept secure and your identity will remain private**

2. **Tick the box which asks whether I may or may not contact you in future,**

3. **Under signature of participant please remember to sign, then underneath print your name and enter the date.**

4. **Answer as honestly as you can, the information you give is really important.**

5. **If there are questions you don't understand or do not want to answer then leave them blank.**

6. **Put the finished questionnaire in the envelope and seal it, so no one else can read it.**

7. **Pass it back to your teacher in the sealed envelope**

The information that you give in filling out this questionnaire will be extremely useful to this research and I thank you for taking the time to answer the questions. You may keep this top sheet for your information.

If you have any questions about this questionnaire please e.mail me at

University of the West of England, Bristol
PhD Research
Researcher: Helen Bovill

Release/Consent Form

XXXXXXXXX College, XXXXXXXXXX consents to the researcher Helen Bovill issuing the attached Questionnaire for Adult Learners to the approved group of students. XXXXXXXXX College, XXXXXXXXXX consents to the information within this questionnaire being released to the University of the West of England and to the researcher Helen Bovill for research purposes based upon the following ethical principles:

1. Further clarification of the aims and nature of this research will – upon request – be explained by Helen Bovill

2. All information will be treated as confidential and securely stored

3. Participant's and the College's identity will remain anonymous

4. The outcomes of this research may be (anonymously) disseminated in appropriate environments e.g. academic journals

5. Participation in this research is voluntary and consent freely given

6. Participants and the College may withdraw from the research at any time

Signature ....
(On behalf of XXXXXXXXX College, XXXXXXXXXX)

Printed name ....

Position held...

Date.....................................

Appendix 2

Interview checklist

- Sufficient tapes and batteries
- Tape recorder working and switched on
- Consent forms signed and explained
- Record name of interviewee, time and date at beginning of each tape
- Record this in writing on each tape also
- Number all tapes, beginning tape 1 side A

End of interview checklist

- Has/does the interviewee feel comfortable about what has gone on?
- Is there anything else the interviewee wants to say before this session ends?
- Switch off tape, (make sure it is all numbered)
- Get consent form signed

List of possible subjects to be covered/questions asked over course of interview 1

About you

- Name, age, d.o.b.
- Are you single, married, divorced, living with someone, in a long term relationship?
- Do you have children, how many, boys or girls?
- Family structure – parents, brothers, sisters, family type e.g two parent, single, reconstituted, looked after.

About your social/economic status
- What class would you consider your parents/carers ad why?
- What class were you as a child and why do you think this?
- What class are you now, if it is different to your class as a child, why is that?
- What class is your partner or if not currently in a relationship the class of your partners in the past?
- Has social class been important in your life?
- Do you work, what do you do, what have you done in the past?
- If you are in a relationship, what does your partner do?
- Who pays the bills in your house?
- Do you have single or joint bank accounts?
- Do you drive and do you have access to a car?
- What sort of accommodation do you live in?

Birth and family of origin

- Was there anything that you consider particularly relevant going on in the world around the time you were born?
- What is your first memory?
- What do you remember most about your grandmother/mother?
- What is the best and worst thing about them?
- Do you think you inherited any qualities from them?
- What feelings do you have about them?

Social factors

- Were you happy in your early childhood? (if asked - childhood up to 12 years old).
- Were you encouraged to try new things by your parents/carers in your childhood?
- Did your parents/carers spend enough time with, and what did you do together?
- What struggles did you go through as a child?
- What sad times can you remember as a child?
- How was discipline handled in your family, and who by?
- What was the most significant event in your life up to age 12?
- Did you make friends easily and what were your most significant friendships as a child?
- As a teenager what pressures did you feel and why?
- What was the most trouble you were in as a teenager?
- What was the most significant event of your teenage years?
- What social pressures have you experienced as an adult?
- What has been the most significant event/s of your adult years?
- Who has been special/significant to you in your adult life?
- Who has most helped you develop your current understanding of yourself?
- What would you say is your current understanding of yourself?

Education - primary

- At what age did you start attending a formal learning setting?
- What are your first memories of school?
- How many primary schools did you attend?
- What are your best memories about primary school?
- What are your worst memories of primary school?
- Do you remember any of your primary school teachers and why?
- How did your primary school teachers treat you?
- Did your primary school teachers treat boys and girls differently or the same?
- Did you get to do the same activities as boys at school?

- What games did you play in the playground?
- Did you feel that you fitted in at primary school?
- Did you have homework at primary school?
- Did your parents/carers help you with your work at primary school?
- Can you remember the kinds of books you read at primary school?
- Did your parents/carers attend parents' evenings, sports days, e.t.c. at primary school?
- Did your parents take you to the library, museums, art galleries e.t.c., or any other similar places, when you were at primary school?
- Were there books available at home when you were at primary school?
- Did your parents/carers listen to you read these books, or show an interest in what you were reading?
- What hobbies, interests, clubs did you have/attend whilst you were in primary school?
- What did you want to be/do with your life at this stage?

Education – secondary

- What are your first memories of secondary school?
- How many secondary schools did you attend?
- What are your best memories about secondary school?
- What are your worst memories of secondary school?
- Do you remember any of your secondary school teachers and why?
- How did your secondary school teachers treat you?
- Did your secondary school teachers treat boys and girls differently or the same?
- Did you get to do the same activities as boys at school?
- What did you do at break times?
- Did you feel that you fitted in at secondary school?
- Did you have homework at secondary school and did you always do it?
- Did your parents/carers help you with your work at secondary school?
- Can you remember the kinds of books you read at secondary school?
- Did your parents/carers attend parents' evenings, sports days, e.t.c. at secondary school?
- Did your parents take you to the library, museums, art galleries e.t.c., or any other similar places, when you were at secondary school?
- Were there books available at home when you were at secondary school?
- Did your parents/carers listen to you read these books, or show an interest in what you were reading?
- What hobbies, interests, clubs did you have/attend whilst you were in secondary school?
- What did you want to be/do with your life at this stage?
- Were you given careers advice at school and what was it like?
- When you chose your options what did you choose and why?

- Were you given advice on this – what sort of advice?
- What exams did you take, what grades did you get?
- What age did you leave school?

Post-compulsory learning/education

- Did you stay on after school?
- How long did you stay on for and what did you do?
- What exams did you take?
- What were your ambitions after finishing school?
- Did you have any goals?
- Did you return to education later and what did you do?
- Did you return to education for qualifications or other reasons – what were they?
- What is your highest qualification?
- Have you/would you go to university?
- How have you felt in higher education?
- What has been your most important lesson/s in life, outside of a classroom?
- What is your view of the role of education in a person's life?
- What role has education played in your life?
- Do you think you are learning new things in your present life stage?
- What else do you want to learn/achieve?
- What education and learning taught you about yourself?

Awareness of self and major life themes

- What primary beliefs guide your life?
- Do you think you are a strong person?
- Are you in control of your life?
- What values would you always uphold?
- What do you see as the purpose of life?
- What mistakes have you made in life?
- Do you feel you have been able to make choices in your life?
- Are you satisfied with your life choices?
- What has been the saddest time in your life?
- What has been the happiest time in your life?
- What have been your greatest accomplishments?
- How do you feel about yourself at the age you are now?
- What do you see for yourself in five, ten or fifteen years from now?
- Are you fulfilled?

Appendix 3

Categories and properties: stage 1

- **Class awareness**

Class of birth family
Class of life family
Self identification of class

- **Classed constructions of femininity**

Classed construction of mother's femininity
Classed construction of participant's femininity
Reproduction of classed femininity through the family
Reproduction of classed femininity through the education system
Mother's aspirations for self
Parent's/carer's aspirations for participant
Participant's aspirations for self
'Appropriate' education chosen by participant for self
'Appropriate' occupation chosen by participant for self
Push factor for participant of types of education undertaken

- **Capital and strategies of advantage (Bourdieu and Ball)**

Local versus 'chosen' school
Parental/carer awareness of content and procedures of schooling
Exposure to 'cultural' activities
Level of importance placed on education by parent/carer
Differing expenditure of time and economic resources on education by parent/carer

- **School procedures**

School selection procedures
Teachers'/educators' expectations of participants
School's streaming procedures
School's options advice
School's careers advice

- **Awareness of self**

Incidences to self belief
In/ability to make choices in mother's life
In/ability to make choices in participant's life

- **Individual Agency and Class 'Infection'**

Incidences of social justice in schooling
Exposure to class other than own - myth breaking
'Gifted', 'able' or 'exceptional' versus 'ordinary' or 'average'
Change in life circumstances leading to changes in life
Feelings of extra capability than perceived by others

Proving people wrong

- **Family Control Systems (Bernstein)**

Personal family structures
Positional family structures
Use of elaborated codes
Use of restricted codes

Key to codes used in database for investigative factors in interviews.

• Negative Incident to Self Belief	-	NI to SB
• Positive Incident to Self Belief	-	PI to SB
• Class Background of 'Birth' Family	-	CB of BF
• Class Background of 'Life' Family	-	CB of LF
• Self Definition of Class	-	SD of CL
• Dis-Identification with Working- Class	-	DI with WC
• Dis-Identification with Middle-Class	-	DI with MC
• Not Mention of Desire to become Educated	-	NMD to be E
• Mention of Desire to become Educated	-	MD to be E
• Negative Push Factor into Education	-	NPF into E
• Positive Push Factor into Education	-	PPF into E
• Contact with Traditionally Middle-Class Influences	-	C with T MC I
• Contact with Traditionally Working-Class Influences	-	C with T WC I
• Negative Role of 'Birth' family in Education	-	NR of BF in E
• Positive Role of 'Birth' Family in Education	-	PR of BF in E
• Negative Role of Teachers in Education	-	NR of T in E
• Positive Role of Teacher in Education	-	PR of T in E
• Negative Role of 'Life' Family in Education	-	NR of LF in E
• Positive Role of 'Life' Family in Education	-	PR of LF in E
• Negative Role of Friends in Education	-	NR of FR in E
• Positive Role of Friends in Education	-	PR of FR in E
• Inability to Make Choices	-	IA to M CH
• Ability to Make Choices	-	A to M CH

Predominant categories: Stage2

- **Identification/dis-identification with class**

Defining class and self definition of class.
The usefulness of the concept?
How does it effect our actions?
Maintaining our classed self in education.

- **Classed Construction of femininity**

Mimicry of past class processes.
Staying in your place.
Vocational low skill/pay/benefits pathway.
Class appropriate aspirations/expectations.

- **Utilisation of capital, choice and strategies of advantage**

Well placed for success.
Maintaining favoured positions.
The meritocratic justification of the present system.

- **Control systems: Education and family**

Personal/positional families.
Elaborated and restricted codes.

- **Myth building and myth breaking**

Labelling, ideal types, SFP.
Destruction of ambition.
Lack of confidence/self esteem
Fear
Resistance through rebellion.
Alternative trajectorys

Appendix 4

Revised development of second questions.

Class awareness

1. What do the words working-class make you think of?
2. What do the words middle-class make you think of?
3. What are your grandparents highest qualifications, when did they leave school?
4. What are your parents highest qualification, when did they leave school?
5. Would you say your parents earnings were high, medium or low?
6. Were there many benefits to the work your parents do/did such as pensions, stability, promotional prospects, good training, freedom to develop their job role?

Classed constructions of femininity

1. What women do you most admire and why?
2. What influence has your mum had on your life?
3. What influences have the girls and women you grew up with had upon you?
4. What have most of the women you know ended up doing with their life?
5. What sort of things have you been encouraged to do with your life?
6. What did your school experiences and your teachers encourage you to do with your life?

Utilisation of capital, choice, and strategies of advantage.

1. What is most important when choosing a secondary school?
2. School choice is choice for the few, what do you think about this statement?
3. Why is it important for parents to be involved in their children's schooling?
4. Schools and homes work closely together today, what do you think about this?
5. Do you think that children who have interests/hobbies do better educationally?
6. Do you think some families are more able to provide a range of activities than others, and does this give their children an advantage educationally?
7. If children have greater educational resources at home such as books or computers do you think this makes them more likely to be educationally successful?
8. If parents/carers place a high value on education do you think their children are more likely to be educationally successful?
9. What factors affect a child's chance of success in the education system today?

Control systems: Education and Family

1. When you were growing up if you did something wrong how did your parents deal with it?
2. Do you remember spending lots of time with your parents?
3. Did your parents explain things to you clearly, or were you often told to do something because they said so?
4. Did you and your family often talk about what was going on in your life?
5. Did you feel valued as an individual with your own thoughts and rights by your parents?
6. Were you encouraged to make your own decisions as a child?
7. Were you encouraged to take responsibility for your actions as a child?
8. Did you feel valued as an individual with your own thoughts and rights by your schools and teachers?
9. Do you ever remember having difficulty understanding the way that the teachers talked to you at school?
10. Did you often have difficulty understanding the meaning of questions or instructions in tests or exams?
11. Were you happy to ask questions in class?
12. Would you ask teachers for help if you were stuck with your work?

Myth building and myth breaking

1. As a child did you feel you had a right to a good education?
2. As an adult do you feel you have the right to a good education and a good job?
3. Did you ever feel that other people got a better education than you did?
4. How could your exam choice or career's choice have been better at school?
5. How could your school have helped you to achieve your ambitions?
6. Do you think that the ability groups you were put in at school were fair?
7. Did you ever feel labelled as any particular type of student throughout any stage of your schooling?
8. Did all the people you went to school with have equal opportunities to succeed?
9. What sorts of people do you think tend to go to university?
10. Are you that sort of person?
11. Do you think that if you go to certain schools you are more or less likely to go to university?
12. Have you ever felt that other people were smarter or better than you in any way?
13. How would you describe yourself educationally?
14. Do you think there are differences between universities in this country?
15. Do you think it is important which university you go to?
16. If you are at/have been/are going to university what were/are your reasons for choosing the university you chose?

17. Do you understand all the financial changes to the funding of university?
18. Do you think(do you think it would have) the changes will make a difference to whether or not you go to university?
19. Do you think the changes to finances will mean more or less people from working-class backgrounds go to university?

Appendix 5

University of the West of England, Bristol
PhD Research
Researcher: Helen Bovill
<u>**Release/Consent Form**</u>

Name of interviewee:

Interviewee Birth Date:

Age at Interview:

Birthplace:

Gender:

Current Residence:

Ethnic Background:

The participant consents to the information within this interview and subsequent interviews being released to the University of the West of England and to the researcher Helen Bovill for research purposes based upon the following ethical principles:

1. Further clarification of the aims and nature of this research will – upon request – be explained by Helen Bovill

2. All information will be treated as confidential and securely stored

3. Participant's identity will remain anonymous

4. The outcomes of this research may be (anonymously) disseminated in appropriate environments e.g. academic journals

5. Participation in this research is voluntary and consent freely given

6. Participants may withdraw from the research at any time

Signatures:

Interviewee..   Interviewer……………………………

Date..............................   Date…………………………